

- The Children and Families Act (2014) placed a statutory duty on local authorities in the UK to establish a Virtual School Headteacher. The Virtual School is **not an online learning environment**: they do not teach pupils. Instead, it **monitors the education of Children in Care (CiC)** to ensure that they have the “**maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential**”.
- The Virtual School also provides advice, support and guidance to Care Leavers, Children with a Social Worker and Children Previously Looked After.
- Virtual School Education Advisers (EAs) are linked to specific schools and settings, and any CiC in these settings make up their ‘tutor group’. **Their role is to oversee the quality of education being provided for the children and young people (CYP) in their tutor group** by providing advice, guidance, signposting and support to the team around the CYP as well as quality assuring Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Each EA has around 60-70 CYP in their tutor group, ranging from EYFS children up to Post-16.
- Below is an example day of an EA. As each EA oversees a range of CYP with different ages, strengths, needs and life contexts, every single day is different. The EA will also be receiving and responding to communications from multi-agency partners and foster carers to provide advice, guidance, signposting and support. *Please note that the examples are based on real events but have been altered to maintain confidentiality.*

9 AM	New to Care PEP meeting
10 AM	Meeting with new Designated Teacher
11 AM	PEP meeting: Year 7 specialist provision

- All CiC must have a care plan, of which the **Personal Education Plan (PEP)** is part. *For a child new to care and of statutory school age, the first PEP meeting should be held within 20 days of them coming into care. For a child placed in emergency care, the first PEP meeting should be held within 10 working days of them coming into care.*
- The PEP will follow the pupil through their education and includes: a record of progress and academic achievement; their strengths; any special needs; areas for improvement; clear goals; and identification of agencies involved and responsible.
- The **CYP's Social Worker is responsible for arranging PEP meetings**, including the New to Care PEP. The PEP is part of the care plan, and therefore the statutory guidance is clear that the social worker is the lead professional as they usually have parental responsibility.
- The child will be placed into an EA's tutor group once they come into care. **The EA will attend the New to Care PEP to offer advice and guidance** and facilitate the completion of the PEP.

*In this meeting, the child was remaining in the school they had been attending prior to coming into care. The school had not previously had any CiC, and therefore the Designated Teacher (DT) was quite uncertain of the process. The EA therefore explained each section of the PEP documentation, as well as providing prompts to the DT to ensure that the targets set were SMART and were focussed on supporting the pupil's educational progress. The EA also provided support around writing the documentation using Language that Cares, for example writing about the child having 'time with their family' rather than 'contact' and living in a 'home with foster family' rather than 'placement'.*

- The role of the DT is a statutory requirement in England. **Each school must have a DT** who has the responsibility of promoting the educational achievement of any CiC on roll.
- EAs aim to provide advice, guidance and support to their DTs.** This can look like signposting them to relevant agencies and information; supporting them to consider effective uses of Pupil Premium Plus Funding (PP+); and ensuring that they understand how to complete the PEP documentation to a high standard. Turnover of staff in schools can be high, which can mean that DTs are often new to the role and benefit from the support of EAs to develop their understanding. Maintaining frequent communication and relationships between EAs and DTs is important to facilitate effective support for CiC.
- The Virtual School provides training for all DTs to support them in their understanding of the role, and in their understanding of how to support CiC in their education. EAs make DTs aware of the training that is available each year and how they can access it.

*In this meeting, the DT asked the EA if they could apply for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for a pupil. **EAs can not apply for an EHCP.** They can support the DT to understand the processes involved, but as they do not hold parental responsibility, and they do not have first-hand knowledge of the pupil's daily school experiences, they cannot make the application. The EA therefore signposted the DT to the SEND casework team and explained the EHCP process.*

- PEP meetings are held three times a year: one in each school term, Autumn, Spring and Summer. **The Social Worker and the DT (or another school representative) must attend for a PEP to be compliant. The Social Worker should have arranged the meeting.** Foster carers are also invited, and the child or young person is encouraged to attend. **EAs attend as many PEPs as they can, prioritising those where professionals feel more advice and guidance is needed.**
- In Gloucestershire, PEPs are completed on an online ePEP system called IRIS. Prior to the meeting, the DT pre-populates the ePEP document with as much detail as possible. The Social Worker pre-populates Section 2. The child or young person completes the student voice section. **The ePEP document forms the basis for the discussion in the meeting, where the child or young person's progress is reviewed, SMART targets are set, and PP+ funding is discussed.**

*In this meeting, the DT discussed how, previously, the pupil was struggling with the transition into a new school as they hadn't yet formed relationships with their peers. This was starting to impact on their education, as their attendance and engagement were dropping. The EA had suggested a block of sessions of extracurricular teambuilding, where the pupil selected some classmates to join them. This linked to the pupil's educational progress as it was hoped that if they felt an increased sense of belonging in school, their attendance and engagement would improve. At this PEP meeting, the impact of the intervention was reviewed: the pupil now had some friends in the class, was attending more and was completing classwork. The EA gently challenged the school on how they planned to maintain this positive social progress now the intervention had ended, as they had not recorded any plans for this in the ePEP and the child's pupil voice made it clear that this was important to them. The action planning for this pupil then centred around social opportunities that could be provided within school, including facilitated group work in lessons and planned opportunities for social activities such as playing board games in the school day.*

	📁 Case discussion with Educational Psychology Service
1 PM	PEP meeting: 17 year old at Alternative Provision (UASC)
2 PM	
3 PM	Education Meeting: Year 4 mainstream
4 PM	Quality Assurance of PEP documentation

EAs can access slots to discuss cases with link members of the Educational Psychology Service. These meetings are on a no-named basis and provide an opportunity for the EA to discuss further advice, guidance and support that could be offered in school. They can then feed this information back to the school.

- An Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child enters the UK without an adult family member or guardian in this country, and they are therefore placed into the care of the Local Authority. Initially they are not attending an educational setting. **It is not the role of the Virtual School to secure a school place for any Child in Care. The holder of parental responsibility must do this – usually this is the Social Worker. The Virtual School can provide advice and guidance around searching for an appropriate setting if required**, as it will be important to ensure that the setting will be able to support the CYP's language needs and offer courses at an accessible level.
- Once a setting has been identified, **the Virtual School can provide advice, guidance and training to settings around how to support UASC young people**. The CYP will also become part of an EA's tutor group so that they can monitor and advocate for their education as they do for their other CiC.
- The CYP should be invited to their PEP meeting. Where they wish to attend, an interpreter should be invited to the meeting if required. **It is the duty of the social worker to invite all required professionals to the PEP meeting including the interpreter.**

*In this meeting, the young person was completing an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) qualification at a training provider. The young person had expressed an interest in moving to another city where a family member had recently become a CiC. Previously, their plan had been to attend a local college to complete entry level qualifications. The EA emphasised the importance of thinking about their next steps in education when considering a move. She explained that it would be important for them to explore college provision in the new city, to understand if they would be able to accommodate qualifications at their current level. As they were 17, the EA emphasised the importance of having a plan in place around their future education as they would be leaving care. The young person agreed and expressed that they would like some support to plan and explore this, so this was implemented into the SMART targets that were written into the PEP.*

- Although PEP meetings are held 3 times a year, **the Personal Education Plan itself is meant to be a live, evolving document – it should be seen as an ongoing process that is evaluated frequently**. The multi-agency professionals around the child or young person should be taking steps to ensure that the plan is being implemented, and progress is being monitored and reviewed throughout the year.
- Therefore, if a CYP is struggling significantly or there are changes in their circumstances, it may be appropriate to hold regular Education Meetings to consider their progress and changing needs. **EAs aim to attend these meetings where their advice, guidance and support would be supportive..**

*In this meeting, the pupil had been attending the school for just over 2 years whilst living with a local foster carer. The foster carer was no longer able to provide a home, however, and the child was living with a new foster carer who lived an hour from the school. The child had been living with their new foster carer for 3 months and had found the change in their life unsettling, which had led to some withdrawn behaviour and lack of engagement in school. In the past month, however, with ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) work, the pupil seemed more settled and was starting to engage in school again. The Social Worker had wanted to initiate a school move, to a setting closer to the new home. When this was raised in*

*the education meeting, the EA provided gentle challenge to the idea that the child should be moved now. The discussion centred around how they had only just reached a new period of stability again, and that a move would likely impact negatively on their engagement with education. The DT highlighted how the pupil had expressed the desire to stay at the school. It was therefore agreed that it would be in the child's best interests to remain in the setting for at least the rest of the academic year, to continue the positive progress and adjust to their new living arrangements with the school as familiar, stable place. Whilst there can be a lot of instability in the life of CiC, the Virtual School aims to facilitate stability in education wherever possible.*

- The DT ensures that the ePEP is completed with any updates from the PEP meeting and submits it to the EA within one week of the meeting. **The EA then quality assures each section of the ePEP to make sure that it is completed correctly and in sufficient detail to accurately reflect the child's educational journey and plan next steps.**
- The EA needs to Quality Assure the PEPs for each pupil in their tutor group, regardless of whether they attended the PEP meeting. **If the EA finds any areas in the ePEP that do not meet the expected standard, they will communicate this to the DT** so that they can amend them. **The aim of the Quality Assurance process is not to judge, but rather to support professionals to ensure that the plans they are writing for CiC are high-quality, useful and effective documents that tell the story of the child's education and plan for progress and opportunity.**
- The focus during the Quality Assurance process is on ensuring that the plan:
  - *is a comprehensive record of the child's education*
  - *is linked to other plans in place for the child (e.g. their care plan or EHCP) to ensure joined-up working*
  - *identifies developmental and educational needs in the short and long term, related to skills, knowledge, subject areas and experiences*
  - *includes SMART targets in the form of both short-term targets and longer-term plans for educational aspirations*
  - *identifies actions for specific individuals to complete to enable progress towards the targets*
  - *champions a personalised approach to the CiC's learning to meet their educational needs, raise their aspirations and build their life chances*
- During the PEP meeting, the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) budget for the pupil will have been discussed and the DT will make a funding request detailing how they wish to use the money. The PP+ can be used to facilitate a wide range of educational support for CiC. It is important that interventions supported by PP+ are evidence-based and in the best interests of the child. There is statutory guidance about what the funding cannot be used for, including funding school places, transport or uniform. **The EA checks that the funding request is appropriate; that it links to one of the pupil's outcomes; and that it is targeted towards supporting the pupil educationally.**