

1. Background and the role of Virtual School

This report presents an overview of the activities and impact of the City of London Virtual School. The Virtual School supports all children in care and relevant care leavers regardless of their length of time in care. The age range covers children in nursery through to those in college and university. The data in this report is based on the 2018-19 academic year.

Every local authority has a responsibility to promote the educational achievement of children looked after. In February 2018, the government released updated guidance *'Promoting the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children'* which reinforces the local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after and previously looked after, and promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated.

There is a clear ambition, at national and local level, to narrow the attainment gap between children looked after and their non-looked after peers.

Looked-after and previously looked-after children start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences and, often, have special educational needs. Virtual Schools have a key role to ensure these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential - an important part of why this role was made statutory. The Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that children looked after and care leavers fulfil their potential at all stages of their learning journey so that they can go on to be successful in higher education, apprenticeships and employment.

The Virtual School strives to achieve this by:

- Co-ordinating and quality assuring all Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
- Monitoring and challenging schools and colleges to make effective use of additional resources such as the Pupil Premium for Looked After Children.
- Tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of Looked After Children.
- Ensuring Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) needs are identified and supported appropriately, including applications for statutory assessment if necessary.
- Ensuring effective transition between schools, colleges, Higher Education or specialist providers

The City of London Virtual School has only one member of staff, the Virtual School Headteacher, (VSHT) Andrew Russell. He is a former secondary school Headteacher and has been the Virtual School Headteacher in two other London boroughs. He works two days a week, term time only. Outside of this work the VSHT works with the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH) planning and organising their annual national conference. He is also a mentor / coach working with other Virtual School Headteachers as well as leading training with school staff and foster carers. This training specialises in promoting the education achievement of young people in care as well as training about how to overcome the impact of trauma and attachment on behaviour and achievement in school. This work has direct benefits on the work of the City of London Virtual School.

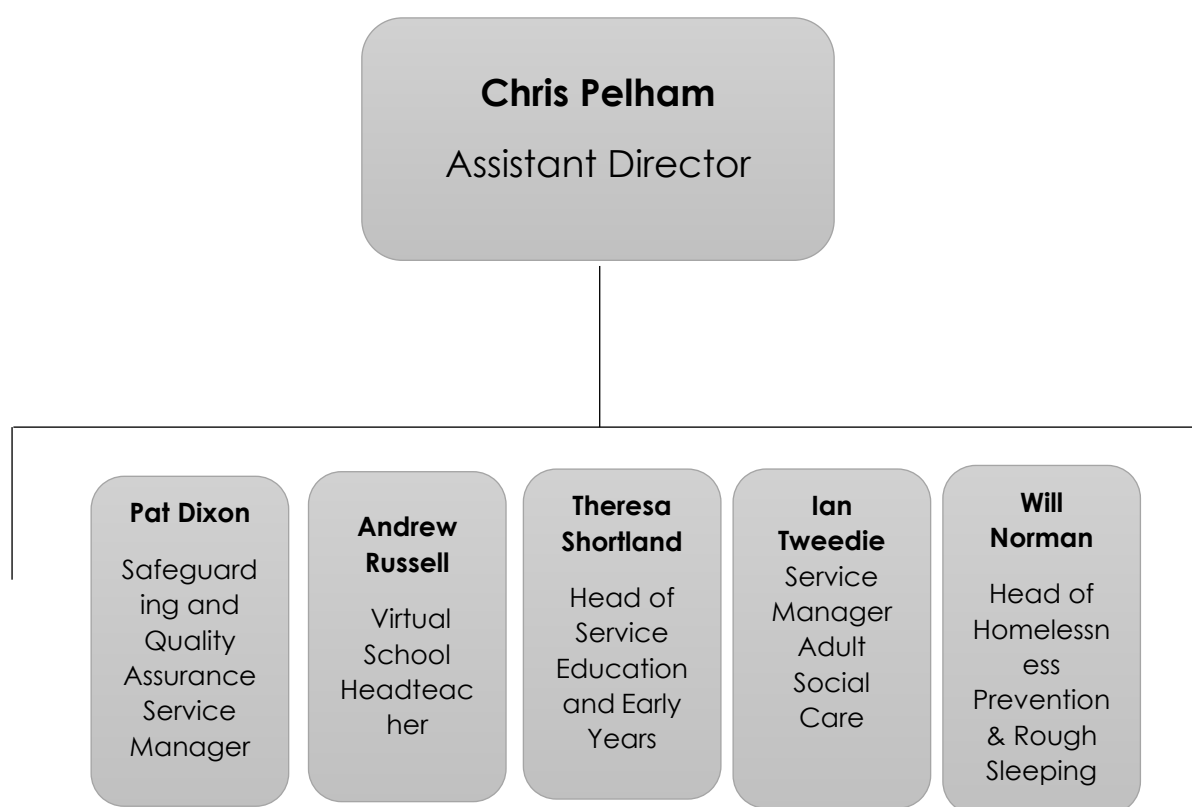
The wider team that supports the education of young people in care also includes:

- Five social workers and their Team Manager
- Lead education Advisor
- Looked After Children's nurse
- City & Hackney Children's Health (CAMHS)
- Information, Advice and Guidance Advisor, Prospects
- Children in Care Council (CICC) Coordinator
- Head of Adult Learning, City of London Corporation

2. Governance and organisation

The VSHT is part of the senior leadership structure in the People's Directorate. This brings the added value of bridging bringing together the two key areas of Education and Social Care under a single management structure. The VSHT has a standing item in the Children's Senior Management Team (CSMT) meetings. The VSHT also meets directly with the DCS regularly.

The VSHT reports into the Safeguarding Sub Committee which acts as the Corporate Parenting Board and provides additional scrutiny and challenge.



3. Cohort characteristics

The nature of the City of London Virtual School cohort is unique compared with other local authorities and London boroughs. It is very small which means it is dynamic – any changes have a big

impact. For example, during the academic year, 22 new young people came into the cohort. Some for only a few days or weeks. Others left care in that time too. The characteristics of the cohort therefore changed a lot in this space of time which meant that the nature of the provision had to change too.

At the end of the academic year, the picture of the cohort was:

Cohort	Number	UASC*	In school / college	Uni	NEET**	Tuition class	individual tuition
EYFS	1		1				
KS1	0						
KS2	0						
KS3	0						
KS4	8	8	1			4	3
KS5	20	20	10		1	4	5
18+	11	8	11	2			
Total	40	36	23	2	1	8	8

- *UASC = Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child = 90% of the cohort
- **NEET = Not in education, employment or training = 2.5% of the cohort. See Attendance section.
- Note also that some young people received extra tuition as well as attending school / college.
- The '18+' group = Care Leavers
- Of the 40 young people above, 36 are male.
- Of the 36 UASC in the cohort, 29 are doing ESOL courses (English for speakers of other languages). The majority arrive with almost no English and study ESOL at Entry Level 1.

The majority can speak Arabic, but we have many other first languages in the cohort, including:

- Pushto
- Amharic
- Farsi
- Tigrinya
- Vietnamese
- Dari
- Oroma
- Albanian

In some cases, we have an interpreter present in meetings. During the year it is pleasing to see the need for interpreters reduces as the young people gain skills in English.

As well as limited skills in English, the UASC young people arrive with varying amounts of education in their home countries. A few have had almost no formal education. Others have only had 3-4 years. Others might have had more. In all cases however, we must focus on their English skills first so they can then progress onto vocational courses.

In most local authorities, the majority of the Looked After Children live within the local area. This is not the case in the City of London. 95% of the cohort live outside the City, scattered across London and into Kent and Medway.

This has several impacts on the work of the Virtual School. Education provision must be sourced from the local area and meetings will be held locally therefore involving a lot of travel. It makes it harder to gather the cohort together locally for activities and events such as the celebration event. The VSHT attends almost all the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings wherever the young person lives. This is a key commitment to our young people.

4. Attainment and Progress

We monitor attainment and progress throughout the academic year. This is usually through the PEP meetings which take place every term. We also gather end of year attainment data directly from schools and colleges. For young people who have extra tuition and those in our tuition class, we receive monthly reports from the tutors.

Measuring attainment and progress in this unique cohort is different from other schools and Virtual Schools where attainment can be tracked from one Key Stage to another and compared with national statistics. In this current cohort there are no young people with a previous Key Stage result. In addition, this year, only one of the young people has come to the end of a course – the rest are all part way through or doing ongoing ESOL courses.

Only two in the cohort are in a school five days a week. The majority are in colleges local to where they live studying a variety of courses. More recent arrivals have individual tuition until they can start a school or college in September. Another group attend a tuition class that we set up locally which runs three days a week.

The only way to measure progress is to look at year on year results based on the courses they are studying. In this cohort only 19 of the 40 were in UK education at the start and end of the academic year. An additional 11 joined in the first term so have been in education for two terms.

The table below shows the rates of progress for the whole cohort, however long they have been with us and includes those Looked After and Care Leavers. The progress measure is based on attainment results and feedback from schools and colleges and the tutors. It is based on the expectation for each individual as it is not possible to relate progress to any national data with this group.

Progress	Number
Too recently arrived	2
Below expected	4
Expected	25
Above expected	9

5. Attendance and behaviour

With such a diverse cohort, making sense of attendance data is a challenge. We use a company called Welfare Call to contact schools and colleges daily to monitor the attendance of 15 of the cohort though only 13 of those have been in college for the whole year. This is sent to the Virtual School weekly. For those who are in the tuition class or receive individual tuition we collect attendance data from the tutors directly.

These are the attendance figures for the full year:

Students in school / college	85.5%
Students in the tuition class	91.0%
Total attendance	88.25%

It is worth noting that 9 of the cohort have attendance above 90%

An analysis of the attendance data across the year shows that attendance in the colleges was good for the first half of the year but then started to drop off in many of the students. The attendance in the tuition class (which only started at the end of December) has been consistent throughout. Sometimes attendance improves following a PEP meeting where we discuss it with the young person.

The VSHT asked the social workers to discuss the drop in attendance with their young people. A variety of responses were returned:

- Didn't like the course
- Placement move, had to find a new college
- Placement move, had a longer journey
- Missing classes for a variety of meetings (we try not to have meetings during the college day but if it is with the Home Office for example, we have little control over this).

For most students, there is an incentive to keep attendance above 90%. The students are eligible for the Education Bursary of £1200. Colleges will only pay this weekly if attendance remains high. Even this incentive doesn't work for some.

One piece of statistics to note is that in a school of 1000 pupils, each pupil has an impact of 0.001% on the overall attendance whereas in a 'school' like the VS with only around 40 people in education, each young person has a 2.5% impact on attendance. Furthermore, our young people, even on a full-time college course, are usually only in college for 3 days a week. If they miss one day for a meeting or, for example, for Eid this means their attendance that week can only be 66%. In a 'normal' school, missing one day means they could still score 80% for that week. 8 of our cohort missed a day for Eid this year which is 1/5 of the cohort.

Further analysis will take place to compare attendance figures between those who are in foster carer and those who are in semi-independent settings with a key worker.

Supporting the NEET student: One 17 year old UASC student became NEET during the year. This follows a similar pattern to his attendance in the previous year. His attendance started well but dropped in October. It was discussed in his PEP meeting where he was challenged about his commitment. His attendance improved with three weeks at 100% but tailed off again. He was warned by the college that they would cancel his place on the course if he didn't improve. Other options were discussed with him – changing course or changing college. Despite warnings and support and challenge he was removed from the course in March.

The young person would often agree to trying a strategy that had been discussed such as home tuition or an alternative education placement. He was also offered a place in the tuition class which he agreed to attend on three occasions but never did.

His case was discussed at the 'Top 3 Forum' which is a PSMT forum that considers complex cases from across the People Directorate. The VSHT referred the case for discussion with a wider group of professionals. Many discussions took place with the social worker. It was decided that the best strategy would be to support the young person into an appropriate job at this time. Again, he agreed to go for interviews and start work but failed to do so.

More recently his new social worker has tried to arrange a course through the Prince's Trust and the VSHT and AD are planning to go visit the young person to try to find out what we can do to further support him.

Exclusions: There was just one fixed term exclusion this year. In the autumn term, one of our students was excluded for one day for a fight. He was being racially taunted in class by another student. The matter was picked up by the social worker and VSHT and discussed in college.

6. The tuition class

As the first term progressed, we had a steady stream of new arrivals. As with most of our young people, they were placed in various parts of London and an initial PEP meeting was set up to assess their skill levels and to decide if they would cope in a local college. The majority had very low English levels. Usually this would trigger a referral for 1-1 tuition. It was decided that it would be better to have a central resource where tuition could take place more consistently.

Working with the head of the adult education service we created a class at the Golden Lane Community Centre which runs every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Two tutors share the delivery of an ESOL course with added enrichment. In addition to the English work they have joined a local library, visited the Museum of London and attended Ballet Black at the Barbican. The idea was for a 'revolving door' provision where young people would attend for 10-12 weeks or until they were ready to join a college local to where they live.

The added advantage was that the class is only a 15-minute walk from the office making it easy for the VSHT and the social workers to visit the group.

Funding for the class has come from the core funding of the Virtual School as no Pupil Premium funds are available for this group as they are all new arrivals aged 16-19.

Discussions are taking place in the new term about how to develop the provision, perhaps to offer more progression through to higher ESOL levels and some vocational work.

7. Enrichment

The VSHT is a member of the City of London 'Family of Schools' which includes the local independent schools and the City of London Academies trust. The VSHT attends the half termly meeting of headteachers. Following a meeting in the autumn term a relationship was established with the City of London School. Discussions between the school and the VSHT led to the creation of an enrichment project.

Before the first session, the VSHT did a briefing for staff and the 6th form pupil volunteers about the group and the journeys they have had to get here as well as about cultural difference.

For 10 weeks in the summer term the young people from the tuition class walked to the school to join volunteers from the lower 6th form for lunch followed by a variety of activities. These included:

- Paired reading
- Science
- Drama
- Art / clay modelling
- Basketball
- Football
- Visit to the Tate Modern
- Film production

The school has been amazingly supportive of the project. The staff and students have given up their time and really committed themselves to welcoming the group each week. Feedback from the school and the young people in the tuition group has been very positive throughout. They have visibly gained confidence whilst developing positive relationships with the school staff and students.

The school produced a video of the project which featured in a celebration lunch at the end of the project. The VSHT has been asked to deliver an assembly to the lower 6th in November to help them understand the nature of the lives the UASC group had before they came to England.

We have started planning a repeat of the project for 2019-20, probably starting after half term – in November. This will depend on the numbers in the tuition class as the current cohort will be going to local colleges and it will depend on the number of new UASC joining before September.

8. PEPs

One of the main ways of engaging with education settings is through the termly PEP (Personal Education Plan) meeting. These take place when the young person arrives or comes into care to the City of London. An initial PEP is carried out followed by termly reviews. If there is a change of education setting there will be a PEP within two weeks of the move.

During the year the VSHT re-designed the PEP process and forms used to make them more user friendly and easier to focus on the things that make a PEP into a useful document.

A PEP has three components:

- The meeting itself
- The document produced
- The actions taken between PEPs.

All the above are equally important.

What makes for an Outstanding PEP meeting?

The meeting needs to have:

- the right people in attendance;
 - the social worker
 - a senior / knowledgeable person from the education setting
 - the foster carer / key worker
 - the young person
 - an interpreter if necessary
 - the Head of the Virtual School – not essential but desirable
- the right information
 - Basic info about the YP

- info about the courses being studied – where relevant.
- attendance info
- behaviour info – positive and negative
- attainment data – recent
- progress information
- a photocopy of a sample of handwritten work

The discussion needs to include, in enough detail to address issues fully,

- attendance and exclusions
- behaviour
- relationships with staff and peers
- data on attainment and progress
- what's going well?
- What's not going well?
- A review of previously agreed actions and targets
- A discussion about new actions and targets that will help boost the YPs education performance
- A discussion about the Pupil Premium or Education Bursary where relevant
- Set the date and time of the next meeting

What makes for an outstanding PEP document?

- All the above information is recorded in as much detail as possible that makes sense for the reader.
- All the relevant sections are completed
- The voice of the Young Person is heard and noted
- Samples of written work are included.
- There is a clear plan for what should be done to support the YP to make positive outcomes

What makes for outstanding actions?

- All participants know exactly what they must do in the next few weeks
- All actions are completed in good time

Since changing the PEP forms and process the quality of the PEPs has improved. There is still room for more improvement to ensure that each social worker understands what makes a good SMART target and to ensure they chase up all the actions that were agreed each meeting.

PEPs cover students aged 3-18. Above 18 the VSHT monitors the education section of the Pathway Plans, giving feedback and coaching to social workers around targets, where necessary.

9. Budget

The operating budget for the Virtual School is £14,000 (not including the VSHT salary). In addition, there is a variable amount of Pupil Premium for Looked After Children. This is determined by the number of young people in care aged 4-16 in January. This year the additional figure was just over £6,000.

The vast majority of this is spent on tuition – either individual or the local class. Some goes on resources. This year the VSHT purchased ‘Nimbl’ tablet computers pre-loaded with interactive software to help the young people practice skills at home. Another useful resource was the purchase of a visual English dictionary and some Arabic-English dictionaries for the tuition class and anyone else who needed them.

The tuition class is an expensive resource although it offers better value for money than having many individual tutors. For the class to run from November to July 2019-20 will require an extra source of funds. This will be a priority in the early part of 2019-20.

10. Celebration event

It is important to celebrate the achievement of our young people. In July an event was put on where over 20 students were nominated for an award. Nominations came from social workers, tutors, carers, key workers and other staff.

A room was booked in Tower Bridge and a nice lunch was enjoyed by students, members and staff. Certificates were given out and the young people were proud to receive them.

Next year a venue large enough to include carers and key workers will be a priority.

Some notable successes:

- A young person who spends his free time studying dictionaries and reading simple English books so that his skills can develop. There is already a noticeable improvement in Yousif’s English. He attends classes five times a week with the Refugee Council and puts a massive amount of effort in to learning. Yousif sets a wonderful example of how to make the most of all resources provided.
- A young person who became pregnant when she was at college. She was in hospital for a month before the baby was born prematurely and the baby was in hospital for two months after so she took a break from learning for a year and a half to care for her daughter. She returned to college in September and has not missed a day since. This year she has passed Functional Skills level 2 in English and Maths. She has high aspirations to eventually train to be a secondary school teacher. She has worked hard to care for her daughter and pursue her learning.
- One young person has passed a level 3 Diploma in Jewellery Making which is an A-level equivalent course.

11. Priorities for 2019-20

- The VSHT plans to launch a ‘Corporate Parent Education Champions’ project with members and across the directorate, initially. I am keen to encourage a better understanding of our young people and the issues they face right across the Corporation. I want our young people to be considered first for possible work experience or apprenticeships or jobs. I want all directorates to understand that we have looked after young people and care leavers who have suffered tremendous hardship on their journey into our care and that decisions made across the Corporation should prioritise them and promote their achievement and wellbeing.
- PEPs can always be improved to make them a ‘live’ document that is an indispensable tool to promote better outcomes for our young people.

- There will be discussions with the adult education team to plan how we can develop the tuition class into a provision that can meet the needs of a wider range of UASC students. If we can secure some funding, we can expand it to offer ESOL progression from *entry levels* 1, 2 and 3 through to ESOL levels 1 and 2
- To develop the relationship with the City of London School in order to expand the enrichment programme so it runs for more than 10 weeks and more closely supports better outcomes for our UASC students.

Andrew Russell
September 2019