



**Centre for excellence**  
for Children's Care and Protection

## **Learners Who Move**

**Practice guidance for Virtual Schools and  
Care Experienced Teams to support the education  
of learners who move from one local authority  
to another**



**Feedback:**

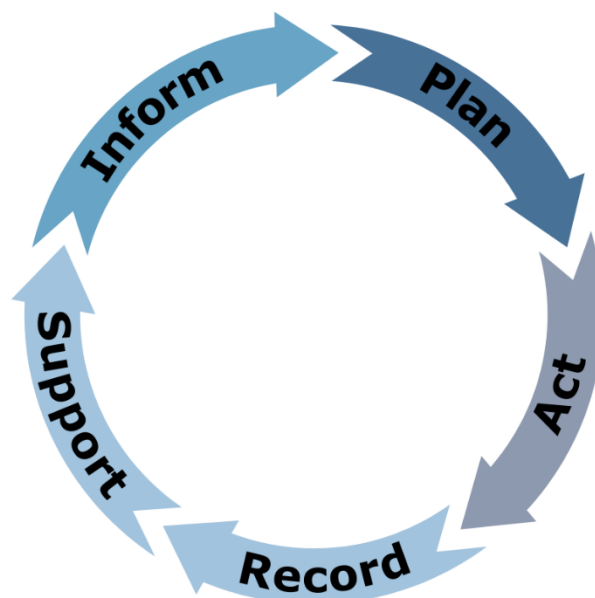
The development of the guide is a collaboration between the Virtual School Head Teachers' and Care Experienced Teams' Network in Scotland, which has been facilitated by CELCIS since 2019, and the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) in England.

It seeks to establish principles of practice when supporting care experienced learners who move or have moved from one local authority to another. Virtual Schools and those who live with, support, and teach care experienced learners are invited to trial it. Feedback and comments will be used for further developments and to publish future versions - contact [celcis.learnerswhomove@strath.ac.uk](mailto:celcis.learnerswhomove@strath.ac.uk).

## Key messages

- All children have a fundamental human right to access education.
- A move of school or home can be challenging and disruptive for any learner.
- A change of school can involve the loss of familiar adults, familiar surroundings, and friendships.
- Care experienced children and young people are more likely to experience more moves and transitions than their peers.
- For a variety of reasons, a significant number of care experienced learners move local authority and live 'at a distance' from their 'home' local authority.
- Some care experienced learners who have moved local authority, including those who live 'cross border', face delays to their right to an education.
- The policy and legal landscapes are complex for learners who move from one local authority to another.
- Virtual School Head Teachers, Care Experienced Teams and their equivalents are connected throughout the UK, across geographical, physical, and cultural boundaries.

The adoption of **five principles of practice** (page 13) will assist practitioners to navigate complexity and support a consistency of experience for care experienced learners including prompt access to education:



## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is this paper?

This is a guide to support the education of care experienced children and young people who are moving or have moved from one local authority to another.

### Who is it for?

The guide is for Virtual Schools but may assist those who live with, care for, support or teach care experienced children and young people moving from one local authority to another.

### Who wrote this practice guidance?

The guidance was written in collaboration between 'The Network' and 'NAVSH', Virtual School Head Teachers from Scotland and England.

### Why was this guide written?

Virtual School Head Teachers wanted to create a framework that promotes a consistency of experience for every care experience learner who moves or is living in another area.

### Who are care experienced children and young people?

Care experienced is a term used to describe people who have at any time been in the care of a local authority.

### Why do some care experienced learners live in another local authority?

Many care experienced learners move from one authority to another and live at a distance from their 'home' local authority for a variety of different and often complex reasons.

### What is a Virtual School?

Virtual School is a term that describes care experienced learners from one authority as if they attended one school. A Virtual School Head Teacher or Care Experienced Team monitors and offers support to these learners wherever they live and whichever education provision they attend.

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## 1. Introduction

The development of this guidance is a collaboration between the [Virtual School Head Teachers' and Care Experienced Teams' Network](#) in Scotland, which has been facilitated by CELCIS since 2019, and the [National Association of Virtual School Heads \(NAVSH\)](#) in England. The principles, format and content emerged from a series of facilitated discussions held with a sub-group of the Scottish Network and a workshop at a NAVSH conference. Participants wanted to underscore a commitment and ambition that all children who move schools when they move from one local authority to another have a consistent experience and access their right to education without delay.

There are a number of local and national protocols, conventions, policy, and legal guidelines for care experienced children and young people who move from one local authority area to another. There are also significant differences between the roles of Virtual Schools, and their equivalents, between the four nations of the United Kingdom. This guide does not seek to replace or align any framework that already exists between local authorities or jurisdictions. It proposes an approach to navigate the complexity that can surround care experienced learners who move from one local authority to another. This guidance points towards how those who live and work with care experienced learners might map out bespoke solutions and broker improved understanding within and between different policy and legal contexts. The principle of 'if this was my child' at the heart of corporate parenting is the key driver and spirit that underpins the work.

### **A note about language:**

There is no universally accepted term to describe care experienced learners who move from one local authority area to another. Finding the right words to capture the wide range of experiences of such a diverse group will evolve over time. 'Care experienced learners who move from one local authority to another' is predominantly used throughout this document in the absence of a consensus and to stay away from terms that are potentially stigmatising. The term 'Virtual School' is used throughout this guidance to refer to Virtual School Head Teachers and Care Experienced Teams in Scotland, and Virtual School Heads and 'looked after' education teams are used to refer to England.



## 2. Definitions

The policy and legal landscape relating to care experience learners who move from one local authority is complex and uses a range of terminology in differing contexts. For clarity, below is a list of key terms set out to help practitioners understand and use this guidance. Unless specified, these are not legal definitions, but explanations which have been developed collaboratively to simplify and explain common terminology used in this area.

**Care experienced** is a term used to describe children and young people who have at any time been in the care of a local authority.

**'Looked after'** is a legal definition used to refer to those who are currently in the care of a local authority.

**Virtual School** is a model that views care experienced learners in one local authority as if they attended one school. A Virtual School Head Teacher or Care Experienced Team monitors and offers additional support to the children regardless of where they live or which physical school they attend.

A **Virtual School Head Teacher** is a senior member of staff within a local authority with responsibility for promoting the education of care experienced children and young people, and leader of the Virtual School.

**'Distance placement', 'out of borough' and 'out of authority'** are all terms that describe a situation where a child or young person who is 'looked after' or care experienced is living in a local authority which is different to their 'home' local authority.

A **Cross Border placement** describes a situation where a child or young person who is legally 'looked after' lives or moves away from their 'home' local authority to another country or jurisdiction of the UK.

**Emergency placement** refers to a situation where a child or young person moves into care or needs to move suddenly whilst in care because of an unexpected life event.

**Home local authority** refers to the geographical area that a child or young person originated from, or the jurisdiction where they came into the care system, which had or has legal responsibility for their care.

**Host local authority** refers to the geographical area that a child or young person is moving to or is currently living in, this could be part of a short- or long-term plan. For some learners this becomes their 'home.'

**Jurisdiction** the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey and the Isle of Man are self-governing dependencies with judicial independence from the United Kingdom. There are 11 councils in Northern Ireland, 22 unitary authorities in Wales, 32 local authorities in Scotland and 152 local authorities in England. Differences in legal frameworks and language can add an additional degree of complexity particularly where young people move across borders.

### 3. Context

Care experienced children and young people in the UK and internationally have been identified as a group of learners who face additional challenges in education; due to a set of complex interrelated factors they face multiple barriers to learning.<sup>1</sup> Findings from research indicate that both home and school changes can further exacerbate and impact on care experienced learners' emotional wellbeing, their success in education and subsequent opportunities for further study and transition into employment.<sup>2</sup> Transitions and moves for any learner can be challenging and those with care experience are more likely to face changes and moves.<sup>3</sup> Changes of home and school can involve the loss of familiar adults, the loss of friendships as well as a loss of community and surroundings. Individual children and young people will have different feelings, degrees of understanding and different levels of anxiety as they respond to these transitions.

#### Care experienced learners who move from one local authority to another

Robust and definitive data is lacking, but statistics<sup>4</sup> and reports<sup>56</sup> point towards a small but significant group of care experienced children and young people (between 10% and 40%) who live 'at a distance' from their 'home' local authority. Many learners who move from one local authority to another attend schools away from the communities they originate from. Those who are 'Cross Border' live and attend school in another country or jurisdiction within the UK. This adds a degree of complexity as children can become subject to different legal, education and cultural systems. Some care experienced learners need and require closer attention and support so that their rights are upheld during their transition. This attention ensures they are heard, they have access to advocacy, sources of support and maintain links despite being geographically distant from the local authority that has legal responsibility for their care.

#### The role of Virtual Schools and Virtual School Head Teachers

A systematic review of international research on supporting the education of care experienced learners identified eleven studies. This included a Virtual School Head pilot and a number of similar and parallel strategic approaches, which 'showed promise.'<sup>7</sup> 'Virtual Schools', a relatively new development in the

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<sup>1</sup> O'Higgins, A. A., Sebba, J., & Luke, N. (2015). *What is the relationship of being in care on the educational outcomes of children? An international systematic review*. The Rees Centre.

<sup>2</sup> Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., & O'Higgins, A. (2015). *The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data*. Oxford. University of Oxford/University of Bristol.

<sup>3</sup> O'Higgins, A., Sebba, J., & Gardner, F. (2017). What are the factors associated with educational achievement for children in kinship or foster care: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79, 198-220.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2020/21](#). Edinburgh. Scottish Government.

<sup>5</sup> Ofsted (2014) [From a distance: Looked after children living away from their home area](#). London. Ofsted

<sup>6</sup> Children's Commissioner for England (2019) [Pass the parcel: Children posted around the care system](#). London. Children's Commissioner.

<sup>7</sup> Liabo, K., Gray, K., & Mulcahy, D. (2013). A systematic review of interventions to support looked-after children in school. *Child & family social work*, 18(3), 341-353.



UK, are one example of an approach that offers multiple levels of support.<sup>8</sup> Emerging research, practice and evidence indicates that the model encourages connections between practitioners who forge relationships with one another that cut across geographical and legal boundaries.<sup>9</sup> Virtual School Head Teachers are senior members of staff who are networked into local authority systems and possess intelligence and influence on what works for care experienced learners in that setting.<sup>10</sup> The right communication with the right person at the right time can influence how learners experience a transition, and facilitate timely access to the right to education.



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<sup>8</sup> Jackson, S. (2015). The virtual school for children in out-of-home care: A strategic approach to improving their educational attainment. *Children Australia*, 40(4), 327-334.

<sup>9</sup> Drew, H., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: what is the role of the virtual school?. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 34(1), 101-121.

<sup>10</sup> Berridge, D. (2009). Looked after and learning: Evaluation of the Virtual School Head pilot. London.

## 4. Purpose

This practice guide was co-constructed by a group of Virtual School Head Teachers and their equivalents from Scotland and England to support the education of care experienced children and young people who move from one local authority to another. The aim is to promote collaboration through Virtual Schools to ensure a consistency of experience for these learners. There are a multitude of complex interrelated social, political, legal, and financial reasons as to why some care experienced learners move and live at a distance from their 'home' local authority. This guide aims to support those who live with, care for, support and teach care experienced learners to navigate that complexity by providing a framework based on practitioner experience, research, and evidence.



## 5. The reasons some care experienced learners live away from their 'home' local authority

There are many reasons that a proportion of care experienced learners live away from their 'home' local authority. Some move to be closer to brothers, sisters, and other family members. Others move away temporarily as part of a plan and return home later. Whilst there are differences across regions and jurisdictions, overall, there is a shortage of families who can offer a home in the UK.<sup>11</sup> This means that some children and young people, particularly those who come into care as a result of an unexpected life event, may live away from their home local authority because there are no family members or carers who can offer them care whilst living in their local area. Changes at home can inevitably lead to a delay to a young person's right to an education. Local school admission arrangements, differences in children's plans, variations in definitions of care and need, alongside professional's levels of understanding of the needs and rights of care experienced learners can all conspire to delay a prompt entry into education.

There are also a small proportion of children and young people who need specialist care which may not be available in the local area. It is difficult to summarise the needs of a diverse group of children. Some learners have life limiting conditions, others more complex physical and emotional needs, a small minority who come into conflict with the law, and those with complex legal status' such as children 'deprived of liberty.' There are also children and young people separated from their families who may be unaccompanied or seeking asylum. There are increasing degrees of complexity for some of these learners, which means that their right to be heard, their right to an education, and their right to see family members are at greater risk of being undermined.



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<sup>11</sup> Recruitment targets foster carers. (n.d.). Retrieved November 24, 2022 from <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/all-about-fostering/recruitment-targets>

## 6. Values

Virtual Schools articulated three key values crucial to those using this guide. These values are helpful reflection points and holding them in mind will assist when navigating complexity.

### Children's Rights

Ensuring that the experiences and voices of care experienced children and young people inform thinking, planning and any action taken. Like all learners, care experienced children and young people have the right to a child centred and empowering education, wherever they live.

### Equity

A desire to promote a consistency of experience for all learners. Begin by considering what we want for all learners. We want all children and young people to access education without delay; where there is a move of any kind, we want learners to experience that in a way that reduces anxiety and involves them, their families and carers.

### Connection

Virtual Schools are connected within their local authorities across education and social care as well as with external partners. They are connected regionally and nationally across geographical boundaries. The infrastructure exists to develop further connections and relationships to promote collaboration and improve the experiences of care experienced learners who move from one local authority to another.



## 7. Need to know

All countries in the UK and self-governing jurisdictions share a commitment to corporate parenting, however, there are significant differences in legislation, policy, the curriculum, definitions of care, academic term times, school start and leaving dates and support into, through and after care.

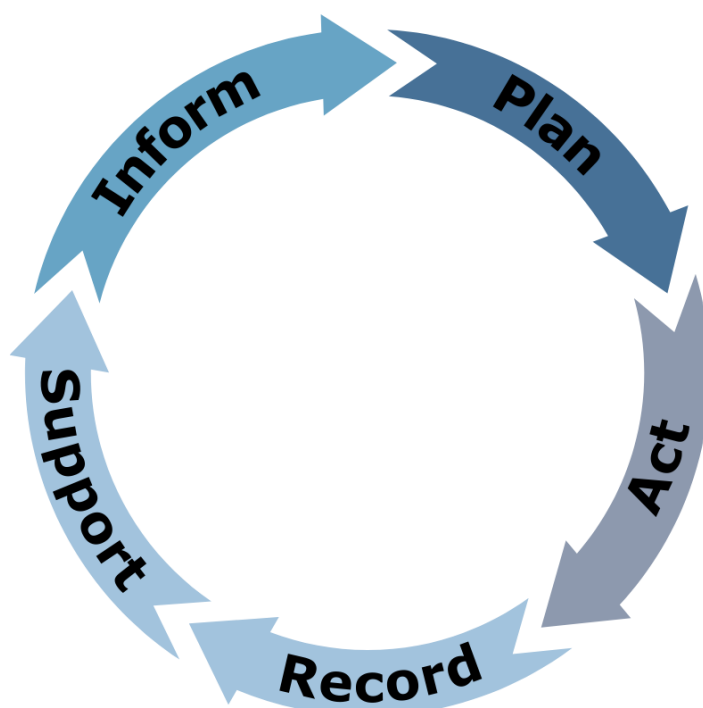
The following table summarises what users of this guide may need to know that would help them to support a learner who moves from one local authority to another.

<b>1.</b>	The policy and legal context for care experienced learners who move from one local authority to another can be dynamic, complex and can change quickly.
<b>2.</b>	Care experienced learners are more likely than all other children to experience more transitions and moves.
<b>3.</b>	Care experienced learners who move are at risk of having their rights eroded. Many live in complex contexts and can experience delay in accessing education.
<b>4.</b>	A fundamental aim of Virtual Schools is to ensure children and young people's right to an education are fulfilled.
<b>5.</b>	Virtual Schools are specialists in the education of care experienced learners. They are networked with each other across physical, geographical, and cultural boundaries.
<b>6.</b>	Virtual Schools are a key point of contact and a 'directory' into their area with good local intelligence. Virtual schools are well placed to build on strengths and overcome structural barriers to learning.
<b>7.</b>	Most local authorities in the UK have a senior officer who is responsible for the education of care experienced learners.
<b>8.</b>	Most schools in the UK have a teacher with responsibility for having oversight of care experienced learners in their setting.
<b>9.</b>	All 'looked after' children should have a multi-agency plan which includes a section on education. They will differ between jurisdictions but will have the same underlying principles.
<b>10.</b>	There are important similarities and differences between each nation and jurisdiction, these should be explored with curiosity and understood as a key part of planning.

## 8. The principles

The following are the high-level principles that emerged and were subsequently refined in a series of facilitated discussions with Virtual School Head Teachers. They underpin the overarching function of promoting collaboration to ensure a consistency of experience for learners who move from one local authority to another.

The principles should be viewed as cyclical and interlinked rather than an iterative step-by-step process. It is for those using the guide, along with children and their families, to map out an appropriate course of action and determine the right level of support needed in a young person's life, based upon their circumstances. There will be situations where children and young people are being supported well already, in which case no additional action will be required.





	<b>Inform</b>
Question	Who needs to be informed about this learner?
Description	Inform the relevant person that you are aware of a learner that is moving or has moved to another local authority.
High Quality Practice	Those who need to know are aware of a care experienced learner who is moving or has moved to another local authority.
Practice Example	One local authority Virtual School informs another local authority Virtual School that a learner is moving into the area to find out about local provision.

	<b>Plan</b>
Question	What is the plan for the learner?
Description	Plan a course of action based on the circumstances, needs and views of learner who has moved from one local authority to another.
High Quality Practice	A robust plan informed by learner voice highlights the roles and responsibilities and actions to be taken by all those involved.
Practice Example	A Virtual School from another local authority is invited to attend a planning meeting to contribute to a transition from primary to secondary.

	<b>Act</b>
Question	What action should be taken as a result of becoming aware of this learner?
Description	Act and follow up on information that has been shared about a learner who has moved from one local authority to another.
High Quality Practice	Practitioners are proactive in supporting care experienced learners who move from one local authority to another.
Practice Example	A Virtual School team member rings another virtual school on hearing from school staff that there has been an unforeseen life event which is impacting on the learner's progress and wellbeing.

	<b>Record</b>
Question	How will information about any action taken to support the learner be recorded?
Description	Record what you have done to support a learner that is moving or has moved to another area.
High Quality Practice	Accurate recording is evidence of timely support, contributes to a plan and promotes corporate parenting.
Practice Example	A designated manager/teacher records information shared by the virtual school on the child's file and shares it with staff who need to know.

	<b>Support</b>
Question	What will support the learner to access or succeed in their education?
Description	Support the learner, wherever they are at, in the process of moving or settling into education provision.
High Quality Practice	Timely and effective support is offered to care experienced learners as soon as a need arises.
Practice Example	Virtual School offers advice to an education provider, for example recommending that the school buddies a learner with a peer to welcome and settle them into a new environment.

## Links to useful documents

Bettencourt, M et al. (2022) [Virtual School Head Teachers in Scotland: Practice Case Studies](#). Glasgow. CELCIS. Series of case studies including one on transition (p.7) details how a Virtual School Head Teacher supported a care experienced learner, his carer and a school in a distant local authority.

Care Inspectorate (2022) [Report on distance placements Dundee](#). Care Inspectorate. Report highlighting the reasons why many children do not have their rights protected including recommendations on advocacy, planning and family contact.

Carroll, C et al. (2017). [Promoting the achievement of looked after children and young people in South Tyneside](#). London. UCL. Series of case studies including one on transition (p.13) that highlights how a school supported a care experienced learner who moved home and school into a different local authority.

Children's Commissioner for England (2019) [Pass the parcel: Children posted around the care system](#). London: Children's Commissioner. Report that highlights ten things that children who had been moved away from their home authority wanted professionals to know. This included feeling isolated, not being heard and waiting to access therapy and education.

Gough, A. (2018) [Secure Care in Scotland: Cross-border placements Glasgow. University of Strathclyde](#). An overview of the legislative and policy context for children from another jurisdiction who move into secure care in Scotland.

NAVSH (2019) [Virtual School Handbook](#). NAVSH. An overview of the role of Virtual School Head in England including guidance on emergency care placements (p. 18), Out of Area Notifications (p.18) and Belonging Regulations (p.19) for children with additional needs.

Ofsted (2014) [From a distance: Looked after children living away from their home area](#). London. Ofsted. Thematic inspection that looked at how local authorities supported children who lived away from their home community. Many recommendations including that virtual schools take a lead on supporting all care experienced learners, wherever they are living.

Scottish Government (2022) [Factsheet: Cross-border placements of children and young people into residential care in Scotland: policy position paper](#). Edinburgh. Scottish Government. A policy paper which outlines in some detail the legislative complexity for care experienced children who live in a different jurisdiction.



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## About CELCIS

CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

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