

Education protects

*Collecting and using data to improve educational
outcomes for children in public care*

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Introduction

This discussion document is intended to provide ideas and support better collection and use of data in improving services and targeting resources, so that individual children in public care will benefit. It is designed for those responsible for strategic planning and delivery of services for children in public care.

It draws upon the work of the Education Protects Implementation Team and responds to issues raised by local authorities in the Education Protects networks.

The central importance of data in improving educational support and outcomes for children in public care has been highlighted in numerous reports including the Social Exclusion Unit's report *Exclusions and Truancy*, the *Review of the Safeguards for Children Living away from Home*, and the Government's response to it, and the *House of Commons Health Committee Report, Children Looked After by Local Authorities*, which said: 'We recommend that every looked after child should have his or her educational progress assessed at each of the Key Stages'.

Particular attention has been drawn by the Audit Commission, SSI and Ofsted to the need for improving joint management information where services for children have to be co-ordinated. This applies at a strategic level as well as in relation to individual child need: 'the better informed a strategy, the greater the likelihood that it will be effective. And preventative work is unlikely to succeed unless the authority has information identifying those most at risk.' (Audit Commission 1999)

The Joint DfES/DH Guidance on **The Education of Children and Young People in Public Care** (May 2000) stresses the importance of data as a necessary and extremely powerful tool in improving services and outcomes.

An emphasis upon better data collection is also reflected in the Quality Protects Programme and in guidance and inspection frameworks for SSDs, LEAs and schools.

Current data demands upon local authorities

National Targets

The Government's national targets for children and young people in public care are to improve their educational attainment:

- By increasing to at least 50% by 2001 the proportion of children leaving care at 16 or later with a GCSE or GNVQ qualification; and to 75% by 2003; and
- By increasing to at least 15% by 2004 the proportion of children leaving care at 16 or later with 5 GCSEs at grades A* – C

The Department of Health Public Service Agreement (PSA) contains the following additional target:

- Improving the level of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged 19, so that levels for this group are at least 75% of those achieved by all young people in the same area by March 2004.

Current data requirements of local authorities that relate to educational outcomes for children in public care include:

- Quality Protects (QP) and Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) indicators

The QP programme sets out objectives for transforming children's services with linked performance indicators. Some of these objectives and related indicators focus upon the educational achievements of children. PAF indicator A2 covers qualifications at the point of leaving care, while C24 covers school absence.

QP indicator 7 measures attainment of children at key stages of the National Curriculum, i.e. at ages 7, 11 and 14. QP indicator 9 covers the percentage of children who are permanently excluded. Details of QP objectives and performance indicators can be found on the Department of Health QP website: www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects

- Education Development Plans
The statutory guidance supporting EDPs 2002-2007 (para.67) draws attention to the underachievement of children in public care and the national targets which relate to care leavers. It requires LEAs to clearly identify strategies for raising attainment for this group of children in their plans and to set a target for Key Stage 4 care leavers (Table C4, p.25). www.dfes.gov.uk/edp/edpnet/page08.htm

- Best Value
There is also a Best Value Performance Indicator that focuses on educational attainment (BVPI 50): the percentage of young people leaving care with at least 1 GCSE at grades A* – G, or GNVQ. www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk

- Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CPA is a new Government initiative to assess every local authority in the country. It is designed to assess the quality of local services; the corporate and managerial effectiveness; and the capacity to improve. Assessment of the education sector of the local authority focuses on social

inclusion, and one of the measures is the percentage of children in public care gaining 1 or more GCSEs at grades A* to G. www.audit-commission.gov.uk/itc/cpa.shtml

- Local Public Service Agreements
Local Public Service Agreements incorporate targets for raising the educational attainment of children in public care and build on the national targets. Typically, they would require that authorities securing PSA money would achieve at least five per cent above the national targets. Currently 50 per cent of local authorities have local PSA targets relating to the cohort of children in public care.

Concerns about current data collections

Much discussion within Education Protects networks has centred on national targets and the different requirements and definitions of data collections. While measuring outcomes will continue to be relevant to the targets set, the data currently being requested does not provide local authorities with information that will help inform the planning and delivery of better support for the children in their care. It is therefore important that local authorities track the progress of individual children and collect data which will help them to target their resources most effectively. Concern has been expressed about the reliability of data collection methods.

Definitions and timescales:
Issues concerning different definitions and timescales demanded by different data collections have now been widely discussed at local and national level. Typical comments include:

'Different definitions and data requirements are measuring different things. At a local level this is really unhelpful because we are trying to focus the attention and concern of different departments and schools on the same group of young people, to be able to show them what is and is not happening. Instead people are distracted into discussions about different children and different timescales.'

'Definitions for looked after children for all different performance indicators are a nightmare.'

If data requirements were 'harmonised' – in terms of definitions and timescales – they would help to achieve better 'corporate parenting'.

Many authorities have commented that the EDP (Education Development Plan) and the MAP (Management Action Plan) and the guidance supporting both plans should be better co-ordinated. They should, ideally, require identical data relating to the education of children in public care, and contain clear and consistent definitions as to which children should be included and within what timescales.

It has also been suggested that the Children's Services Plan should set overarching data requirements for all agencies relating to children, including the education of children in the care of the authority, so ensuring that they are consistent. This would be in line with the 'bookcase' model of plans set out by the Children and Young People's Unit: see www.doh.gov.uk/scg/childplan.htm

Many local authorities experience difficulty in obtaining data about specific groups of young people, and vary in their understanding of whether they should be included in the various returns. This includes children in respite provision, young people in PRUs and secure accommodation, and special units. These young people are often not routinely included on the local authority's database. There also appears to be wide variation in whether young people with significant learning difficulties are included in, for instance, the OC1 returns. One authority reported including tripartite funded 52 week placements for 2 young people with severe autism who were technically 'looked after', together with other young people with significant learning difficulties. By including these young people, the percentage achieving the target was reduced by over thirty per cent. There is equal concern that the educational progress of these young people is not helpfully captured within existing collections.

Changes in relation to national data collections and targets are currently being jointly examined by the DH and DfES.

Data collection

For some local authorities improved databases and a clearer focus upon data use has played a significant role in improving educational support and outcomes for looked after children. Many authorities, however, continue to struggle with the 'mechanics' of how to collect and share data relating to this group of young people. Feedback from the Education Protects questionnaires and the Quality Protects MAPs refer to local authorities' attempts to establish joint databases; investing in developing existing software or commissioning customised software to enable the LEA and SSD to share data. Some local authorities, judging the 'integrated' database to be some way off, have in the meantime developed stand-alone systems.

The Department of Health's Integrated Children's System, like the Looking After Children Action and Assessment Records which preceded it, may provide Social Services Departments with a fresh opportunity to establish joint data collection methods.

In some authorities data collection is a truly 'joint' exercise. In some it is clear that only one agency is driving the process. In these circumstances people working centrally, developing services for looked after children, will continue to experience difficulty obtaining information from other agencies.

Who collects the data varies enormously. The size and capacity of the local authority is obviously a factor. Some authorities have research and statistics personnel collecting and analysing data across the authority, but in other authorities it appears to be an additional task for the 'multi-agency' officer or team responsible for the education of children in public care. Some authorities, recognising the complexities of the task, have appointed 'data terriers' to collect the data required but also to build better ways of joint working around data collection. Some

Social Services Departments refer to having dedicated administrative staff responsible for all the DH returns. Some have routine procedures for requesting information from schools. There are widely differing interpretations of data protection and how this affects the corporate responsibility of the local authority for children placed in their care.

Questions for Senior Managers in Social Services Departments and LEAs:

- Who 'commissions' data within the local authority in relation to children in public care? Is it the Chief Executive, Director of Education, Director of Social Services?
- Is data management well resourced and managed or delegated and resourced in such a way that requests for information and data carry no authority?
- Are there effective administrative processes which assist joint working in relation to data collection?
- Is the collection of data clearly linked to the use of data to plan service delivery and subsequent evaluation of services?
- Are there clear protocols/shared policies about the sharing of data? Are there clear procedures for the collection of data for children placed outside the authority? Do issues concerning confidentiality present barriers to data collection? How can these be resolved corporately?

What data to collect

The following minimum set of data items can help to improve targeting and service development.

Pre-school

- Percentage of under-fives who are in public care (at any time) and the type of educational/day care provision to which they have access.
- Name and type of pre-school provider

This data can help the authority to ensure that children in public care benefit from preventive strategies aimed at addressing disadvantage, such as SureStart.

School age

- Name and type of school currently attended
- Record of school placements to date
- Attainment at Key Stages of the National Curriculum, including P scale scores and GCSE/GNVQ examination results
- Attendance and exclusion
- Special Educational Needs: e.g. stage on the Code of Practice
- Access to study support and out of school hours learning
- Whether a Personal Education Plan is in place

Post-16

- Type of education, training or employment activity
- Name of institution
- Course and qualification aimed for in further and/or higher education
- Qualification obtained
- Any special needs

Some of this data will be routinely collected across education and social services for the purpose of national data collections, such as OC1 and OC2 returns. Other data may be gathered on a snapshot or 'census' basis, or aggregated through information collected from Personal Education Plans. The authority will have additional social care data which will be useful to use in conjunction with the above data items. This will include information such as placement moves, duration of periods in care and the age, ethnic origin and gender of the looked after population. (Records of types of support and interventions are also important in assessing what works in improving educational attainment.)

How data is used

How data is collected, who collects it, which data items are collected and how it is analysed will determine how useful it is in shaping services and helping to improve outcomes for individual young people. While aggregate data will continue to be useful, local authorities need child-level data to improve educational outcomes for children in their care. A 'value-added' approach

for this group of young people will better assist local authorities in their efforts to improve services and also to focus on children in most need.

The Department for Education and Skills publishes a statistical package each Autumn to facilitate longitudinal analysis of pupil performance. It is produced principally to help schools compare their performance at a number of levels with all schools in England, or with schools with similar characteristics (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/performance). The package also offers the possibility of analysis at 'pupil level', i.e. it '... enables you to compare the progress made by individual pupils in your school with the progress made by individual pupils nationally. It is designed to provide information that teachers can share with pupils and parents about expectations for achievement, to involve them in target setting. It is this 'pupil level' of analysis that offers local authorities the means to evaluate their success, or otherwise, as corporate parents. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 1999) states that 'Many studies confirm that prior attainment is by far the best predictor of a pupil's ultimate performance.'

Baroness Ashton, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Early Years and School Standards, has expressed commitment to a value-added approach:

It allows us to care about the progress and achievement of each and every child in the care of your authorities, setting them realistic but stretching targets based on their abilities. There are many steps forward which you as practitioners know contribute to a young person's formal achievement: it may be regular attendance at school, a breakthrough with literacy, or developing personal safety skills. We need to know about, and care about, the progress of young people and encourage them whatever their likely achievement will be, be it attainment of GCSEs or other forms of accreditation.

This is not about lowering expectations. It is about ensuring that our combined effort to support the education of children in care adds value for every child.'

Ofsted/DfES/DH conference, October 2001

A value – added approach

This value-added approach to investigating pupil progress is essential if public care is to mean caring about every child's progress, needs and achievements. A step-by-step guide to a 'value-added' method of analysis has therefore been made available on the Education Protects website (www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects) to support such an approach. This uses a modified and simplified version of the Autumn Package and is organised into Key Stage sections with some duplication between each section, to remove any need to cross-reference. Each section leads the reader through the process by use of a worked example.

The great benefit of this approach is that the information can be analysed and used at a number of different levels and in both a summative and formative manner. That is:

a) At the individual looked after child level

Summative – the results for an individual child at the end of, for example, Key Stage Three can be compared with the predicted results from his/her attainment at Key Stage Two. This might be of interest but doesn't alter the Key Stage Three results.

Formative – Continuing the example above, the SATs results at the end of Key Stage Two could be used to inform target setting within the Personal Education Plan. Progress against predicted outcome could then be monitored **during** Key Stage Three, and appropriate interventions could follow a detected deterioration in performance.

b) At the service level

Summative – Comparison of outcomes against predictions for groups of young people offers services the opportunity of evaluating the benefits, or otherwise, of the activities they have been engaged in. For example, has the enormous amount of teacher time spent providing training

to foster carers resulted in improved outcomes? If not, then using that time to support young people more directly in schools might need to be investigated.

Formative – Allows services quality information to influence their planning. For example, the analysis of Key Stage Four data in one authority identified that the young people at Key Stage Four were particularly disadvantaged. This has led to an increased focus on this group from both the Education Service and the Social Services Department.

c) At the local authority level

Summative – In the longer term, it may also be possible for the overall performance of local authorities to be assessed with reference to, for example, the percentages of looked after children achieving at, or above, their predicted attainment when entering care.

Formative – As above, but on a whole authority scale, it provides quality information to influence planning and reporting in relation to the Children's Service Plans, the Quality Protects Programme and Educational Development Plans.

d) At the National level

Summative – The overall performance of local authorities could be assessed with reference to, for example, the percentages of children in public care achieving at, or above, their predicted level in SATs and GCSEs. Current National targets are phrased in terms of the percentage of children obtaining, for example, at least one pass at GCSE, irrespective of their underlying ability or their attainment when entering care.

Formative – Similarly, in the longer term it may be possible for value added information to be aggregated at a national level to provide quality information to better inform policy development by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills.

Use of data for service planning at a local level

Questions for Senior Managers in SSDs and LEAs, Team Managers, Social Workers and Schools:

- Is it analysed locally and fed back to relevant colleagues? Is it presented to key Committees: Joint Education/Social Services Committees; Corporate Parent Steering Groups; Scrutiny Committees? What action follows?
- How does data inform planning and support for individual children, including target-setting within Personal Education Plans?
- How does data inform targeting of resources and service planning?

Case Study – Using Data in South Gloucestershire

The Performance Assessment Framework indicators for the education of children in public care in South Gloucestershire for 2000/1 had fallen into the 'Investigate Urgently' bracket. The Local Authority was concerned about this as their own perception was that they served this group of young people well. The new, joint-funded, Practice Supervisor situated in both the Looked After Team (SSD) and Central Teaching Service (Education), was asked to research why the Authority had performed so poorly.

The case files and results of the young people were examined, and reasons listed why some young people had no results. Overall, it was clear that issues such as foster placement breakdowns and school exclusions were significant factors in underperformance, but the following factors had an even greater impact on the PAF A2 indicator (see above):

- Special Educational Needs – The proportion of children with SEN statements varied from 33% to 82% in each Year Group across the three year sample, rendering the figures incomparable. The proportion of young people with Severe Learning Difficulties varied from none to one quarter.

- Individual Ability – Young people had such varying ability from achieving A* at GCSE through to young people who seemed to have been ‘missed’ from the SEN process and were clearly not going to achieve the milestones set by the DfES.
- Data collection problems, i.e. missing or inaccurate results.
- Statistical Problems – Due to very small sample sizes (e.g. 13) the results of individual young people had a disproportionate effect on the indicator so that performance would appear to vary wildly from year to year. Additionally, the DoH definitions of young people to be included in the measure meant that some were not in public care when they took their GCSEs (including asylum seekers who were not in the country at that age), or weren’t due to take their exams until the following summer.

The conclusions of the report centred on the need to be more rigorous in tracking young people’s educational performance, but also to use ‘Value Added’ as a tool to measure young people’s performance relative to other young people of similar ability across the country. For young people who are exempted from the National Curriculum, this can be used in conjunction with P-Scores, which cover a range below NC Level 1.

A ‘Value Added’ Tracking System

South Gloucestershire is now implementing a system of monitoring pupils performance through ‘Value Added’, and the first results are expected in October 2002.

The process starts each September with the SSD writing to each school where a child in public care completed a course the previous summer. Their results, or teacher assessments, are then collated. These are then combined with the predictions from the previous year’s results and assessments to track actual performance over the academic year against expected performance.

Where a young person has achieved far beyond expectations, this will be used as a trigger to reinforce their achievement through a letter to the young person from either the Executive Member or Director of Education. This letter will recognise the work they have put in over the previous year. Consideration is being given to similar letters to schools, foster carers, Social Workers and other significant parties to that young person’s success.

For young people who have not attained close to what was expected, this triggers an investigation into the reasons for this by a multi-agency panel. The Central Teaching Service and Social Services Department write a brief report about what may have undermined the young person’s education in the previous year, and suggest ways forward for the next year. This panel can then agree the plan, allocate additional resources where necessary, and consider the strategic implications of performance of all children in public care on future service delivery.

Implementing Value Added

Such an approach needs commitment at all levels of the service, and investment in the time for someone to collate and assess the data. Implementing such a system also takes time: a minimum of two years results is required to have an indication of an individual’s performance.

However, the benefits in terms of individual expectations and overall management make such investment well worth the time.

Conclusion

Those working on a day-to-day basis with young people, and those supporting them at a strategic level need reliable information in order to better support their progress and achievements. It is vital that relevant data about children’s needs and progress is not simply collected, but shared and used in such a way that local authorities know what works in improving educational outcomes for children in public care.



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