Removing the Cliff Edge:

An exploration of what enables care leavers to make successful transitions from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training and employment

"The thing about Transition (support) is that it helps you adjust at the start and then gradually when you start to feel more comfortable you begin to rely on yourself a bit more. You just get into a routine and then gradually you don't need as much help anymore. It starts to come more natural. Like that is what my transitional worker done for me and I didn't even realise until she had done it"

Young person

Sara Boyce
Jennie Bronte

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and purpose of research
This research focuses on a group of marginalised young people who frequently cannot and do not realise their true potential due to the barriers and disadvantages they experience in relation to education, training and employment.   Its aim is to explore what works in enabling care leavers to make successful transitions from supported education and training environments, within which they typically achieve positive outcomes, into mainstream education, training and employment provision, where they tend to face considerable barriers to achievement.

Research has highlighted that in many cases young people who are outside of education, training or employment (NEET) move between non-participation interspersed with short term participation in casual or poorly paid work and/or low level vocational training programmes. The negative impact on individual young people of such 'churning' has been documented, with studies finding that repeated exposure to training which fails to lead to meaningful progression into employment or higher level study is deeply discouraging for young people.

Among the groups of young people at significant risk of 'churning' within the education, training and employment arenas are young people in and leaving care, particularly those who have been in residential care. While overall education, training and employment outcomes achieved by employability programmes are significant, Include Youth had become increasingly aware that a percentage of the young people it worked with struggled to maintain their mainstream placements. Young people who had progressed into mainstream education, training or employment were literally knocking on Include Youth's door seeking help and support, highlighting the fact that this was an issue that warranted greater attention. Consistently, young people identified the lack of support as a key factor in undermining their ability to transition successfully and sustain their mainstream placements.

In 2013 Include Youth established a two year transitional support pilot project to test its hypothesis that the provision of support before, during and after transition would contribute to a significant improvement in retention rates. At a policy level the organisation began to research policy and practice with a view to capturing the learning involved.

The Policy Context
Include Youth's approach to this research has been to locate the issue of transitions for young care leavers within the wider social, economic and political context that to a large extent shapes their lives. Young people transitioning to adulthood in Northern Ireland do so within a society that is itself in transition – from violent conflict and deep divisions to a society that is democratic, equal and inclusive. Community division and segregation in housing, education, public services and leisure facilities are daily realities experienced by many young people. Likewise, the threat of paramilitary violence continues to be a real issue for marginalised young people. Other aspects of society in Northern Ireland that are linked directly or indirectly to the conflict and its legacy include the higher levels of mental ill health and suicide among young people, higher levels of poverty and youth unemployment.

Among young people growing up the impacts of this systemic inequality and disadvantage are most acutely felt by those young people who are classified as NEET, and particularly so by young care leavers who are NEET.   The proportion of 16 to 18-year old care leavers in

Northern Ireland whose status is NEET or unknown has fluctuated around 35 per cent since 2010. The corresponding proportion for 19-year-old care leavers has been around 40 per cent over the same period. The NEET rate for all 16 to 24-year-olds in Northern Ireland varied between 13 and 17 per cent during 2013-15.

The research considers government's legislative and policy obligations and commitments. Obligations in respect of education, training and employment opportunities for care leavers which arise from government's ratification of various international human rights instruments are reviewed, and the parity afforded to vocational education and training within those provisions is highlighted.

Key legislative and policy developments in respect of care leavers over the past twenty years are traced. The increased emphasis on education, training and employment outcomes during this period is evidenced by the introduction jointly by DEL and DHSSPS of regional guidance, which has in turn led to the development of employability services in all Trusts.

The NI Executive's response to the issue of young people who are NEET, manifested primarily in the form of its Pathways to Success strategy, is assessed for its impact on care leavers specifically. One significant weakness of this Strategy and its implementation has been the lack of disaggregated data collection, with the result that it is not possible to identify the levels of participation in or the extent to which care leavers have benefitted from the various initiatives that came within its scope.

Methodology
The research utilised a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative methods and included the following elements: desktop literature and policy review, statistical analysis, best practice review, interviews and focus groups with young people and with key stakeholders.

Review of models of good practice
Three different practice models or frameworks for intervention are explored for their relevance to supporting care leavers into mainstream education, training and employment, as follows: Buttle Quality Mark for Commitment to Care Leavers, the EU Model of Supported Employment and the Youth Work model. A number of other models of good practice are also briefly reviewed and a synthesis of the learning on 'what works' is drawn out.

Certain common features across all programmes are identified as being central to programmes designed to support marginalised young people to make and sustain transitions into mainstream education, training or employment. These include:
- the adoption of a young person centred, holistic approach
- the provision of support prior to , during and following transition
- a recognition and response to the different challenges faced by young people beyond education, training or employment
- the key role played by mentors
- the importance of empowering young people while recognising the important advocacy role staff can continue to play if required
- the value of developing natural supports for the young person
- the need to coordinate support across the various services and interventions

Include Youth's Transitional Support Service

Include Youth's two year transitional support pilot project was established to test its hypothesis that the provision of support before, during and after transition would contribute to a significant improvement in retention rates. The project operated from July 2013 to June 2015 and employed two Transitions Workers, covering the five Health Trust areas. In 2015, following a very positive external evaluation, the service was mainstreamed into Include Youth's Give and Take service.

The Transitional Support service is needs led and engagement by young people is on a voluntary basis. Transition support is provided for six months prior to a young person leaving the Give and Take scheme and for up to 12 months after leaving Give and Take. The report provides an overview of the service as well as giving a 'flavour' of how it works in practice.

Findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings from the research are presented. Project data from July 2013 to June 2015 was analysed to enable an assessment of outcomes for the pilot project. During this period 45 individual young people were tracked for a 6 month period post programme. The retention figures for July 2013 to June 2015, benchmarked against the original scoping study for the period April 2010 to December 2012, demonstrate the extremely positive impact the provision of transitional support has had. From a baseline retention rate of 65% at the three month post programme mark, the retention rate increased by 35% up to 100% retention rate when transitional support was provided. A significant increase in retention rates at the six month post programme mark was also identified, from 60% to 87%.

The following key themes emerged from interviews and focus groups held with a range of stakeholders, including young people, practitioners and mainstream education, training or employment providers:

- Value of a transitional support service
- Addressing wider barriers
- Primacy of the youth work model
- Centrality of relationship building
- Importance of an embedded service
- Necessity for partnership working
- Requirement for clarity around roles

These themes are closely interlinked. Each is discussed, with quotations included where relevant to illustrate key themes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research focuses on one aspect of the transition process into adulthood for many care leavers- from supported education and training environments into mainstream education, training or jobs. It takes Include Youth's Transitional Support pilot project as a starting point for a wider exploration of 'what works' in enabling these young people to progress into further education, government training or employment.

The research highlights the real value of combining both quantitative and qualitative research, and in particular the rich evidence base provided by young people themselves.

It also recognises that care leavers' attitudes, behaviour and decision making in relation to education, training or employment options cannot be abstracted from the wider social, political and economic context in which they live their lives. Significant aspects of that societal context include the transitional nature of the society in which they live, the ongoing legacy of the conflict, the economic recession and the impact of welfare reform on young people.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates clearly that Include Youth's model of transitional support enables care leavers to make successful transitions from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training or employment than was previously the case.

The combination of the review of good practice models along with field work has proven to be a rich source of evidence regarding effective approaches in supporting young care leavers into mainstream education, training or employment. A number of common, interconnected themes emerge.

The starting point is the removal of what has been described as the 'cliff edge', facilitating young people to make supported, gradual transitions from employability programmes into mainstream provision. Beyond this, the foundation stones of any intervention are identified as the adoption of a youth work model that places the needs of the individual young person at the centre and gives primacy to relationship building. Repeatedly, young people and professionals emphasise the centrality of the relationship between the young person and their support worker.

The flexibility provided by the youth work model is also viewed as extremely important, as was the principle of empowerment "*it's more about working with you on a journey rather than being told 'you have to do this'*".

The need for all involved to be fully aware of the gradual, phased nature of support levels being provided is seen as important, with increasing emphasis being placed on young people being encouraged to identify natural supports in their own environment.

Another important consideration for young people is the continuity of the relationship with their support worker, across organisational and service boundaries. While the role played by transitional support workers is in the main fairly well understood, including by young people themselves, the research highlights the need for further work to be done with professionals in communicating clearly the service provided by transitional support workers.

The limitations of this small scale research need to be acknowledged. Further research could usefully involve a wider range of stakeholders, engage in a longer tracking exercise and examine other models of transitional support, including those in place for young people with disabilities.

In conclusion, this research study has drawn effectively on both quantitative and qualitative data in an exploration of what works in supporting care leavers, who face a number of significant barriers and challenges, to make successful transitions from supported learning and training environments into mainstream education, training or employment provision. It is hoped that its findings, and the recommendations which follow, will be acted upon by all concerned to help improve education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers in the future.

Recommendations | **Departments/Agencies responsible**

Recommendations	Departments/Agencies responsible
1. The provision of transitional support to care leavers should be mainstreamed within relevant employability and training programmes funded or delivered by government, including the new Youth Training model, United Youth/T:BUC programmes as well as other employability and/or training programmes funded or delivered by government departments.	Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, the Executive Office
2. Key government strategies should include a commitment to the provision of transitional support to care leavers transitioning from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training or employment provision.	Department for Health and Social Services, the Executive Office, Department of Education, Department for the Economy
3. The provision of transitional support should be based on youth work principles including being young person centred, needs led, on a voluntary basis and flexible in approach.	Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, Department of Education
4. The impact of wider government policies on care leavers and their achievement of quality outcomes from education, training and employment should be addressed. These include the provision of appropriate childcare, stable accommodation and adequate financial supports, mitigation against any negative welfare reform impacts and ensuring that	The Executive Office, Department for Health and Social Services, Department for Communities, Department of Justice

criminal records do not constitute blocks to training and employment.	
5. Recent legislative changes for care leavers introduced in Scotland and England, including the extension of the upper age for corporate parenting responsibilities to 21 years, should be explored with a view to introducing similar legislative changes in Northern Ireland.	Department for Health and Social Services
6. There is a need to ensure that clarity of roles exist between different professionals involved with care leavers around their education, training or employment. This is so as to ensure cooperation and coordination between professionals and to eliminate duplication, in order to maximise positive outcomes for the young people.	Health and Social Card Board, Health and Social Care Trusts, Further Education Colleges, Training for Success providers, voluntary sector employability programme providers, Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership's Looked After Children/16+ Group
7. The Executive Office should work with relevant government departments including the Department of the Economy and the Department for Communities to ensure that all employability and vocational training provision for care leavers is compliant with relevant international human rights standards.	The Executive Office
8. Government departments that are funding or delivering employability and/or vocational training programmes must ensure that monitoring and outcomes data is disaggregated by care status.	Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, Department of Education, Department for Health and Social Services
9. Longitudinal research should be commissioned which tracks a number of individual care leavers as they progress through education and training and into employment. Such research should draw on both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as broader transitions research, to develop a deeper understanding of the enabling and blocking factors for care leavers in securing and sustaining mainstream education, training or employment placements.	Department for Health and Social Services, Department for the Economy and the Executive Office

1. INTRODUCTION

Background and Purpose of Research

The most recent population census found that out of a population of 1.811 million in Northern Ireland, children and young people under the age of 18 represent approximately 23.8% of that number, while there were 227,634 young people aged 16-24, equating to 12.5% of the overall population .[1] A youthful population such as this is considered a formidable asset for innovation, for creativity, for development and for the sustainability of all that is progressive within a society. Yet, without the opportunity for all young people to receive a quality education, to engage in further education and training and to obtain meaningful, quality employment, all of which enables them to participate as 'active agents' in shaping their own lives and destiny, that potential will never be realised.

This research concerns a group of young people, care leavers, who frequently cannot and do not realise their true potential due to the barriers and disadvantages they experience in education, training and employment. Its aim is to explore what works in enabling these young people to make successful transitions from supported education and training environments, within which they typically achieve positive outcomes, into mainstream education, training and employment provision where they tend to face considerable barriers to achievement.

Economic, social and cultural changes in society over the past 30 to 40 years have seen many young people in western countries take longer to achieve social and economic independence. Post World War Two the transition into adulthood was relatively straightforward for most young people, with the majority transitioning directly from school into employment. Since the 1970s however youth transitions have changed fundamentally. It is now unusual for young people to leave school and enter work directly. For most young people, earning a living wage, leaving home, long term relationships and parenthood all tend to take place at a later age than was the case for their parents, if at times at all. These changes seem to stem from worldwide as well as more localised structural changes which have transformed the youth labour market, resulting in the emergence of high youth unemployment since the 1980s. This has been accompanied by the demise of the traditional apprenticeship route into employment.

In response successive UK governments have expanded the education and training system, with young people now engaging in education and/or training into their twenties; Northern Ireland has in turn adopted broadly similar policy responses. This changed landscape, which has brought about an increased dependency among young people, has significant implications for certain groups of young people, especially those without the safety net of family and finance, such as young people leaving care.

As the global economic crisis deepened during the early to mid 2000s, governments across the world grappled with the phenomenon of growing numbers of young people disengaged from any form of education, training or employment provision, with some countries witnessing over half of their young people unemployed and/or out of any form of education or training provision. In Northern Ireland, despite governmental strategies and interventions, the numbers of young people who are not in education, training or employment (hereafter 'NEET') continues to be

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[1] http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/2011/results.html Key Statistics for Northern Ireland December 2012, Table KS 102NI, p12

worryingly high. With an intensifying focus on growing the higher end skills and knowledge base to meet the needs of a changing economy, a real concern exists as to the level of strategic priority being afforded to supporting those young people who are furthest away from the labour market.

Research has highlighted that in many cases young people who are outside of education and training move between non-participation interspersed with short term participation in casual or poorly paid work and/or low level vocational training programmes. The negative impact on individual young people of such 'churning' has been documented, with studies finding that repeated exposure to training which fails to lead to meaningful progression into employment or higher level study is deeply discouraging for young people. [2]

Among the groups of young people at significant risk of 'churning' within the education, training and employment arenas are young people in and leaving care, particularly those who have been in residential care. This research focuses on these young people and how they can best be supported through education, training and into sustained employment, thereby ensuring that their experience is a positive, human rights compliant one.

Include Youth was established in 1979 and is an independent, rights based non-governmental organisation that actively promotes the rights, best interests of and best practice with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. It has over thirty years experience in delivering youth work based employability programmes for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, in particular for young people in and leaving care, who typically have significantly poorer education, training and employment outcomes than their peers. Its policy advocacy work is directly informed by the experiences and expertise of young people and practitioners and by the use of international human rights standards as benchmarks against which to measure policy and provision.

Evidence demonstrates that outcomes achieved by employability programmes utilising a youth work approach are significant, with between 70-80% of participants progressing into further education, government training, and employment or volunteering.[3] Outcomes achieved by young people on Include Youth's Give & Take scheme are consistent with these findings. [4]

Despite these positive outcomes however, Include Youth became increasingly aware over a number of years that a percentage of young people it worked with struggled to maintain their mainstream placements. Historically Include Youth did not track young people post completion of their programme due to lack of resources and therefore didn't have quantitative data on the extent of this issue. However, first hand evidence provided by young people, who literally knocked on Include Youth's door seeking help and support, indicated that this was an issue that warranted greater attention. Consistently these young people identified a lack of support as a key factor in undermining their ability to maintain their placements.

At a practical level, Include Youth responded by establishing a two year transitional support pilot project with a view to testing its hypothesis that the provision of support before, during and

[2] Simmons, R. (2013). *NEETs Survey*. University and College Union.
[3] Mack, N. (2013). *The difference youth work makes to young people who are described as NEET*. Youth Council Northern Ireland.
[4] http://www.includeyouth.org/mgmt/resources/employability-evaluation-final-report-v4-1.pdf

after the period of transition would contribute to a significant improvement in retention rates. At a policy level the organisation began to research and review policy responses with a view to drawing out the learning.

This research project builds directly on that initial practice and policy work. It's purpose is to explore in a more systematic way 'what works' in supporting young people from a care background to make successful transitions from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training and employment.

Include Youth's approach to this research has been to locate the issue of transitions firmly within the wider social, economic and political context of young people's lives. In Northern Ireland the ongoing legacy of the conflict and transition to a 'post-conflict' society clearly constitutes a key aspect of that context. In addition, as a rights based organisation, young people are seen by Include Youth as rights holders who have a fundamental right to dignity, respect and a say over their own lives. As such they are entitled to quality education and training, including of the vocational type, and to a decent job with opportunities for progression; this principle underpins the research in the chapters that follow.

Chapter One outlines the background to and purpose of the research.

Chapter Two outlines the methodology utilised for the research and identifies the different strands involved.

Chapter Three considers the relevant policy contexts. These contexts include that of a society which is itself in transition, as well as the legislative, policy and service provision frameworks in relation to young people who are NEET and young people in and leaving care. It also maps out the relevant international human rights standards as benchmarks against which to measure policy and practice.

Chapter Four presents a review of models of good practice. Three different practice models or frameworks for intervention are explored for their relevance to supporting care leavers into mainstream education, training or employment. A number of other models of good practice are reviewed through an examination of available toolkits, evaluations, reviews or reports documenting their practice.

Chapter Five provides an overview of Include Youth's Transitional Support pilot project. It details the background and rationale for the development of the pilot project as well as providing an overview of project's aims and objectives, the role of staff and the practice elements involved.

Chapter Six reports on the primary research, presenting both the quantitative findings in relation to project outcomes as well as the findings from interviews with a range of stakeholders including young people, practitioners, mainstream education and training providers and Health and Social Care Trust personnel.

Chapter Seven draws together the lessons from the policy and practice reviews as well as the data analysis and field research and makes related recommendations for both policy and practice.

A note on the use of the term 'NEET'

The use of the term 'NEET' to describe young people not in education, employment or training can be traced back to the early 1990s in the UK. Initially a 'Status 0' derived from Careers Service records in England was briefly used to describe 16-18 year olds outside of education, employment or training. The overtly negative connotations of such a descriptor were not lost on government; as indicated by Williamson (2010) who dubbed it ' *a metaphor for young people who, in policy terms at that time counted for nothing and were going nowhere'*.[5] In 1996 a Home Office official in the then Conservative government proposed the term 'NEET', which quickly gained currency not only in the UK but wider afield. Intended to be a more neutral alternative, the term has been heavily criticised and its stigmatising associations have been widely accepted. Criticisms include the concern that it turns young people "*into an alien species*"[6] and that *'it can often be seen as pejorative and thus unhelpful'*.[7] Such concerns have been shared by those working with young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland, with a number of service providers, including Include Youth, preferring to interpret the acronym as meaning '*needing education, employment or training'*.

A further criticism of the term has focused on the lack of an internationally agreed definition. Unlike unemployment, which has been internationally defined by the ILO, the usage of the term NEET varies from country to country, making comparisons difficult. In that context it is instructive to note that the Northern Ireland Executive's Pathways to Success Strategy, while outlining the characteristics of young people who are NEET, does not include a precise definition of the term 'NEET', an omission which has led to some difficulties among programme providers for the purposes of assessing eligibility of some young people for their programmes.

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[5] Williamson, H. (2010). *Neet acronym is far from a neat description*. TES Cymru. Available online at http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6038266
[6] House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee *Inquiry into young people who are not in education, employment or training*. Eight report of session 2009-210 Volume 1 HC316-1. London: The Stationery Office Limited.
[7] Ibid

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The research utilised a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative methods. The approach adopted was to 'triangulate' the findings from the quantitative data analysis with the results from policy analysis, review of best practice models and interviews with young people and key stakeholders.

 It included the following key elements:

Desktop literature and policy review – in relation to international human rights frameworks, the social, economic and political context in Northern Ireland, young people's transitions to adulthood, young people who are NEET, young people in and leaving care and governmental policy responses.

Statistical analysis – of data sets relating to young people who are NEET, education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers and outcomes data from Include Youth's Transitional Support pilot programme. This analysis was conducted in part by Locus Consultancy who carried out an evaluation of Include Youth's employability services between 2011-2014 and by Include Youth staff for the programme period of 2014-2015.

Best practice review – A small number of strategic models or frameworks for intervention designed to support vulnerable and disadvantaged young people to engage in education, training and employment were reviewed in some depth to extrapolate their key features. A further, more limited assessment of other employability initiatives and programmes operating in the UK, Ireland, Europe and further afield were reviewed and a synthesis of the learning on 'what works' was drawn together.

Face to face interviews with practitioners and key stakeholders. These interviews were conducted by a combination of Locus evaluators and two Include Youth researchers drawn from its Policy team. Locus evaluators interviewed a range of stakeholders, including from Health and Social Care Trusts, Further Education colleges, mainstream training providers and voluntary sector training providers.

Include Youth researchers also conducted the following interviews with stakeholders: two interviews with senior Include Youth practitioners; four interviews with mainstream education and training providers (two further education providers and two work placement providers); two interviews with Social Workers from two different Health and Social Care Trusts.

Face to face interviews with young people. A total of six interviews were completed with young people who were receiving Transitional Support at the time or who had previously received this service. Three males and three females were selected and were drawn from a number of Include Youth programme locations in both urban and rural settings. These interviews focused on the young people's experience of mainstream education, training or employment and barriers to their participation, their experience of Transitional Support, whether and how it helped them to maintain their mainstream placement and any impact Transitional Support has had on other aspects of their lives beyond education, training or employment. An additional case study was provided by the Locus evaluation.

Focus groups with practitioners and young people. A group of six staff from Include Youth took part in one focus group. The group included a mix of staff roles including essential skills tutors and employability workers and were drawn from a number of Include Youth bases. Themes explored in the focus group included barriers experienced by young people in accessing and sustaining mainstream education, training or employment, their assessment of the Transitional Support service, the impact they think it has had on young people's engagement with mainstream education, training or employment, any wider impacts delivered by the Transitional Support service, other supports that might benefit young people in maintaining their mainstream education, training or employment placement.

Four young people, two male and two female, all aged 17-19 years of age and drawn from the same location took part in a focus group. Two of the young people were receiving Transitional Support while two were at a pre-transitional stage. Themes explored included their perceptions of barriers to accessing and maintaining education, training or employment placements, previous experiences of mainstream placements and views and experience of Transitional Support.

CHAPTER 3 THE POLICY CONTEXT

This chapter explores the different, but inter-related policy contexts impacting on the lives of young people in and leaving care and in particular their progression through further education and training and into employment. It begins by setting out the relevant human rights entitlements of this group of young people and the corresponding duties on the state. It presents statistical data on outcomes being achieved by young care leavers across a range of domains including education, training and employment. It maps out the relevant legislative and policy contexts as well as those planning and coordination mechanisms that exist. Finally, it examines both the global and local crises around youth unemployment and the related responses by the Northern Ireland Executive, at both the policy and service provision levels.

International human rights framework

International human rights law clearly sets out the UK government's obligations (and those of the devolved assemblies) regarding the education, training and employment rights of all young people. They also specify that vulnerable groups of children and young people, including young people in or leaving care, should not be discriminated against in any way but rather should be provided with additional protections and supports.

The two most directly relevant international instruments are the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter UNCRC) and the UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (hereafter the UNESRC).   The UK government has ratified both of these international human rights treaties, and while they are not binding in domestic law, the UK government and its devolved administrations are bound by them under international law. The state party is required to participate in a 5 year reporting and examination cycle led by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Article 20(1) of the UNCRC addresses the rights of children deprived of their family environment and states that these children shall be entitled to special protection and assistance by the state. It makes clear that the phrase '*special protection and assistance*' refers to much more than simply the provision of alternative accommodation and must be read in conjunction with other articles of the Convention, in particular the relevant principles of non-discrimination (article 2), best interests (article 3) and the voice of the child (article 12).

Article 28 of the UNCRC on the child's right to education incorporates the right to vocational education, underscoring the importance of education having relevance in the child or young person's current and future life.

Other relevant provisions include Article 4 which places specific obligations on government in respect of data collection and analysis; this provision notes the need to ensure data is evaluated and used to inform policy development.

In detailing its expectations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has issued guidelines for Alternative Care of Children which recognises that state parties have a number of responsibilities towards care leavers.[8] These guidelines make a series of recommendations

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[8] UN General Assembly (2010). 64/142.Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children. United Nations

for policy and practice to enhance implementation of the UNCRC and promote the wellbeing of children deprived of parental care. The importance of preparing young people to make the transition from care to adulthood and supporting them with aftercare is highlighted. Consistent with the principles of the UNCRC the guidelines reflect the importance of gradually preparing and empowering young people to take greater responsibility for decisions affecting their lives.

The UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which pre-dates the UNCRC by some three decades, is also a useful source of international human rights standards on the education, training and employment rights of young people. Its provisions also cover young people of 18 years and upwards, whereas the UNCRC is limited in its scope to under 18s only.

Article 13.a (b) of the UNESCRC closely mirrors the provisions of Article 28 and 29 of the UNCRC, underscoring the importance of effective access to various forms of education, including vocational and work-related training, as well as the principle that education should be viewed in a holistic manner.

The UNESCRC's General Comment No 13 on Education explains the right to education as encompassing requirements on the state to ensure that education is available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. [9] These essential elements of Article 13 must be measured differently in different social and economic contexts. In the context of a high developed, post industrial state such as the UK it can be argued that they encompass the need to provide the requisite levels of support to enable vulnerable young people to effectively access, participate in and achieve through further education and/or vocational training.

At a European level the European Social Charter also provides a set of legally binding standards in respect of education, training and employment for young people. The revised Council of Europe charter of 1996, ratified by the UK government in 1997, sets out minimum social and economic rights to be guaranteed by the state. Article 9 spells out the obligations on government to provide all young people with vocational guidance '*with due regard to the individual's characteristics and their relation to occupational opportunity*', while article 10 emphasises the right of all persons to technical and vocational training.[10]

The wider context of young people's lives in Northern Ireland

In attempting to understand and address the issue of young people who are NEET gaining education, training and employment it is important to understand the wider social, economic and political context which shape their lives.

Young people transitioning to adulthood in Northern Ireland do so within a society that is itself in transition – from violent conflict and deep divisions to a society that is democratic, equal and inclusive.

Political developments in recent years have served to underscore the fact that Northern Ireland is a society still actively transitioning out of conflict. Sixteen years on from the Belfast/Good

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[9] UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1999). General Comment No 13 on the Right to Education. paragraph 11

[10] Council of Europe European Social Charter revised 1996.

Friday Agreement being signed it is clear that the political settlement and by extension 'the peace' is far from secure. This context overshadows the lives of children and young people growing up post 1998 and has both direct and indirect impacts on their lives. These impacts, as with the conflict itself, are experienced most acutely by young people in working class, disadvantaged communities.

Community division and segregation in housing, education, public services and leisure facilities continue to be a daily reality experienced by young people. Many people who grew up during the conflict and whose trauma went unrecognised now have children and grandchildren of their own. It has been recognised that trans-generational trauma manifests itself in a number of ways, impacting on the ability of children and young people to participate in education, on their mental health and their overall sense of identity and self.[11]

The threat of paramilitary violence continues to be a real issue for many young people, particularly young working class men who are classified as NEET, with official figures likely to underestimate the scale of the problem due to fear of reporting.[12]

The experience of being 'expelled' from their community by paramilitaries is a commonplace one for many of those young people who are NEET and are in conflict with the law. Young people describe how paramilitaries assume a 'policing' role in relation to their lives:

"*It's the paramilitaries who make you feel unsafe – they know everything, know everyone – they always go to people to find stuff out, and people tout – so if they want you, they'll always get to you*."[13]

A related conflict legacy issue is the high level of mental illness. The Bamford Review of Child and Adolescent Health published in 2005 found that factors associated with the conflict impact severely on child and adolescent mental health in Northern Ireland. More recent research highlighted that of those in Northern Ireland suffering poor mental health, in 15% of cases it is as a direct result of the Northern Ireland conflict as well as the ongoing impact of inter-generational trauma and poor mental health associated with living under paramilitary threat.[14]

Suicide rates for young people have been increasing steadily over the past ten years, with levels in the most disadvantaged areas having more than tripled. A review of the evidence undertaken by researchers from Queen's University Belfast has found that the conflict significantly shapes the suicide problem, with its legacy influencing the challenge of suicide.[15]

Unemployment levels in Northern Ireland continue to lag behind the overall UK rate, with rates of youth unemployment significantly higher than the UK average. In September 2015 the rate of unemployment among 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland was 20.2% while the equivalent

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[11] University of Ulster (2015).*Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*. Belfast: Commission for Victims and Survivors.

[12] Figures obtained by the Children's Law Centre found that 12 children were recorded as victims of paramilitary style shootings between 2009 and 2014, with 5 children recorded as victims in 2009 alone.

[13] Include Youth (2009) Submission to Department of Justice on its consultation on Community Safety

[14] University of Ulster (2015) Towards a Better Future: The Transgenerational impact of the Troubles on Mental Health, prepared for the Commission on Victims and Survivors.

[15] Tomlinson, M. (2007) *The Trouble with Suicide: Mental Health, Suicide and the Northern Ireland Conflict – a Review of Evidence.* Belfast: School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast.

UK rate was 14. 3%. While rates of adult unemployment have shown some early signs of reduction, this has been accompanied by a rise in the phenomenon known as precarious work with evidence pointing to the growth of zero hour working practices among some employers. Commentators have raised concerns that this growing normalisation of casual, insecure work threatens to have serious longer term implications for the financial security, health and well being of young people, particularly those who are most marginalised.[16]

Levels of poverty in Northern Ireland are higher than in other parts of the UK, a fact that has also been attributed in large measure to the legacy of the conflict. Figures show that in 2012-2013 20% of children and young people in Northern Ireland were living in relative poverty and 22% in absolute poverty before housing costs.[17]In 2008 21% of children and young people were living in persistent poverty, which is more than double the rate in Britain. [18] Research has suggested that child poverty in Northern Ireland is likely to increase in the coming years and will do so at a disproportionate rate to the rest of the UK.

There are serious concerns as to how welfare reform will impact on vulnerable young people in Northern Ireland. A number of reports highlight the negative impact of welfare reform on young people in England, including the severe hardship caused by increasing sanctions and benefit delays. It is clear from available UK statistical evidence that young people are more severely affected by the rapid growth in benefit sanctions than other age groups. Research conducted in England by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that young people in the under 25 age group had a consistently higher sanction rate than other age groups, with individuals in this group accounting for 41% of all sanctions issued under the new regime from October 2012 to December 2013.[19] One explanation proffered is that young people may be more likely to live in insecure or chaotic circumstances that make it difficult for them to comply with the strictures of the welfare system, and that they may have less experience of navigating a highly conditional system. Such an explanation fits with the observations of experienced practitioners in Northern Ireland working with young people who are NEET.

A related concern is how the Department for Employment and Learning's Steps to Success Programme is impacting on young people who are NEET. Young people aged 18-24 are being mandated onto Steps to Success after nine months of receiving Job Seekers Allowance. Voluntary sector providers of employability programmes have collated evidence which demonstrates that, as a result of being mandated onto Steps to Success, young people are being denied the opportunity to participate in or complete tailored, young person centred programmes that best meet their needs.[20]

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[16] Research by The Resolution Foundation in 2013, '*A Matter of Time*', found that 37% of those employed on zero hour contracts were aged between 16 and 34 years.

[17] Department for Social Development NI (2014) Households below average income Report for Northern Ireland. Report can be accessed at http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dsd/news-dsd-251114-the-households-below.htm

[18] Monteith, M., Lloyd, K. and McKee, P. (2008) *Persistent Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*. Save the Children, ARK and ESCR.

[19] Watts, B,. Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G. and Watkins, D (2014) Welfare Sanctions and Conditionality in the UK. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[20] Include Youth, Prince's Trust and Springboard Opportunities Limited (2015) *Briefing note on the impact of Steps to Success on young people's participation on ESF and United Youth Programmes* (unpublished).

A pervasive feature of life for young people in Northern Ireland is that of negative stereotyping. Research undertaken by Queen's University Belfast and Include Youth illustrated the impact of such negative labelling, with young people highlighting the impact of negative media representations on the treatment they receive, particularly from the police and paramilitaries.[21] The potential for such negative representation of children and young people to 'fuel and sustain' the control and punishment of children and young people by paramilitaries was starkly highlighted by this research.

Two aspects of the youth justice system as it operates in Northern Ireland that have negative and far reaching consequences on young people growing up and their education, training and employment opportunities are the very low age of criminal responsibility and criminal records. The minimum age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland remains set at 10 years of age, despite numerous recommendations from various domestic and international human rights bodies as well as the Review of Youth Justice in Northern Ireland.

The wide-reaching impact of acquiring a criminal record on a young person's education or employment opportunities has been under researched, according to a recent study conducted by NIACRO, Bytes and DEL into young people, criminal records and employment barriers.[22]

While this research did find that young people considered a criminal record to be a barrier to certain employment and education opportunities, what was of serious concern was the lack of awareness among young people as to the disclosure implications of certain disposals, particularly those which young people considered to be 'diversionary'.[23]

New filtering arrangements for Northern Ireland, introduced in April 2014 were designed to identify and remove some old and minor offences and other information (such as cautions, informed warnings or diversionary youth conferences) from Access NI checks. Since its introduction there appears to have been a significant level of confusion regarding the operation of new filtering system as well as concerns about net widening and the particular negative impacts on young people.

In addition, the possibility of disproportionate effects of the current filtering arrangements on particular young people has been raised. The Youth Justice Review highlighted the over representation of looked after young people with complex needs within the youth justice system as an area of concern. The fact that young people who are looked after may come into contact with the criminal justice system at disproportionate rates means that the filtering arrangements, which currently only allow for the filtering of one conviction of a non-specified offence, may have a particularly disproportionate impact on young people within this group. [24]

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[21] Gordon, F., McAlister, S. Scraton, P. and Include Youth (2015) *Behind the Headlines: Media Representations of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.

[22] Carr, Dr. N., Dwyer, Dr. C. and Larrauri, Professor E (2015). *Young people, criminal records and employment barriers New Directions: Understanding and improving employment pathways in youth justice in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: NIACRO.

[23] Ibid page 48

[24] Ibid, p 41

Young people in and leaving care

Children are taken into care for a variety of reasons, the most common being to protect the child from abuse or neglect. In other cases their parents could be absent or may be unable to cope due to disability or illness.

In 2013/14 2,163 children and young people had been looked after continuously for 12 months or longer; this figure has risen year on year since 2006.[25] There is a clear link between social deprivation and care status, with 42% of that total figure coming from the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland. By comparison 6% of children and young people taken into care originated from the least deprived areas. Approximately 1000 young people aged between 16 and 21 years leave the care system every year in Northern Ireland which for the purposes of planning and service provision is a relatively small number compared to the 10,000 leaving care in England annually. In 2014/15 in Northern Ireland there were 289 care leavers in the 16-18 year age bracket and 201 care leavers in the 19 year old age bracket. [26]

Although care leavers are not a homogenous group, extensive evidence highlights the fact that young people in and leaving care are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in society, experiencing significant barriers to participation. This evidence would suggest that young people with experience of the care system are significantly more likely to leave school early with no qualifications, to have special educational needs or a disability, to have higher levels of mental ill health, to be over represented in the criminal justice system, to become young parents, and finally, to be classified as NEET. Young people at the upper end of the age spectrum, and those in residential care are more likely to be represented in most these categories. The latest statistical data on care leavers in Northern Ireland confirms this profile.

Looking at the 16-18 year old group of care leavers in 2014/15[27], 15% had a disability, compared to 6% of the general population in that age bracket. 14% had a Statement of Special Educational Need, compared to 5% of the general population. 25% obtained 5 GCSEs A*-C, compared to 79% of the general school leaver population, while 26% had no qualifications on leaving school, over 15 times that for general school leavers. Just under two thirds (61%) 16-18 year old care leavers were in education or training, 8% were working while 31% were economically inactive.

Of the 240 19 year old care leavers in 2014/15[28], 64% were in education, training or employment, a small increase from 2013/14. The remaining 34% were unemployed, economically inactive or their status not known. 26% of female care leavers aged 19 became mothers on or before their 19th birthday.

There are significant differences in rates of participation in education, training and employment among care leavers linked to accommodation type. Over 8 in 10 of those whose final placement had been in foster care were in education, training or employment (84% in both

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[25] DHSSPS (2015) Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2013/14 Statistical Bulletin published 18 June 2015
[26] DHSSPS (2015) Northern Ireland Care Leavers 2014/15 Statistical Bulletin published 14 January 2015
[27] Ibid
[28] Ibid

kinship and non-kinship care) compared with between 30% and 57% in all other accommodation types.

The over-representation of young people in and leaving care in the youth justice system has been well documented. In 2013/14 9% of children and young people in care had been cautioned or convicted of an offence during the year ending 30 September 2014. The rate of caution or conviction was higher in the older age group, with one sixth of young people over 16 having been cautioned or convicted.[29]

In 2014-2015 33% of young people involved with custodial services were in care; a huge over representation in relation to the proportion of looked after children in the overall population of children and young people.[30] It is worth noting that a combination of PACE and remands (36% and 54% respectively) were the main reasons why young people were in the Juvenile Justice Centre, with only 10% of young people there having received a custodial sentence. The disproportionate use of remand in relation to looked after children from children's homes was highlighted by the Review of Youth Justice. That review recommended that looked after children should no longer be placed in custody, either through PACE, remand or sentenced, where this would not have been an outcome for children in the general population.[31]

The Legislative and policy framework for young people in and leaving care

There are a number of key legislative, policy and programme initiatives that underpin the development of services to improve the educational and career outcomes for young people leaving care. These are detailed below.

The introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 helped focus attention on the challenges associated with leaving care and it sought to stimulate the further development of leaving and aftercare services. It placed a requirement on the Health and Social Services Trusts to advise, assist, and befriend young people with a view to promoting their welfare when they leave care.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 formed the basis for improved leaving and aftercare services by amending the existing leaving care provisions. The main purpose of the act was to improve the life chances of young people who were looked after by the Trusts as they made the transition to independent living. The Leaving Care Act amended the Children Order to place new, enhanced duties on the Trusts to assess and meet care and support needs of young people until they are at least 21 years of age. In the context of Northern Ireland's leaving care legislation, it is worth noting that legislation introduced in Scotland in 2014, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, extended support for care leavers up to and including 25 years of age.

Following on from the Children (Leaving Care) (NI) Act, statutory regulation and guidance in the form of the Leaving and After Care Regulations and Guidance was issued by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (hereafter DHSSPS) in 2005.

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[29] Op cited at note 24
[30] Youth Justice Agency (2015) Annual Workload Statistics 2014-2015.
[31] Department of Justice (2011) Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland, recommendation 19.

These regulations set out the role and responsibilities of the Personal Advisor, the provision of which was a statutory requirement under the Children (Leaving Care) Act. The Personal Advisor must help to construct a Pathway Plan, provide continuity of support for the young person through transition and assist in identifying the resources and services required to meet the young person's needs. The Personal Advisor clearly has a significant role to play in enabling young care leavers to make a successful transition into further education, training or employment.

In 2009 Regional Guidance on Arrangements to Support Young People to Engage in Education, training or employment was introduced. This guidance set out service, operational and practice arrangements for improving the education, training and long-term employment options for young people in care with the aim of redressing the negative outcomes of many care experienced young people. Key components of the guidance include dedicated employment support workers, access to work experience, supported training placements and employment, mentoring and incentive payments. The Regional Guidance also set out the Partnership Agreement developed between the Careers Service in DEL and the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Flowing from the above guidance, each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts has an Employability Service in place. While each service has been operationalised somewhat differently, all of them have similar strategic aims. These are to develop a culture and infrastructure within the Trust to better prepare young people in care for education, training and employment and to identify, secure and support a range of work experience, employment, training and volunteering opportunities across various sectors but particularly within the Trusts as corporate parents.

The Standards for Leaving Care set out the minimum standards for leaving and after care services for care leavers in Northern Ireland. Of particular interest in the context of this research are the standards in relation to education and economic well being. Outcome measures include evidence that demonstrates that young people are offered work experience, training, employment, pre-vocational and volunteering opportunities that meets their needs and preferences. Outcome measures also include evidence of the existence of protocols between the Trust and a range of agencies to ensure equal access is afforded to all young people in accessing appropriate training and employment opportunities.

The Going the Extra Mile Scheme (GEMS), launched by the DHSSPS in 2006 aims to promote continuity and stability of living arrangements in post care life for young people living with foster carers. It is designed to ensure that appropriate and agreed levels of financial support are available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of young people until at least 21 years of age. There have been calls for the scheme to be extended to young people in residential care also, particularly in light of the significantly poorer educational outcomes achieved by this group of young people.

The Health and Social Care Board has issued guidance on financial arrangements to support care experienced young people in higher education institutions and intends to issue similar guidance in respect of further education institutions. The purpose of both sets of guidance is to formalise financial arrangements put in place by Trusts to ensure that care leavers engaged in

further and higher education studies are not disadvantaged by virtue of financial barriers or care status.

If applied consistently by all Health and Social Care Trusts, this guidance should prove helpful in clarifying for care leavers what financial support they are both entitled to and can expect from Trusts when undertaking further or higher education.

Care Matters in Northern Ireland – a Bridge to a Better Future continues to be the main policy framework for children in or leaving care. Operational since 2009, it sets out an outcomes based vision, stating that '*we must strive to achieve the best outcomes for children in care and leaving care in terms of education, health, life skills, preparation for independence and adulthood*'. [32] The development by the DHSSPS of a Strategic Statement for Looked After Children: Improving Children's Lives is intended to build on the earlier actions contained in the Care Matters action plan as well as emerging research and evidence.

Developments in Scotland and England have seen the right of young people leaving care to remain in the same accommodation provision they had been in, albeit to differing degrees. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, as referred to earlier, introduced a right to 'Continuing Care'. It placed a duty on local authorities to provide care leavers whose final placement was 'away from home' with a continuation of the same accommodation and assistance as they were receiving immediately before they ceased to be looked after. The aim of the provisions is to provide these young people with a more graduated transition out of care. This means that, as is the case with their non looked after peers, those not ready to leave home will be entitled to remain with their carers until age 21. The provision covers foster, residential and kinship care placements. Calls have been made from voluntary organisations working with care leavers in Northern Ireland for a similar amendment to the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002.[33]

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a statutory duty for local authorities in England to enable 'Staying Put' arrangements to commence after a fostered young person reaches the age of 18, whereby they can remain with their foster carer up to the age of 21. It should be noted that this duty only applies to those young people in foster care.

Planning and co-ordination mechanisms
In addition to relevant legislation, regulations, guidance and policy frameworks, a number of planning and coordination mechanisms are in place with the aim of improving education, training and employment outcomes for young people in and leaving care.

The overall aim of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is to put in place integrated planning and commissioning across agencies and sectors, through its Children and Young People's Plan, aimed at improving well being and the realisation of children and young people's rights in Northern Ireland. In addition to its Outcomes groups and Locality Planning groups it has established a number of Regional Sub-Groups to plan for specific groups of children and young people. Among the regional sub-groups is the Looked After Children (16+)

[32] DHSSPSNI (2007). *Care Matters – A Bridge to a Better Future*. Paragraph 12.d, p 14
[33] Northern Ireland Assembly (2015). Official Report Committee for Employment and Learning ' *Our life in care survey*' Briefing by VOYPIC 4 March 2015,

Sub-Group. This group has an action plan in place that includes actions in respect of education, training and employment outcomes for young people in and leaving care.

Two further planning and co-ordination initiatives are in place, the Care to Careers Group jointly chaired by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Employment and Learning and the regional Further Education and Higher Education grouping, chaired by the Health and Social Care Board.

The Care to Careers Group was established to provide leadership and collaboration on the theme of improving education, training and employment outcomes for looked after and care experienced young people. The Further Education and Higher Education group has representation from Health and Social Care Trusts, universities and regional colleges, relevant government departments and a number of community and voluntary sector organisations. Its overarching aim is to prevent disengagement in education on ceasing compulsory school age by supporting timely and connected pathways into further and higher education and through collaborative working practices and information sharing.

The crisis of young people who are not in education, training or employment

The challenge of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland should be viewed in the wider context, which is one of a global crisis. Young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and almost seventy three million young people worldwide are looking for work. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has warned of a '*scarred*' generation of young workers facing a dangerous mix of high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work as well as persistent levels of poverty. Such conditions, while not the only ones, were certainly some of the reasons behind the recent Arab Spring uprising and undoubtedly fuelled the fires of protest among young unemployed people across the Middle East region and beyond. [34]

At a European level the issue of young people who are unemployed or classified as NEET is considered to be one of the most challenging issues facing the region. Youth unemployment rates in recent years, particularly in the southern, poorer countries of the EU have reached levels previously unheard of, with countries such as Spain and Greece recording rates of 53% and 52% respectively.[35] The UK and Ireland, while experiencing nowhere near the record rates in southern Europe nevertheless recorded youth unemployment rates of at least 3 times those for overall unemployment.

Eurostat figures for 2014 in relation to the percentage of young people in the EU aged 15-24 who are neither in education, training or employment indicated an overall rate of 12.4%, a reduction of only 0.5% over a ten year period.[36] The corresponding rate for the UK was 11.9%. [37]

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[34] http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_154078/lang--en/index.htm

[35] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tipslm80

[36] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tesem150

[37] Ibid

The EU Commission has responded to this crisis through its Europe 2020 flagship initiative Youth on the Move and the 2012-13 Youth Opportunities Initiative, both initiatives demanding concerted action from member states. Special emphasis has been placed on providing pathways back into education and training as well as contact with the labour market. In 2012 the Commission's Employment Package '*Towards a Job Rich Recovery*' re-emphasised the need to deliver youth opportunities, stressing the importance of decreasing the dramatic rates of youth unemployment and NEET status by enabling transitions to work.

In April 2013, EU Member States made a commitment to ensure young people's successful transition into work by establishing Youth Guarantee schemes. Under the Youth Guarantee Member States must ensure that, within four months of leaving school or losing a job, young people under 25 can either find a good-quality job suited to their education, skills and experience; or acquire the education, skills and experience required to find a job in the future through an apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education. In short the Youth Guarantee was intended as both a structural reform to drastically improve school-to-work transitions and a measure to immediately support jobs for young people.

However, a question mark hangs over the Youth Guarantee amid concerns that it is too slow to be implemented, underfunded and failing in its central promise to give every young EU citizen a quality offer of employment, education or training if they are unemployed.

The UK government took the view that as the EU Youth Guarantee was non binding they would not offer a guarantee but would instead offer '*tailored support to young people based on their needs'*.[38] That decision was criticised by the TUC which noted that the UK was the only member state in the EU to express such a clear opinion against the EU Youth Guarantee.[39]

Due to its inability as a region to meet the threshold of 25% youth unemployment rate Northern Ireland was not deemed eligible for the EU Youth Employment Initiative funding and also did not implement the EU Youth Guarantee. It is worth noting that despite this the Minister for Employment and Learning Dr. Stephen Farry has maintained the view that Northern Ireland nonetheless met the Youth Guarantee through its existing programmes and policies.[40]

Young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland in the period April – June 2015 34,000 16-24 year olds or 16% of that age cohort were classified as being NEET. More than half of this figure (18,000) was economically inactive. Northern Ireland along with Wales ranks joint highest for percentage of 16-24 year olds who are NEET; the UK average is 12%.

While the overall numbers of NEET young people has declined from a high of 46,000 for October – December 2011, it is unclear how much of this improvement is simply as a direct result of a change in the classification and counting of young people who are NEET, in line with changes introduced by the UK's Office of National Statistics in May 2013. It has been

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[38] House of Lords European Union Committee (2014). Youth unemployment in the European Union: a scarred generation? 12th report of session 2013-14. Published 10 April 2014. London: The Stationery Office Limited.
[39] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldselect/ldeucom/164/16407.htm#n123
[40] Northern Ireland Assembly AQW 5310/11-15

estimated that the removal of part time students in Northern Ireland removed approximately 12-13,000 from the NEET population.

Profile of young people who are NEET

There is significant evidence to suggest that being NEET for long periods of time can have considerable costs, both to the individual and society more broadly. The Prince's Trust Macquarie Youth Index for 2014 involved a survey of over 2000 young people aged 16-25 years. Of those, young people who were long term unemployed were twice as likely as their peers to have been prescribed anti-depressants, one in three had contemplated suicide while one in four had self harmed. These figures serve as a stark illustration of the huge personal cost to being NEET. A life time 'scarring' effect on young people who are NEET has been noted, manifesting itself in poorer mental and physical health, lower wage earning capacity and greater likelihood to be dependent on social welfare.

The cost to the state of young people being NEET is also high. Research undertaken by the University of York calculated that the average resource lifetime cost of being NEET (i.e. compared to those who are non-NEET) had more than doubled from £45,000 in 2002 to £104,000 by 2010.[41] Closer to home the Prince's Trust has estimated that the weekly income lost to the Northern Ireland economy through youth unemployment equalled £4,566,905.[42]

Policy responses to support care leavers into education, training or employment

The Pathways to Success Strategy represents the central plank of the Northern Ireland Executive's response to the increasing numbers of young people at risk of becoming or already classified as NEET in Northern Ireland. Launched in June 2012, the strategy is designed to form a set of joined up actions to be taken across the Executive. It is intended to have a particular focus on helping those young people facing barriers to participation and was designed to sit alongside other proposals to tackle the wider problem of youth unemployment. Key elements of the Strategy include the NEET Advisory Group, a cross departmental, cross sectoral group established to oversee implementation of the Strategy, and the NEET Strategy Forum, whose role is to enable the community and voluntary sector to influence the Strategy's effective implementation.

At the outset the scale of the issue was recognised as considerable – in the October to December 2011 period 20.5% or 46,000 young people aged 16-24 were classified as NEET. The Strategy recognised that the problem constituted a deeper structural one and not one solely caused by the economic recession. In its foreword the Minister for Employment and Learning Dr. Stephen Farry stated that:

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[41] Coles, B., Godfrey, C., Keuny, A., Parrott, S. and Bradshaw, J. (2010) *Estimating the life time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in education, training or employment*. York: University of York.
[42] The Prince's Trust (2010). *The Cost of Exclusion: Counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK*. London: The Prince's Trust.

"It is critical that our young people get a good start in life and are not left behind in the way previous generations were held back by conflict, division and inequalities"[43]

Young people in and leaving care were identified by the Strategy as among those most at risk of becoming NEET, although no baseline figures were provided as to the numbers involved. It included a number of specific action points targeted at care leavers, the primary one being that of improving education, employment and training outcomes for young people in care.[44] The DHSSPS target of 75% of care leavers aged 19 in education, employment or training by March 2013 was included as a target.

In addition, young people in or leaving care came within the scope of many of the Strategy's other action points including the ESF programme 2007-2013, the introduction of the Pathways EMA allowance, the further promotion of individual action plans, the development of the Collaboration and Innovation Fund to test new approaches, the Youth Employment Scheme and the promotion of social clauses in public sector procurement.

The important role played by mentors in supporting young people who are NEET into education, training or employment was recognised by the Pathways to Success Strategy:

A 'mentor' approach has emerged as one of the most effective tools and is where, appropriately, the voluntary and community sector can often make an important and substantial contribution. Depending on the individual young person's starting point and circumstances, this is likely to involve a personalised series of co-ordinated interventions, each moving the young person closer to employment, education or training.[45]

An evaluation of the Pathways to Success Strategy was published in March 2015.[46] This evaluation concentrated on the six main programmes or initiatives within the Strategy and their individual impacts, costs and benefits. Less attention was paid to the effectiveness of the administrative and political oversight mechanisms in place to deliver the Strategy as a whole. Overall the evaluation concluded that 53 out of the 56 objectives had '*been achieved or were on course to be achieved'.*[47] However, this largely positive assessment must be read in the context of negligible reduction overall in the numbers of young people aged 16-24 considered NEET, begging the bigger question as to the real impact of the Strategy on the lives of young people who are NEET.

A significant weakness in the implementation of the Strategy has been the lack of disaggregated data collection and tracking of participants, both within and post programmes. This was acknowledged by the evaluators:

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[43] Northern Ireland Executive (2012) *Pathways to Success Strategy: Preventing exclusion and promoting participation of young people.* Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive.
[44] Ibid. Action Point 21
[45] Ibid. paragraph 5.5. page 34
[46] Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (2015). *Evaluation of Pathways to Success Northern Ireland Final Report.* London: CESI.
[47] Ibid p6

More generally there appears to be limitations to the extent to which projects were systematically collecting data at an individual level, on participants' characteristics, the forms of support they received and their destinations. [48]

Of the six main programmes and initiatives evaluated, data on overall numbers entering education, training or employment post programme was only available in relation to two of these, the Collaboration and Innovation Fund and the Community Family Support Programme. No data on participation, retention or progression rates for care leavers was available as this was not systematically collected. As such, despite anecdotal evidence that care leavers participated in and benefited from a number of programmes, including the Collaboration and Innovation Fund, there is no statistical data to demonstrate their participation or the extent to which they benefited.

Generating our Success – the Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training

DEL's youth training provision is a frequent progression option from employability programmes for young people in or leaving care.

The new strategy, 'Generating Our Success' published in June 2015, outlines the future direction for youth training in Northern Ireland and sets out new policy commitments and an accompanying implementation plan. It is intended to complement the new Strategy for Apprenticeships 'Securing our Success' published by the Department for Employment and Learning in June 2014. It is expected that the new system will be fully operational by Sept 2017, with certain elements being piloted in advance of that.

It is intended that the new system will deliver structured work based learning for all participants, including those already in employment, together with qualifications valued by employers through a new baccalaureate style award, equating to a min of 5 GCSEs Grades A*-C, including English and Maths.

Elements of the new training offer include dedicated pastoral support, a workplace buddy, financial support and flexible approaches for those with additional needs including young people with disabilities and young people in and leaving care. Other key aspects will include a Strategic Advisory Forum, new sectoral partnerships, a central service to connect young people with relevant employers and dedicated industry consultants.

A number of the policy commitments and programme elements outlined in the Strategy have particular relevance for young people with additional barriers to transitioning into mainstream training provision such as care leavers.

These include the proposed additional flexibility and support to be provided to young people with additional needs, the comprehensive pastoral support and importance attached to data collection, analysis and evaluation.[49] These elements all have the potential to address acknowledged weaknesses in the previous programme and as such improve outcomes being

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[48] Ibid p7
[49] Department for Employment and Learning (2015) *Generating Our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training*. Policy Commitments 8, 10 and 12 respectively.

achieved by care leavers from youth training and their progression into further education, training or employment options.

Further Education Means Success – the new Further Education Strategy for Northern Ireland

As with youth training, further education provision represents a common progression route from employability programmes into mainstream education, training or employment provision for care experienced young people.

 The new Further Education Strategy 'Further Education Means Success' was published in January 2016 and is intended as a 'refresh' of the 'Further Education Means Business' introduced in 2004. One aspect of the strategy's stated aim is to support social inclusion by providing those who have low or no qualifications, or who have barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and become economically active. The strategy contains little detail on the inclusion of young people who are NEET, beyond a broad policy commitment focused on increasing economic participation through engagement. No recognition is given to either the specific challenges faced by care leavers, or to the positive action taken by all further education colleges in Northern Ireland to support care leavers in further education under the auspices of the Frank Buttle Quality Mark.

In addition to the Pathways to Success and Further Education strategies there are a range of other policy developments and supporting strategies emanating from the Department for Employment and Learning which have relevance to supporting care leavers into education, employment and training opportunities. These include the Review of Careers, the Economic Inactivity Strategy and policy on use of zero hour contracts.

The refreshed Careers Strategy, whilst including some innovative elements such as work experience from an early age and the development of an e-porfolio, did not appear to draw on the lessons of what worked with NEET young people, who tend to require tailored, youth work led approaches. The Economic Inactivity Strategy, introduced in April 2015, and jointly led by DEL and DETI, has as its primary target groups lone parents and people with disabilities. While it doesn't include any specific actions targeted at care leavers, it does include proposals to appoint regional young people's advocates to inspire and support life choices among young people at risk of becoming NEET. It should be noted that insufficient detail was provided to enable assessment of their potential benefit for care leavers per se.

Finally, research evidence which demonstrates that the prevalence of zero hour contracts is higher among young people than other age groups, with 37% of those employed on such contracts aged between 16-24[50], gives real cause for concern in the context of what appears to be a 'regulation light' response planned to the issue by government.

Beyond the Department for Employment and Learning there are a number of other legislative or policy developments of relevance for young people leaving care and their journey into education, training and employment. These include the NI Executive's 10 year Children and Young People's Strategy, currently being renewed; The NI Executive's Draft 10 year Strategy

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[50] Pennycook, M., McCory, G. and Alakeson, V. (2013). *A Matter of Time: The rise in zero hour contracts.* London: The Resolution Foundation.

for Affordable and Integrated Childcare 2015-2020; OFMDFM's proposals for age discrimination legislation in respect of goods, services and facilities and the Children's Services Cooperation Act (NI) 2015.

CHAPTER 4: REVIEW OF GOOD PRACTICE MODELS

This chapter presents a review of models of good practice. Three different practice models or frameworks for intervention are explored for their relevance to supporting care leavers into mainstream education, training or employment. These are: the Buttle Quality Mark for Commitment to Care Leavers, the EU Model of Supported Employment and the Youth Work Model. A number of other models of good practice are also briefly reviewed through an examination of available toolkits, evaluations, reviews or reports documenting their practice. These are as follows: the T2A (Transition to Adulthood); the From Care2Work project; Scottish Transitions Forum; Austrian Job Coaching Project; Boys Town Australia and the Youth inc YEP programme. A synthesis of the learning on 'what works' is then drawn together and presented at the conclusion of this chapter.

Buttle Quality Mark

The Buttle Quality Mark, introduced in 2006, was awarded to further and higher education institutions across the UK in recognition of their commitment to care leavers. It provided a measurable tool for institutions to assess their provision for care leavers and develop their operational and strategic approach to supporting this cohort of students. In order to be awarded the Buttle Quality Mark universities and colleges had to offer a minimum level of support in line with criteria provided, and demonstrate their commitment to improving their provision. All six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland, along with three Higher Education institutions, were awarded the Buttle Quality Mark.

The Buttle Quality Mark project formally ended in July 2015 as Buttle UK reached the view that with a considerable pool of good practice in existence across further and higher education institutions the emphasis needed to be on embedding that good practice into mainstream provision.

A good practice learning guide, published in August 2015, provided many examples, including some from the Further Education sector in Northern Ireland, of good practice in meeting the needs of young people in or leaving care within further education colleges. A number of elements were identified as making a positive difference to the experience of this group of young people in further education. These included: pastoral support, transitional support, partnership working, youth work approaches and monitoring of outcomes and impact.

The provision of transitions support was cited by a number of colleges as a way of providing effective support for students during the application, entry and induction phase. Examples of what different colleges do include summer programmes, early interviews and building relationships with external agencies. Sheffield College reported that they '*offer transition support before the course starts to help students and their carers feel comfortable with the institution e.g. visits to the college, meeting the staff from support services and academic tutors pre-course*'. [51]

Others highlighted the importance of developing partnerships on the ground:

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[51] National Voice of Lifelong Learning (2015). *Supporting care leavers in further education: A guide to good practice in colleges achieving the Buttle UK Quality Mark*. Leicester: NIACE. p 19

Belfast Metropolitan College developed a pro-active working relationship with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to support their students from a care background. The Trust and college have regular meetings to review the educational pathways of young people from a care background.[52]

To properly support looked after and care leaver students, East Kent College has excellent relationships with external agencies and it is by working together that they can arrive at solutions to help the young person most effectively.[53]

In general Further Education colleges were extremely positive about the value of having a Quality Mark, with most emphasis placed on how it helped colleges deliver their commitment to young people in and leaving care in a practical way:

The Further Education and other staff were clear that supporting care leavers within their institutions is fundamentally a moral duty. It is integral to their equality and diversity policies and practice, their commitment to supporting 'vulnerable groups' and creating an inclusive learning environment which is accessible to all. [54]

Model of supported Employment

Supported employment is a method of intervention which assists individuals with a disability or disadvantage to access paid jobs in the open labour market. Developed initially by the European Union of Supported Employment to support people with disabilities in the workplace, the model has been adapted to include people in disadvantaged situations.[55] It is underpinned by concepts of empowerment, social inclusion, dignity and respect for individuals, which all contribute to the ensuring that the needs of the individual are paramount regarding all decisions in relation to the Supported Employment process.

The previous approach of 'train then place' was found to have significant weaknesses and contributed little to the integration of people with a learning disability into the workplace. Fundamentally, it neglected to pay attention to the company culture and the natural supports available on the work site from co-workers. That early model has been replaced with a 'place-train-maintain' strategy which recognises that effective job support comprises of more than simple visits to the job site but includes instrumental, informative, emotional and feedback support. The core element of the Supported Employment model as it is now operated is to provide and facilitate all the different supports on and off the job to help the employee to become and remain a valued worker.

The development of regular contact and a trustworthy personal relationship between the Employment Support Worker and the employee, co-workers and the employer has been identified by the EUSE as the basis for successful support. That worker must be able to react quickly in case of difficulties and should be able to support all involved parties to solve problems as early as possible.

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[52] Ibid p24
[53] Ibid p26
[54] Ibid p5
[55] European Union of Supported Employment (2010). *Toolkit for Supported Employment and Toolkit for Diversity.* Dundee: EUSE.

In Northern Ireland, the model of Supported Employment is promoted by an umbrella body, the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment. The NIUSE provides training and support to organisations on the model, which has been adopted by a number of organisations, including Include Youth, who work with people who are disadvantaged.

Youth Work Model

The key purpose of youth work as defined by the UK National Occupational Standards for Youth Work is as follows:

To enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential. [56]

The generic youth work model is underpinned by a set of values including participation and active agency, equality, diversity and inclusion, partnership and personal, social and political development.

Youth work has historically played a key role in engaging marginalised and disadvantaged young people. In more recent times it has demonstrated its effectiveness in supporting young people who are not in education, employment or training to access, participate in and obtain outcomes from such opportunities.

A paper commissioned by Youthnet, the voluntary youth network for Northern Ireland, has demonstrated how youth work outcomes align well with employability requirements identified by employers.[57] The paper also provides quantitative and qualitative evidence collected through monitoring and evaluation of programmes to illustrate the performance of youth work programmes on key areas such as retention, achievement of qualifications and progression into education and training. The report found that between 60-80% of young people on employability programmes adopted a youth work model progress into education, training or employment.

The periods of transition from employability programmes and of settling into a mainstream education, training or employment placement are recognised as being particularly challenging for many young people:

F*or young people who are core NEET and often leading chaotic lifestyles, maintaining a consistent positive commitment to training and employment does not happen immediately. Young people often need to progress through a number of stages in their learning and personal development, which for some can include one or more relapses. Learning from set backs and recovering help to build resilience and strengthen progress overall, however the*

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[56] Lifelong Learning UK (2010) UK National Occupational Standards for Youth Work
[57] Youthnet (2013) *The difference youth work makes to young people who are described as NEET*. Belfast: Youth Council Northern Ireland.

reality for many young people is that they still require additional support post programme and initiatives need to be ready to maintain an open door policy. [58]

The role of the youth worker in supporting these young people to transition successfully is viewed as critical, with a number of different aspects involved, including:

- Engage the young person in a programme of structured activity until the new placement begins
- Help the young person maintain their placement and become self sufficient by offering practical support depending on assessed need e.g. phone calls, texting, accompanying the young person to meetings
- Help the young person to identify support, this might be in the workplace, training organisation or in the community
- Advocate on behalf of the young person with a relevant agency or person e.g. benefit arrangements, working with social services, supported accommodation providers

Identified as being central to all of this was the importance of building relationships, with the young person and with other key people such as social workers, residential workers or placement providers:

The relationships which are central to the success of the approach remain after a programme has completed. Youth workers may regularly visit the young person at their education, training or employment placement to ensure a good relationship with the provider is maintained. Similarly they may continue to ensure links with other key people are maintained such as a social worker, residential worker, foster carer or significant other.[59]

BEST PRACTICE MODELS OF PROVISION
In addition to the three programmes examined above, a briefer, desktop review of the following programmes and initiatives was also undertaken: T2A (Transition to Adulthood); From Care2Work project; Scottish Transitions Forum; Austrian Job Coaching Project; Boys Town Australia and the Youth inc YEP programme.

This resulted in the identification of the following criteria as being central to those programmes supporting disadvantaged young people to make and sustain transitions into mainstream education, training or employment:

- Support should be provided before, during and after the point of transition
- Programmes should always keep 'the door open' for a young person to come back to receive support
- Young people require a holistic approach – the young person's emotional well-being should be prioritised within any provision.
- There is a need to recognise and respond to the individuality of each young person – support should be tailored

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[58] Ibid p37
[59] Ibid p 38

- There is a need to recognise and respond to the differing experiences and challenges facing young people beyond education, training or employment such as personal and family circumstances, accommodation, finances and mental health
- There is a need for flexibility around the duration for which transitional support is provided
- A mentor/support worker can play a key role in ensuring that the young person makes a successful transition
- The importance of building a good relationship between the mentor/support worker and the young person is central to the effectiveness of the service
- The role of the mentor/support worker is not to do it for the young person but to support and guide them to do it for themselves
- The mentor/support worker can play a valuable advocacy role on behalf of the young person where required
- A network of support is required, including those natural supports within the young person's environment
- Support should be co-ordinated across the various services and interventions with the young person as the central focus
- Broader legislation and policy frameworks which impacts on the young person should be coordinated

CHAPTER 5: INCLUDE YOUTH'S TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT PILOT PROJECT

Include Youth has delivered employability programmes for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, in particular care leavers, for over three decades. The professional expertise and reflection developed as a result of that work has informed and shaped the development of the Transitional Support pilot project in 2012.

The Give and Take scheme, Include Youth's flagship programme, works predominantly (but not exclusively) with young people from a care background aged 16 to 21 years. It is a pre-vocational programme, utilising a youth work model, with the aim of improving the employability and increasing the self-esteem and confidence of vulnerable young people who are not ready to participate in mainstream training and education. It includes a number of elements including personal development, essential skills, employability, work experience, mentoring and transitional support.

The programme is delivered in 6 offices across Northern Ireland (Belfast, Ballymena, Armagh, Derry, Omagh and Newtownards) with each office aligned to one of the five Health and Social Care Trusts.
Young people are referred to Give and Take by Social Workers from each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts and specifically from within the 16+ Transitional Teams within each Trust.

In 2015 the Give and Take scheme expanded to include additional strands working with a broader range of young people, including young people at risk of child sexual exploitation. The Transitional Support service, piloted between 2012 and 2014, was also mainstreamed within the service.

In addition to the Give and Take Scheme Include Youth provides a range of other programmes including the Aiming Higher project in partnership with Business in the Community, its New Leaf project, a United Youth pilot programme 'Strive', and employability services for care leavers on behalf of two Health and Social Care Trusts.

Progression into Education, Employment or Training

In 2011 Include Youth commissioned Locus consultancy firm to undertake an evaluation of its employability services, including the Transitional Support pilot project. This evaluation was completed in December 2014.

The Locus evaluation of the core Give and Take programme found that over a three year period an average of 65% of participants achieved a positive move on, defined as a move into education, training, employment or volunteering. When analysed annually figures show that there has been increasing performance with 58% achieved in 2011/12, 70% in 2012/13 and 70% in 2013/14. Approximately half of the young people over that three year period who progressed from the programme moved into training, 28% into employment and the remainder, 22% into education.

Rationale for the Transitional Support Pilot Project

Historically Include Youth did not formally monitor the sustainability of move on destinations for young people who moved into education, training or employment, mainly due to a lack of resources to undertake such tracking. However, the nature of the relationships developed between staff and young people was such that anecdotally staff were aware of young people who were progressing well and those that were not. Young people who had completed the programme were literally knocking on Include Youth's door, seeking support as they struggled in the education, training or employment placement. A number of young people who presented had left their education, training or employment placement. Consistently these young people identified a lack of support as a key factor in undermining their ability to maintain their placements.

In early 2013 Include Youth decided to undertake a tracking exercise of young people who had completed the Give and Take scheme during the period 1 April 2010 to 31 December 2012 to identify if they were still in their move on placement to mainstream education and training and / or their supported training placement. The tracking exercise identified a total of 112 young people who had left the Give and Take scheme more than six months and who had moved into employment, training or education. Research showed that approximately one third of these young people did not sustain their placement beyond six months, with a slightly higher percentage maintaining supported placements as opposed to mainstream placements.

Table 1 Give and Take Leavers Tracking Study April 2010 – December 2012

Destination Numbers		Sustained placement after 6 months
Total Young people leaving Give and Take for education, training or employment	112 (100%)	68 (61%)
Moved to mainstream education / training or employment	82 (73%)	49 (60%)
Moved to a supported training programme15	30 (27%)	19 (63%)

The research indicated that;

Of the 82 who moved into mainstream education, training or employment placements 60% (49) maintained their placements for at least 6 months. The

destination for 2 young people was unknown and for the 38% (31) young people who didn't maintain their placements, all placements broke down within the first six months. The vast majority (87% or 27) broke down within the first three months of leaving Give and Take.

Of the 30 who moved into a supported training scheme 63% maintained their placement for 6 months, with one third disengaging before six months.

Consultation by Include Youth staff with former Give and Take participants suggested that there were a wide range of reasons behind the placements breaking down including anxiety and nervousness about starting somewhere new, mental health issues, foster placement changes, moving out of a residential setting, pregnancy, bullying, lack of motivation, engaging in offending behaviour or ending up in custody, dealing with trauma and being in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. There were also practical problems such as organising transport, applying for college places and funding and understanding timetables.

Give and Take staff were concerned about the failure of this cohort of approximately one third of leavers to stay engaged. Despite the investment with the young people for approximately one year on the Give and Take scheme, it was evident that more needed to be done to ensure a sustained placement when they leave the programme. As the majority of young people on Give and Take are from a care background, unlike their peers from a non-care background, they generally do not have the emotional and practical support of family.

Give and Take staff therefore consulted with young people on the Give and Take scheme to ascertain their views on the transition process and any concerns or apprehensions they might have about leaving Give and Take. Feedback showed that young people were concerned about moving from the supportive environment of Give and Take and worried that they may lose motivation without the one to one support, push and encouragement of Give and Take staff. One young person consulted as part of the evaluation process articulated her concerns thus: "*if things get hard I need someone to say keep going and pick me up*".

Young people were also anxious about who they could turn to for advice and support with any difficulties experienced in their placement. Those consulted advised that ideally they would like a member of the Give and Take staff team to stay in touch with them in a support role for at least six months after they leave the programme.

Through a process of group reflection on the findings from the baseline tracking exercise and consultations with young people and staff, and informed by its knowledge of both the Logic model and the Theory of Change, Include Youth mapped out the following long term goal for care leavers moving from supported employability provision into mainstream education, training and employment provision: that young people sustain their mainstream placements on an equal par with young people who are not from a care

background. The following, accompanying measurable outcome was identified:

That 80% of young people (or an increase of 20% of young people in or leaving care) successfully maintain their post vocational mainstream education, training or employment placement for a period of not less than 6 months.

Based on its consultation with young people and staff, Include Youth's hypothesis was that the provision of transitional support would support and enable young people to more effective sustain their mainstream placement. The development of a pilot Transitional Support project was identified as a way of testing that hypothesis. Through ongoing monitoring and both quantitative and qualitative evaluation Include Youth was subsequently able to test its theory of change.

The Transitional Support Pilot Project

Include Youth secured additional ESF funding in 2013 to introduce a two year pilot project focused upon transitional support for young people on Give and Take. The project operated from July 2013 to June 2015 and employed two Transition Support workers, covering the five Health and Social Care Trust areas. One worker covered the Western and Southern region and the other the Northern, Belfast and South Eastern region. In 2015, following a very positive evaluation of the Transitional Support pilot project by Locus, the service was mainstreamed into the Give and Take service funded through the European Social Fund programme 2014-2020.

Aims of the Transition Support service

These are as follows:

1) Support the move towards transition for young people while they are participating on the Give and Take scheme
2) Facilitate the transition process for young people as they make the move from Give and Take
3) Support the transition of young people in their move on to access and be aware of the natural supports available to them.
4) Support young people who have left Give and Take for mainstream education or training or employment to address their complex needs.

Overview of the Transitions Support service

The Transitional Support service is needs let and engagement by the young people is on a voluntary basis. Transition Support is provided for 6 months prior to a young person leaving the Give & Take scheme and for up to 12 months after leaving Give and Take. A decision was made not to provide transitional support to those young people moving into a supported placement as by the very nature of those placements there was already a person centred support resource in place which Transition would have been duplicating.

Transition Support Workers are introduced to Give and Take participants during their induction process. This ensures that from the outset young people are advised that their time on Give and Take is part of a journey / pathway towards education, training or employment. Transition Support Workers are integrated into the staff teams in each office and they engage in group based activities to help build relationships with young people during their time on the programme. Six months before a young person is due to leave Transition Support staff will work on a one to one with young people to develop a Transition Plan and they will work with them and support them towards this transition. This will include;

- Compiling a personal profile of the young person identifying qualifications, skills, hobbies, interests, employment preferences, work experience, further training / education preferences, benefits, health
- Identifying move on options and establishing goals to be achieved
- Assisting with course / job application forms
- Taking young people to meetings / interviews
- Preparing young people for meetings / interviews
- Assisting with grant applications
- Ensuring that they are prepared for their transition in respect to transport, resources needed
- Confirming what support they feel they would need when they leave Give and Take

This one to one engagement also enables staff to identify young people they believe may be at risk of not sustaining their placement. Such young people are likely to include those who;
- Need continued motivation and support to stay engaged
- Need support in their learning
- Have difficulties with structure and routines
- Have personal issues and needs e.g. mental health, addiction

When such young people leave Give and Take, Transition Support Workers will continue to provide one to one support while they are in their placement. The nature of this support includes;

- Supporting young people if they are experiencing difficulties in their home or personal life or in their placement
- Advocating on behalf of young people with employers / colleges / training providers, e.g. if there has been attendance, time keeping or behaviour issues
- Supporting young people to establish and maintain the regular routines required for successful education, training or employment engagement e.g. by providing a daily wake up call

A monthly transition review is updated in each Transition Plan which records Transition Support Worker engagement with young people and details the following:

- What has gone well for the young person, relative to the goals they set for themselves
- Confidence and motivation levels of the young person
- Relationships they have established with others in their placement
- Their punctuality, attendance and reliability
- Goals for the next period

In addition, Transition Support workers complete evaluation forms with young people, at six months and on completion of Transition Support.

Transitional Support in Practice

While there is no such thing as a 'typical day', given that the service is needs led, the following descriptions by Transitional Support workers of what an average day might involve gives some insight into how the service works in practice:

Transitional Support Worker Stuart

"This is a 'typical' day. You're starting your phone calls about 7.15/7.30am through to 8.30am to make sure that all the young people are up and that they have access to transport.

Come into the office and check emails to make sure you know the issues, if you have contact with an external Training for Success officer, or a Further Education college support officer…just to make sure everything is ok, that the young person is there and that there are no issues.

During the day you'll have meetings either internally with Include Youth or externally, could be a meeting if the placement isn't going to plan. You'll be meeting the young person at lunchtime just making sure they remember why it is they are doing what they are doing, just making sure they are staying on top of things.

A lot of the afternoon could be spent driving because it's such a wide area we are spread across. Come back to the office and do a lot of administration, we keep daily records of each young person, contact sheets for the day, what has occurred that day, what their attendance was like etc.

Evening time you carry on with phone calls just checking in with the young person to see how their day was, what their plans are for the morning.'

Transitional Support Worker Jenny

"*For example, yesterday I went and collected a young person at her father's house and took her to meet her social worker. We were actually meeting her to ask for funding for a part time course. Following that I had to take her in to Jobs and Benefits to get her a supporting letter for the course.*
Then I met another young person who I'm actually finishing working with…so I was doing a final evaluation with him and also helping him source employment.

Then I took a young person down to Magherafelt tech, took her down to an interview/information session for a full time hairdressing course.

My days very much depend on the young person. Like today I was supposed to meet a young person and their mentor, and also take another young person to tech. However it turned out that the young person is going to tech tomorrow instead and the other young person was somewhere else today. I had to totally change my day"

A number of key aspects of the role are clearly discernible from these descriptions, including the fact that the service is needs led and young person centred, the degree of flexibility required, the variety of roles involved and the importance of partnership working.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This chapter reports on the primary research, presenting both the quantitative findings in relation to project outcomes as well as the findings from interviews with a range of stakeholders including young people, practitioners, mainstream education and training providers and Health and Social Care Trust personnel.

Outcomes for Give and Take Transitional Support Beneficiaries

As the Locus evaluation only analysed data for one year of the two year Transitional Support pilot project, Include Youth undertook further analysis of data to enable assessment of outcomes for the full period of the pilot project, from July 2013 – June 2015.

During that period 46 young people who had completed the Give and Take scheme and had moved into mainstream education, employment or training engaged with the Transitional Support service. One young person did not take up their education, training or employment offer and therefore did not avail of the Transitional Support service.

In order to enable a comparison with the baseline scoping study, data was collected and analysed for young people's education, training or employment engagement at the three and six month points post Give and Take programme.

Table 2: Retention rates in mainstream education, training and employment placement at three months and six months post Give and Take.

Intervention	Time frame	Numbers	3 months post Give & Take	6 months post Give & Take
Scoping study / no transitional support	April 2010 – December 2012	82	53 (65%)	49 (60%)
Transitional Support Pilot Project	July 2013-June 2015	45	45 (100%)	39 (87%)

The retention figures for July 2013 – June 2015 period, benchmarked against the original scoping study, demonstrate the extremely positive impact the provision of transitional support has had. From a baseline retention rate of 65% at the 3 month post programme mark, the rate increased by 35% up to 100% retention when transitional support was provided. A significant increase in retention rates at the 6 month post programme mark, from 60% to 87% was also identified. This percentage increase exceeded the target of a 20% increase set for the Transitional Support pilot project.

Data was recorded in relation to those six young people who didn't sustain their mainstream placement through to the six month stage. The 'roll-on roll-off' nature of the Give and Take programme, and by extension the Transitional Support service, presented some challenges with regard to differing start and finish points for individual young people. Two young people had not reached the six month mark post Give and Take and therefore could not be counted. Of the other four, one left their placement due to becoming pregnant, one received a custodial sentence and tracking information was not available on the final two.

The limitations of this data analysis should be acknowledged. The time frames and numbers involved differed from the scoping study to the Transitional Support pilot project. The initial baseline study was carried out to establish a baseline and, as this data had not traditionally been collected, it relied on Include Youth staff tracking back with individual young people as far as was possible. The time frame for the Transitional Support tracking exercise was set by the parameters of the pilot project itself. The numbers tracked during the pilot project were much smaller than the baseline study. However, as the 45 young people were individually tracked through direct contact with their Transitional Support worker, as opposed to any electronic system such as texting, emailing etc, the accuracy of the data can be relied upon.

Data was not analysed beyond the six month post programme stage for reasons outlined above. However, indications from Transitional Support staff indicate that after nine months, while retention rates were estimated to be around 70%, they did indicate a decrease from the six month stage. It would be important therefore for any further research to formally track beyond six months, through to nine and twelve months. This would be in line with the post programme tracking requirements that the Department for Employment and Learning has built into its new ESF and United Youth programmes.

Qualitative research findings

The following section of this report presents the findings from the face to face interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders including young people, practitioners and mainstream education, training or employment providers.

The findings are organised under the following themes:

- Value of the Transitional Support Service
- Addressing wider barriers
- Primacy of the youth work model
- Centrality of relationship building
- Importance of an embedded service
- Necessity for partnership working
- Requirement for clarity around roles

Quotations from interviews and focus groups conducted are included where relevant to illustrate key themes. All identifying information in relation to young people has been altered to protect their identities. Mainstream providers or organisations are identified only in terms of the sector they work in i.e. Health and Social Care Trust, Further Education, Training for Success provider or employers.

1) Value of the Transitional Support Service

All interviewees spoke very positively about their experience of the Transitional Support Service. Young people referred to the practical help and advice, as well as the emotional support they received:

"He *helped me finish my Level 3 in youth work. Most of the work was homework and I struggled with it but Stuart came and helped explain things to me. He helped me work out what (academic) references were*" Young Person

"*Jenny helped motivate me and encourage me to keep going*" Young person

Many of the young people interviewed indicated that they struggled with the practical side of their placements, for example - time keeping, organising their study schedule, form filling and job applications. They pointed out that the timing of interventions by their Transitional Support worker was key.

Supporting young people to address day to day problems before they became bigger issues was seen as very helpful by the young people. As one young woman described it:

"*when things started to get lackadaisical she helped me back into the way of things*"

The emotional support provided by Transitional Support Workers was predicated on a good relationship having been established between the young person and the worker, a theme that is explored further below.

Social workers saw the Transitional Support as representing a 'significant support' that makes a 'huge difference' to what's already being provided to support care leavers to move into mainstream education, training and employment.

"in the broadest sense of the term (it is) dispelling the notion that for these young people that going on to further education is impossible, so for me the Transitional Support worker makes it possible because he is doing it step by step with young people and walking them through it, they are not being left to go to big establishments on their own that they normally avoid"

The combination of practical and emotional support provided by the service was seen by social workers as its main strength:

"I *could not speak highly enough of the Transitional Support service and the work the TS worker has put in. I have had three young people that have moved on and they have all experienced different things. Once has been around the emotional support, finding it difficult to connect with people because they don't share the same experience as she had, for others it is financial issues, their grant didn't come through in time and he chased that up…something as simple as that would stop a young person from going"*.

Placement providers were also very positive about the value of the Transitional Support Service. For them, it was the additional support provided ,and the ability of the Transitional Support service to respond in a timely manner to crises when they arose which made it a valuable service for them.

"*Jenny was brilliant. TJ is a great wee lad but he just wouldn't show up someday, then the tech would be ringing me asking me where he was. Nobody could keep an eye on what days he was where so Jenny phoned every Friday. Just to see if he had been in that week, that was helpful because there would have been no point in ringing me in a months' time or whatever. That kind of kept him on his toes*" Work Placement Provider

Providers also appreciated the way in which the support was provided, in that it didn't interfere or add to their workloads in any measurable way:

"*It was great the way she rang, just a quick phone call for a couple of minutes and it would be done*" Work Placement Provider

Providers reported that developing links with the Transitional Support service prior to a young person joining their programme was extremely beneficial. They noted that traditionally they would not be made aware of the background and challenges faced by young people joining their programme. The Transitional Support Worker, with the consent of the young person, was able

to make the placement provider aware of any relevant issues, thereby allowing them to take cognisance of those issues.

A number of providers reported that without the support of the Transitional Support worker, who adopted an advocacy role on behalf of the young person, young people would have been suspended from their programme, some due to unauthorised absences and some due to the influence of drugs or alcohol on their engagement. One provider reported that if a young person took 15 casual sick days in a three month period then they would be suspended for 8 weeks. The provider reported that the intervention of the Transitional Support worker *"helped to avoid this scenario"*. Another reported that through communication with the Transitional Support worker the targets for one young person were "*scaled back*" to take account of their personal circumstances.

While some providers noted that their own organisations provided mentors for young people, they pointed to their large caseloads, some of up to 90 young people, and the impossibility of providing focused support for any one individual in that context. However, one training provider felt that their own mentoring service was adequate to meet the needs of young people on their programmes:

"*we have our own in house mentors to help deal with those barriers. They will address anything that has been signposted to them. We also deal with the likes of FASA or the likes of those services*" Training Provider

2) Addressing Wider Barriers

Young people, placement providers and Include Youth staff all raised the wider barriers faced by young people leaving care, and the impact of those issues on their engagement in education, training and employment. Issues raised included access to benefits, accommodation, criminal records, stigma around being a care leaver, unrecognised learning difficulties and childcare issues.

Include Youth staff highlighted young people's fears that their benefits might be jeopardised as a result of moving onto a mainstream placement, and that they might be financially worse off. For young people leaving care, who very often do not have the safety net provided by a family to fall back on, and who are living independently by 18 years of age, this was a major concern:

"*the benefits system, this is the big thing at the moment*" (Include Youth staff)

"*finance is a huge barrier…young people from care just don't have that safety net. If they run out of money there is no mum or dad to help them out. It could be the difference of having a bed at the end of a day or having a meal or not*" Include Youth staff

Transitional Support workers indicated that in these circumstances they would signpost the young people to the relevant organisations for information and advice

" *a lot of them are scared that it (moving on to a mainstream placement) might affect their benefits cause a lot of them are living independently, so it's maybe about getting advice from Citizens Advice*" Transitional Support worker

Having decent, stable accommodation is critically important for young care leavers. The reality however is often that the transition from a children' home or foster family into some form of independent living arrangement can be fraught with difficulty and can be extremely difficult and unsettling for a young person. Issues around accommodation were highlighted by Transitional Support workers:

"*when they turn 18 they lose their accommodation, that's a big barrier. Some of them do go to supported accommodation, others go on waiting lists. Sometimes they have to go back to the parents with whom they had the original problem in the first place. That destabilises the young person. Accommodation is always the biggest thing; it's the thing I look for most. They are more likely to have a successful placement if they are in stable accommodation*" Transitional Support worker

The issue of criminal records was raised by one young person, who indicated that she had been unaware of the importance of complying with the disclosure requirement on application forms. This was in part due to the minor nature of the convictions and the fact that they hadn't come up previously in Access NI checks:

"*I have two convictions, for minor things. They have never come up on my record but they did when I had an enhanced check. When applying for uni I maybe wouldn't have declared it but Stuart explained that I had to and it would all turn out ok. If he hadn't explained that I wouldn't have declared it*" Young person

Another young person talked about the disruptive effect that receiving a custodial sentence had on his progression through education and training:

"I *worked in two different placements. I would have finished these but I got sent to jail. I started a training programme but got put outta there after a week for the way I was with my ADHD and all. I started Give & Take a couple of months after that and then I got sent to jail*". Young person

Both young people and Include Youth staff commented on the stigma some young people feel as a result of their care experience, and how this can impact on their transition into mainstream placements:

"*I guess being in care is a barrier. There is no positive influence*" young person

"The *two or three months leading up to transition they may feel 'I'm a square peg in a round hole here, I'm a 'care kid' It's working on that to get them outta that mindset. Then two or three months later they realise I should be here, when they realise that it's only them that is stopping themselves*" Transitional Support Worker

Young people in and leaving care have a higher incidence of disability, including learning disability. Unrecognised learning needs were identified as presenting barriers for care leavers moving into a more formal learning environment such as a Further Education college. One Further Education provider gave that following example:

"*there was a young person who started off well but then started to not attend class. There were classes that he would avoid, but that was about working together with the tech, himself and his PA. We actually discovered it was because he felt that he wasn't fit for the work that was expected of him. So that was resolved by getting extra supports for him, work outside the class, making tutors aware of what was going on*" (FE provider)

Finally, the challenges presented for care leavers who are young parents and making the transition into more full time mainstream placements was noted by the Transitional Support workers:

"*one young person struggled to settle because of an ongoing battle with trying to see her son. Trying to work out what days she could see him, while juggling classes and a work placement*" (Transitional Support Worker)

All of the barriers identified by young people and Include Youth staff were also highlighted by social workers, along with one or two additional ones. The impact of early childhood trauma on the young people's emotional well being and resilience was identified as a major underlying reason for young people's difficulties in engaging consistently with education and training. This inconsistency of engagement and application was identified as a key explanation for educational underachievement rather than any underlying learning difficulties or lack of ability.

Connected to young people's experience of past trauma and lack of a stable, nurturing family environment were issues of low self esteem and self worth. These were viewed as significant factors in young people's readiness and ability to engage in education and training, with the fear of failure preventing young people from exposing themselves to new challenges.

Social workers also identified a specific issue for young care leavers living in rural areas wishing to access education, training or jobs – that of lack of an adequate public transport system. They pointed to poor transport links between big towns, with bus services often being limited to two a day. While social workers try to help young people overcome such transport issues by providing travel warrants and other practical assistance, this cannot overcome the poor transport infrastructure.

Social workers reflected on the wider context to young people's journeys within education and training, underscoring the reality of vulnerable young people's lives

"*some of these young people might never get to the mainstream stage, for social workers the biggest priority might be keeping them alive*" (Social Work Team Manager 16 plus service)

Include Youth staff in turn drew attention to the importance of mainstream education, training or employment providers understanding that wider context:

"*they (placement providers) have to understand that there is something behind the attendance and behaviour issues. They need someone to get in underneath and find out*" (Include Youth staff)

3) Primacy of the youth work model

Many of the essential elements that underpin a youth work approach to engaging with young people were identified as being central to the effectiveness of the Transitional Support service. These included a needs led, flexible, individually tailored approach and young people's active participation and empowerment.

Transitional Support workers illustrated how each young person had different needs and how their job was to respond to that need:

"*sometimes they just need a wee bit of support and they are flying, but they are all different*" (Transitional Support worker)

"I *would say that the young people that requested phone calls needed them. There was one young person who I was giving phone calls to for about 8 months. I was trying to reduce them because I don't want to create that dependency, but for this young person nothing else worked. So I ended up just giving him the phone calls. If a young person feels that strongly about it of course I will do that*" (Transitional Support worker)

The fact that the Transitional Support service, in keeping with its youth work ethos, is needs led and young person centred, was seen as a hugely positive factor by social workers:

"*If the young person has had a bad day/bad night then can come in and blast off to some of the staff and then focus on their studies afterwards, whereas maybe young people in other training providers don't have that safe sounding board to be able to do that, and then focus on their studies*" (Social Work Team Manager 16 plus service)

The flexibility offered by the Transitional Support service was also considered by social workers as being one of the reasons for its effectiveness:

"*If somebody is half an hour late, they are spoken to but it's not the be all and end all, it's about looking for a solution focused approach with the young*

people, not saying you were an hour late and we can't have that, it's let's look at how we can sort this out, set your alarm a half an hour earlier, a wake up call, that's the kind of thing that makes the difference" (Social Work Team Manager 16 plus service)

Social workers noted that bigger and mainstream organisations, often lack the flexibility, and relationship based approach inherent to the youth work model of working.

Staff working with young people were clear that the goals in relation to education, training or employment were very much set by the young person themselves and were benchmarked against their own personal journey as opposed to external targets.

"*Even if the young person isn't set for tech or for finishing tech, it is the individual achievement of that young person that counts. For one person it could be a tech qualification but for another it could be a short term course or even if they stay in tech for two or three months. Yes it is great that they get qualifications but sometimes it's just the learning that is important*" (Transitional Support Worker)

The principle of empowerment of young people was a recurring theme in all of the interviews. Young people described how this principle was translated into practice:

"*I had an idea in my head what I wanted to do but he kind of helped me do it. It wasn't down to Stuart, it was kinda my choice. He just kinda encouraged my choice I don't know how to put it…he kinda assisted*" (Young person)

" *A transitional worker …they don't tell you 'right, this is what you are doing', instead they tell you 'ok, this is where you are at, this is what you could do and this is how far you have to go'; it's more about working with you on a journey rather than being told 'you have to do this'*" (Young person)

This view was echoed by staff who reflected on their practice as follows:

"*I think that's the big difference, that we are doing things with the young people for the young people. So the young people are fully engaged with all things as they move forward*" (Transitional Support Worker)

"*Transitional Support lets the young people realise the skills that they have learnt. They realise 'yes, I'm up for this, I can't believe how far I've come'* (Transitional Support Worker)

A key element of empowerment is building the capacity of young people so they can assume increased agency in respect of decision making and day to day management in their own lives. Reflecting on the rationale for the Transitional Support service, Include Youth's Employability Services Manager acknowledged the weakness of the model of provision prior to Transitional Support being put in place:

"At times it didn't work for the young person because we were taking them up to the top of the cliff, helping them in every way we could then expecting them to jump off the cliff and survive. We needed to make the process more gradual and that's the gap that the transitions service fills" (Include Youth Employability Services Manager)

Transitional Support workers highlighted the importance of phased withdrawal of support alongside the building up of natural supports in the young person's environment:

"support gets tapered off; they have that support but just not at the same level" (Transitional Support Worker)

"The 3 month intensive supports will maybe mean (contact) everyday for a week and then reducing this to once a week. The morning calls are essential though fro 3 months. The over the next few months you start reducing them as well. You want to see an improvement" (Transitional Support Worker)

"The young people are aware that they will only have a certain amount of time working with us. There is an expectation on them that they will learn to rely on these other sources" (Transitional Support worker)

Young people interviewed were all very clear that the Transitional Support service was a time limited service, and they displayed a clear understanding of why that was the case. When one young woman was asked what would happen once the service ended her reply was:

"I don't like to think about that. I am worried about not having someone there but he has taught me stuff. I think I could do more stuff now on my own. It's just the support I'll miss, but I think its better that it's phased out" (Young person)

Another young person referred to the gradual, phased nature of support levels being stepped down:

"We had weekly phone calls and we would have met up quite often but then she backed off and I didn't see her as much. It didn't happen too quick or anything. I still keep in contact with her, just a wee odd text to see how I am getting on. I appreciate that" (Young person)

Young people also alluded to the fact that they a say over the level of support they received, underscoring the fact that the service is needs led:

"Support has dropped off. I found it fine, there were times I would text him and say that I was doing fine and that I didn't need his help as much" (Young person)

"*It was completely different in my case because I'm so independent. If there was somebody who needed it then it would be perfect, but for me, well I just didn't need it. It was just good to know that if something did come up that I needed help with that I could phone him, but it never did*" (Young person)

4) Centrality of Relationship Building

At the heart of good youth work practice is relationship building between the worker and the young person. The centrality of relationship building was commented on by interviewees from all stakeholder groups.

The Transitional Support workers explained how they had prioritised relationship building from the offset of the project:

"*It was definitely important, that relationship building. Myself and the other worker sat down last July and decided what we would want the service to look like in a year's time. One of the things was that we would have strong relationships with the young people coming through each office, not just the young people in transition*" (Transitional Support Worker)

One young person described how staff went about building a good working relationship with them, through spending time with them in a relaxed environment:

"*She used to come down and take me out to lunch and that's always a bonus, like she did that on top of all the work stuff. Jenny is just really down to earth. Even her company was good. It was much easier to talk to her then if I had a problem*" (Young person)

For young people trust was a crucial element of that relationship, with a number of them noting that having trust with their Transitional Support worker was the foundation for engagement:

"I *always trust what he says. I think that's very important. He will tell me if I did something wrong like I was going to apply for a job that was way beyond me and he told me that. He explained it in a really nice way*" (Young person)

Placement providers also commented on the benefits of a good working relationship between the Transitional Support worker and the young person and how it assisted with maintaining their placement:

"*Their relationship was good. Like TJ would have known she was fair and decent to him. He would never have got frustrated or anything. She would just have given it to him straight, just talked to him in his own language. No point in talking to him in any fancy talk*" (Work placement provider)

Include Youth staff also identified the importance of the working relationship being sufficiently robust to allow for staff to constructively challenge young people when required:

"*Sometimes you just need to be that parent figure. They just need a person to talk things over with, they just need a bit of advice or they need someone to keep them calm. That's what they get with a Transitional Support worker and that relationship has been built. If they need Stuart or Jenny to challenge them, tell them they might be wrong, the young person will take it because they have built that relationship*" (Include Youth Youth Worker)

5) Importance of an embedded service

An issue highlighted by young people, Include Youth staff and social workers alike was the way in which the Transitional Support service was delivered. All agreed that having the service integrated within the young people's existing placement was very positive, and made the transition process less of a step into the unknown for them.

Include Youth staff noted that the Give & Take scheme might often be the first programme with which a young person has engaged and also felt a sense of belonging:

"*Leaving Give& Take is a big step for them, it's maybe the first time that they have fully engaged, it's the first time they have completed qualifications. So they say that having somebody within Give & Take seems safer somehow. It feels like I am helping prepare them before they even move on, it sort of helps them visualise how its is going to be*" (Transitional Support worker)

Once again, the importance of relationship building with the young person was emphasised:

"I *like it that it was someone I had always known, that I wasn't just flung with anyone*" (Young person)

"*It was really good to meet her (prior to the move on) she helped me sort out stuff before tech. It was really good cause I got to build up that relationship, I couldn't have without that. I wouldn't have been able to go to her if I had had a problem, I wouldn't have been able to talk to her about half the stuff that I was able to talk to her about*" (Young person)

An issue highlighted by staff which relates to young people's experience of care was the sense of rejection some young people can feel when it is time to move on from their programme. The development of an in house transitional service meant that young people were less likely to experience the same feelings of rejection:

"*The majority of young people have it good at Give & Take. Some rebel when they move on. They rebel because they feel rejected again.   You can try to*

explain it to them but they see it as a loss of contact. That's why it's good that Stuart is part of the journey. They meet him from the start" (Transitional Support worker)

Social workers echoed the importance of Transitional Support workers being integrated as part of the supported placement, thereby allowing young people to develop a relationship with them prior to their move on to mainstream provision:

"*in terms of transitional work you've got Stuart there, he obviously linked in with the young people quite early on which I think was important so they already knew a familiar face and he was able to walk alongside them in terms of transition*" (Social Work Team Manager 16 plus service)

The researcher raised the option of pastoral/mentoring type support being provided from within their mainstream education, training or employment option. Young people and staff both noted that as a 'move on' already involved so many new challenges, young people feel more comfortable and confident having somebody to support them through the transition period with whom they had an existing relationship.

6) Necessity for partnership working

A key aspect of the Transitional Support workers role is to work in partnership with other agencies and professionals. Among the agencies and organisations Transitional Support workers liaise with are Careers Service, Citizens Advice Bureau, education, training or employment providers, Jobs and Benefits, Prince's Trust, Addiction services and Trusts' Employability services.

The importance of developing good working relationships with the respective partners involved in the young person's journey through education, training and into employment emerged as an important theme from interviews conducted.

At a fundamental level, Include Youth staff highlighted that the scale of issues that care leavers have to contend with on their journey into education, training and employment meant that the only way to effectively help these young people was to work in partnership:

"*There are such big barriers sometimes and you can't take that on yourself, it is really important to have links elsewhere*" (Transitional Support worker)

This view was echoed by social workers who noted that different professionals have relationships with different colleagues and services and that good partnership working harnesses these relationships. They noted for example that Transitional Support workers have well developed relationships with key people within colleges, something social workers or personal advisers may not have had the opportunity to develop. The consistency of working developed through such relationship building was seen as important, allowing individual professionals to take the lead in specific areas.

Working in partnership was seen as an effective bulwark against young people dropping out of their provision:

"*It's like a preventative service as well. When young people contact me to say they are not going into tech that day for one reason or another I have contact with the tech so I can call a meeting and review the process. I would talk to the young person and the tutor and then it would have been solved that way. Whereas if I hadn't been there then the young person might have decided just not to come back*" (Transitional Support worker)

One Further Education provider likened the preventative function of partnership working as 'closing the circle':

"*It's also good to close that circle, so the young people will know if they are attending college then the tutor or myself will contact Stuart and let him know that maybe the young person has missed so many days or maybe he's acting up so we ask can Stuart to come in and have an informal word with him*" (Further Education provider)

Transitional Support workers also displayed awareness that partnership working was an essential element of the service, given its 'get in to get out' nature:

"It's *working together with the external organisation. It's working with a support officer with that same purpose in mind. It's like an extended handover. The more you work with that young person to find a solution to a problem by using the help of the training organisation or college, it's to see that eventually it will be that other person who will be dealing with these issues. It's that get in to get out*" (Transitional Support Worker)

7) Requirement for clarity around roles

Young people in and leaving care typically have a wide range of professionals involved in their lives. These can include Social Workers, Personal Advisers, Careers Officers, Jobs and Benefits Personal Advisers, Youth Workers, Tutors and Mentors. For young people involved in the youth justice system the list multiplies. While the provision of various types of support can certainly be necessary and beneficial to the young person, it also presents challenges.

For young people these challenges can be around understanding the distinctive role of each person and how they can help them, the number and frequency of meetings/contact they are required to have and building and maintaining a wide range of relationships. The following quotation from a Transitional Support worker encapsulates this challenge very well:

"*So many of these young people are meeting with so many people. One young person in particular had so many meetings. He was great at meeting with me, he was consistent, but he did say 'omg I have so many people to*

meet in a week. I have my therapist, my PA, my social worker, my training and this and that. He did sort of say this a lot" (Transitional Support worker)

For professionals there are challenges related to clarity around professional roles and boundaries and ensuring effective communication and liaison across professions.

Young people interviewed demonstrated a high degree of clarity around the role of their Transitional Support worker, as illustrated by this quote from one young person:

"*A social worker deals with everything, my money, my home, my education...whereas my transitional worker helped me get from Give &Take to higher education and helped me through that process and all those struggles*" (Young person)

A number of young people interviewed articulated an awareness that the role of their Transitional Support worker was to prioritise their education, training or employment needs and possess the necessary knowledge and expertise to help them to address any issues in relation to this. By contrast other professionals and/or family members in the young people's lives were seen to have a wider role or as lacking in the necessary expertise:

"*Their (the Transitional Support Worker's) job is specifically for what you are asking. If you ring someone in Give & Take they might be too busy doing something else*" (Young person)

"I *guess I could have asked my mum but she doesn't know this stuff (college). Social workers are supposed to help until we are 24 but sometimes they drop the ball. It's not their fault; it's just that they are too busy*" (Young person)

"If *I didn't have Stuart I would have no one to help me with all the stresses. My social worker would be too busy, Stuart will take his time. He will show me how to do things and keep me calm*" (Young person)

While most young people expressed a clear awareness of boundaries in respect of the role of their Transitional Support worker, one young man stated that he had been unaware of the specific role played by the Transitional Support worker and simply viewed this person as his "*best friend*" .

In the main the role of the Transitional Support worker seemed to have been fairly well understood by other professionals, both internally within Include Youth and externally among Health and Social Care Trust staff, Further Education college staff and training and work placement providers.   Other professionals recognised the resource commitment required to effectively support care leavers through a transition process and acknowledged that they would not be able to provide that level of resourcing. One social worker noted that their Trust did not have the resource or time that Transitional Support Workers can devote to maintaining an intensive support service in relation to

the young people's engagement in mainstream education, training or employment.

However, the understanding and appreciation of the role of Transitional Support workers was not unanimous among interviewees. One training provider experienced a lack of clarity as to the nature of the service provided and what the lines of communication were:

"*I never knew if I was bothering them or not. I always thought – should I be ringing? Maybe a clearer structure would be better*" (Training for Success provider)

This training provider also suggested that his organisation's own mentors were well placed to deal with any barriers or issues that arose for the young people on commencing a placement, noting that they provided a signposting service to various specialist agencies. He also suggested that he would be open to young people being provided with the opportunity to visit the training organisation in advance of their placement commencing to allay any fears that existed.

Given the wider role of Personal Advisers employed by the Trusts in relation to providing continuity of support to young people through transitions, there is a need for absolute clarity between the roles of Personal Advisers and Transitional Support workers. This point was acknowledged by the Transitional Support worker, particularly in light of the latter being a newly established service; he reported that this issue had been raised with him by a residential social worker. He relayed the conversation as follows:

"*I have been asked by a residential social worker if I was trying to take over the role of the PA? Certainly there is a cross over but I don't take the young people to the doctors etc. I am purely there for education, training and employment. We have a stronger understanding of the colleges which the Personal Advisers and Social Workers don't have*" (Transitional Support Worker)

The issue of overlap or duplication between the roles of Personal Advisers and Transitional Support workers was accordingly explored with two social workers in interviews conducted. Neither expressed any concerns – instead social workers strongly endorsed the service as playing a complementary role to their service:

"*I would see the Transitional Support workers role as a complement to the Personal Adviser and Social Worker role, people can do different things for the young person*" ((Social Work Team Manager 16 plus service)

Social workers suggested that, in order to develop a greater understanding of the service in future, to avoid any potential overlaps and to maximise its benefits for the young person, it would be important to ensure that the Transitional Support service be integrated into the Pathway planning process

more formally. Roles and responsibilities of the various professionals could be clearly set out within this planning process.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has focused on one aspect of the transition to adulthood for many care leavers – that of moving from supported education and training environments into mainstream education, training or jobs. It has taken Include Youth's Transitional Support pilot project as a starting point for a wider exploration of 'what works' in enabling these young people to progress into further education, government training or employment. It bears emphasis that this research was not intended as an academic project. Rather its rationale was to capture the learning from practice as to what works while factoring in the wider policy context, with a view to scaling up those successful models of provision thereby enabling wider numbers of care leavers to also achieve positive education, training and employment outcomes.

The research highlights the real value of combining both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative element demonstrated that Include Youth's Transitional Support pilot project worked, the qualitative research showed how. The interviews with young people and practitioners allowed the research to draw on their knowledge and expertise as to what works. There is also valuable learning to be gained from the review of models of good practice as well as the review of policy, both of which can usefully inform future policy and practice developments in this area.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in this report demonstrates clearly that Include Youth's model of Transitional Support enables young care leavers to make more successful transitions from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training and employment than was previously the case.

A significant facet of this research has been the wider contextualisation of care leavers lives. The research recognised that young care leavers' attitudes, behaviour and decision making in relation to education, training and employment options cannot be abstracted from the wider social, economic and political context in which they live their lives.

A primary aspect of that context is their identity and experience as care leavers. There is extensive evidence, alluded to in this research, to demonstrate that these young people experience a wide range of barriers and challenges in transitioning into adulthood. Undoubtedly there have been improvements across a number of domains, including the age of leaving care and educational outcomes being attained. However, the statistics presented in this study underscore the fact that care leavers continue to be significantly more likely to leave school with few or no qualifications, to have higher levels of mental ill health and disability, to be parents at a young age, to be over represented in the criminal justice system and to be classified as NEET.

The evidence also demonstrates that care leavers too frequently experience accelerated and compressed transitions into adulthood, with all of the problems associated with these – unstable accommodation, poor mental

health and poor education, training and employment outcomes. Added to this, the negative representation of young people in general by the media and in society is further compounded for care leavers, who can experience stigmatisation as a result of their care background, characterised in the research as '*a square peg in a round hole*'. Such negative perceptions, if internalised, can in turn create further barriers to transitioning into mainstream education, training and employment.

Tracing back to the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the subsequent introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, there have been a number of significant legislative and policy developments, led by DHSSPS and described in some detail earlier, all aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people in and leaving care. Unfortunately the associated development of good inter-agency work at the operational level has not been replicated at the higher strategic level, with stand alone strategies being brought forward by individual Departments in the absence of an overarching strategy for looked after children and young people. The Children's Services Cooperation Act (NI) 2015 should lead to greater cooperation between departments and as a result better outcomes for look after children and young people. Recent legislative developments in Scotland and England look likely contribute to improved education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers and as such are worthy of serious consideration in Northern Ireland.

This research also highlighted the fact that there are additional, specific dynamics which impact on the lives of young care leavers in Northern Ireland. It is clear that for many of these young people, most of whom were born in the era of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the ongoing legacy of the conflict continues to impact significantly, both directly or indirectly, on their lives. The effect of a prolonged transition from violent conflict to a peaceful, more democratic society with fully functioning political structures and institutions is seen to be most acutely felt by those who are at the margins of society. Its manifestations include entrenched community division and segregated services, paramilitary violence and the threat of it, increasing suicide rates and high levels of mental illness, poverty and youth unemployment. The evidence demonstrates that care leavers are more likely to disproportionately affected by all of these structural and societal factors.

The current labour market context in Northern Ireland, largely dictated by and mirroring a global context of economic recession, has been shown to represent a very significant challenge for those young people who are furthest away from the labour market in gaining employment. Youth unemployment and 'NEET' figures have both remained stubbornly high. Strategic interventions by government have not, in and of themselves, had any significant impact on this. The rapidly changing nature of work, again reflecting international trends, has created a situation whereby increasingly young people are increasingly expected to accept what has been described as 'precarious' work –involving zero hour contracts, underemployment, payment of minimum wage or below and no job security or opportunities for progression. Alongside this is evidence that many of those young people who

are outside of mainstream education, training or employment and seeking to gain the necessary training and qualifications have experience of simply 'churning' through programmes. Young people describe experiences of moving from a training programme onto the live register and back onto a further training programme, a cycle occasionally interspersed with periods of short term, casual work, with all of the demoralising effects such circular patterns have.

The research mapped out the key strands of government's response to the issue of young people who are NEET, and the specific focus on care leavers within that landscape. While acknowledging that there have been a range of reviews, policies and strategies developed since 2012, the continuing high numbers of young people who are unemployed or NEET raises the question as to the actual impact of all of this activity on young people's lives. The lack of any level of disaggregated data collection, analysis or tracking in relation to mainstream education, training and employment programmes has meant that specific outcomes for care leavers from these programmes cannot be established.

A common thread underlying all of the above contextual and policy considerations is the undermining and non fulfilment of the rights of young care leavers. The international human rights standards presented in Chapter 3 of this study constitute benchmarks against which the relevant legislation, policy and practice should be assessed. While there can be no doubting the positive intent of government in attempting to address the issue of young people who are NEET, unless such strategies are sufficiently high level, are adequately resourced, targeted and systematically monitored, then any positive outcomes for care leavers are in danger of being achieved more by default than by design. The research has demonstrated that the rights of care leavers across a range of domains, including education, vocational training, health, standard of living, housing and protection from violence and discrimination are routinely violated. There is an urgent need for government to adopt an explicitly human rights based framework within which to develop its policy responses, one that views care leavers as rights holders and that is rooted in principles of dignity, respect, equality and participation. Without such fundamental rights as an adequate standard of living, secure accommodation and adequate health care services being met, it can be extremely difficult if not impossible for young care leavers to access, participate in and achieve positive outcomes from education and training or to gain employment.

The combination of the review of good practice models along with the field work has proven to be a rich source of evidence regarding effective approaches in supporting young care leavers into mainstream education, training or employment. A number of common, interconnected themes emerged.

The starting point is the removal of what has been described as the 'cliff edge', facilitating young people to make supported, gradual transitions from employability programmes to mainstream placements. Beyond that, the

foundation stones of any intervention were identified as the adoption of a youth work model that places the needs of the individual young person at the centre and gives primacy to relationship building. Repeatedly, young people and professionals emphasised the centrality of the relationship between the young person and their support worker. The flexibility provided by the youth work model was also viewed as extremely important, as was the principle of empowerment *'it's more about working with you on a journey rather than being told 'you have to do this'*''.

The need for all involved to be fully aware of the gradual, phased nature of support levels being provided was seen as important, with increasing emphasis being placed on young people being encouraged to identify natural supports in their own environment.

For young people another important consideration was the continuity of the relationship with their support worker, across organisational and service boundaries. Young people valued the fact that the support provided at the point of transition was from somebody they had an existing relationship with, that they weren't '*just flung with any old person*'.

The research testified to the number and range of people involved in the lives of care leavers, reflected in this quote from a young person '*omg I have so many people to meet in a week*'. This presents various challenges for young people around understanding the distinctive role of various professionals, but also more practical/logistical problems given the number and frequency of meetings. For professionals there are challenges related to the need for clarity around professional roles and boundaries and ensuring effective communications is maintained.

Evidence was uncovered as to the clear understanding among young people of how the role played by their transitional support worker differed from that of their personal adviser or social worker. However, it also highlighted the need for further work to be done with professionals in communicating clearly the service provided by Transitional Support and the specific role played by transitional support workers.

A small number of professionals interviewed, from different sectors, expressed the view that the Transitional Support service could be explained better to colleagues in other professions also working with the young people. The importance of communicating the precise function of the service at the outset, as well as its 'modus operandi' was highlighted. The particular importance of ensuring clarity among social workers and personal advisers was emphasised, with a suggestion that the provision of transitional support be included within a young person's Pathway Plan where relevant.

The limitations of this research need to be acknowledged. The pilot project was quite small scale and only tracked young people for a 6 month period post programme; a 12 month tracking exercise would have been preferable. A larger research project involving a wider range of stakeholder interview would also no doubt have brought valuable additional perspectives.

While beyond the scope of this research, it would have been useful to have drawn on models of transitional support in place for young people with disabilities. There has been much development in policy and practice over the past decade or more with a large number of new initiatives aimed at improving transition outcomes for disabled young people. While facing different barriers and challenges, there are nonetheless likely to be many points of commonality at both the practice and policy levels between transitions for young people with disabilities and young care leavers. It is worth noting for example, that recent research findings indicate that although there is much investment in transition, young learning disabled adults can '*transition into a void*' or can be forced to rely on limited and inappropriate post-school options.[60]

While any further research undertaken should address these issues, it should be noted that the interviews which were conducted did yield a significant amount of information, which, when integrated with the quantitative data and the policy and practice reviews, led to a fairly well developed understanding of what works and the reasons why.

In conclusion, this small scale research study has drawn effectively on both quantitative and qualitative data in an exploration of what works in supporting care leavers, who face a number of significant barriers and challenges, to make successful transitions from supported learning and training environments into mainstream education, training or employment provision. It is hoped that its findings and the recommendations which follow will be acted upon by all concerned to help improve education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers in the future.

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[60] Kelly, Dr. B. (2013) *Don't Box Me In – Disability, Identity and Transitions to Young Adult Life.* Belfast: Queen's University Belfast pp 5-6.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Responsibility for implementation
1. The provision of transitional support to care leavers should be mainstreamed within relevant employability and training programmes funded or delivered by government, including the new Youth Training model, United Youth/T:BUC programmes as well as other employability and/or training programmes funded or delivered by government departments.	Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, the Executive Office
2. Key government strategies should include a commitment to the provision of transitional support to care leavers transitioning from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training or employment provision.	Department for Health and Social Services, the Executive Office, Department of Education, Department for the Economy
3. The provision of transitional support should be based on youth work principles including being young person centred, needs led, on a voluntary basis and flexible in approach.	Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, Department of Education
4. The impact of wider government policies on care leavers and their achievement of quality outcomes from education, training and employment should be addressed. These include the provision of appropriate childcare, stable accommodation and adequate financial supports, mitigation against any negative welfare reform impacts and ensuring that criminal records do not constitute blocks to training and employment.	The Executive Office, Department for Health and Social Services, Department for Communities, Department of Justice
6. There is a need to ensure that clarity of roles exist between different professionals involved with care leavers around their education, training or employment. This is so as to ensure cooperation and coordination between professionals	Health and Social Card Board, Health and Social Care Trusts, Further Education Colleges, Training for Success providers, voluntary sector employability programme providers, Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership's Looked After

and to eliminate duplication, in order to maximise positive outcomes for the young people.	Children/16+ Group
7. The Executive Office should work with relevant government departments including the Department of the Economy and the Department for Communities to ensure that all employability and vocational training provision for care leavers is compliant with relevant international human rights standards.	The Executive Office
8. Government departments that are funding or delivering employability and/or vocational training programmes must ensure that monitoring and outcomes data is disaggregated by care status.	Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, Department of Education, Department for Health and Social Services
9. Longitudinal research should be commissioned which tracks a number of individual care leavers as they progress through education and training and into employment. Such research should draw on both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as broader transitions research, to develop a deeper understanding of the enabling and blocking factors for care leavers in securing and sustaining mainstream education, training or employment placements.	Department for Health and Social Services, Department for the Economy and the Executive Office

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