

# include YOUTH

**Response to the  
Heenan-Anderson Independent Commission  
Call for Submissions**

**‘How Social Clauses can be used to tackle employment related  
inequality experienced by Care Leavers’**

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## **Include Youth**

Include Youth is an independent, human rights based non-governmental organisation with over 30 years' experience in actively promoting the rights, best interests of and best practice with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. We work across Northern Ireland and have offices in 6 different locations. We provide a range of employability programmes and services as well as engaging in policy advocacy work in the areas of youth employability and youth justice, all with the aim of addressing the significant inequalities experienced by young people in or leaving care.

In addition to our core programmes we are contracted to deliver employability services for care leavers age 16 plus by two of the five Health and Social Care Trusts. We also work in collaboration with a number of community organisations working in disadvantaged areas to deliver employability programmes for marginalised young people.

Over the last few decades Include Youth has built up considerable practice and policy expertise around what works most effectively in improving the situation for young care leavers, and this response is directly informed by that experience and expertise.

## **Introductory comments**

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Heenan-Anderson Independent Commission. While there are a range of policy options that can be utilised to address the inequalities experienced by care leavers, including tailored, youth work based vocational training programmes with clear progression pathways into mainstream provision and the use of mentors to name but a few, we wish to use this submission to expand on one specific proposal we shared at the Speak Out Event on 22 January held in the Ulster University York Street Campus.

**This proposal centres around exploiting the potential provided through the use- of social clauses in public procurement to address the significant employment related inequalities experienced by care leavers. It's about ensuring that the Programme for Government commitment, to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts can be made to deliver for care leavers as one of the most disadvantaged groups in our society.**

## **Inequalities experienced by care leavers**

The majority of young people we work with and for are in or leaving care or are on the edges of the care system. Despite positive efforts made by DHSSPS, DEL, DOJ and OFMDFM amongst other government departments, the outcomes being achieved by care experienced young people in education, training and employment compare very unfavourably with their peers in the general population. Care leavers experience significant levels of inequality across a range of domains. Latest DHSSPS<sup>1</sup> statistics show that:

- Just under a quarter ( 19%) of care leavers had been subject to a Statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) compared with 4% of the general school population
- 12% of the population of 16-18 year old care leavers have a disability compared to 6% of that age group in the general population
- Only 21% of young people from a care background obtained 5 GCSEs ( grades A\* -C) or higher, compared with 79% of general school leavers
- The proportion of care leavers leaving school with no qualifications was 28%, over 15 times that for the general school population
- 16% of all 19 year olds were parents, compared to 4% of all young people that age.
- 23% of 16-18 year olds and 36% of 19 year olds are NEET. This compares unfavourably with 14.8% or 32,000 of all 16-24 year olds for period April – June 2014. It is worth noting that overall levels of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland have remained stubbornly high.

There is also a strong correlation between levels of deprivation and being taken into care. DHSSPS data reveals that for those children where geographical information was available, a higher proportion had been living in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland before last entry into care (44%) than after leaving care (35%). Further analysis showed that half the care leavers (50%) were living in an area of same deprivation rank when leaving care as before last entry into care. Furthermore, one fifth (21%) had moved into an area ranked of higher deprivation whereas a slightly larger proportion (28%) had moved into areas ranked with less deprivation.

Unsurprisingly then, given the levels of underlying deprivation and the barriers they experience in education, training and employment, evidence also shows that care experienced young people are over represented in the youth justice and criminal justice systems : approximately one in three young people in custody are from a care background.

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<sup>1</sup> DHSSPS ( 2015) NI Care Leavers Statistical Bulletin 2013-2014 ( January 2015)

## **The cost of social exclusion of young care leavers**

The cost to the individual young person of being 'NEET' is extremely high, with research evidencing higher levels of mental health problems, social isolation, political alienation, lower earnings and wage scarring over a lifetime. The recently released Prince's Trust Macquarie Index 2015 found that more than half of unemployed young people felt anxious about everyday situations, with over 30% feeling too anxious to leave the house.<sup>2</sup>

The particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, as a society emerging from conflict, without question contributes an additional dynamic that all too often impacts negatively on the daily lives of vulnerable young people in particular.

There is also a very significant wider social and economic cost to society as a whole. These costs include loss of potential tax revenues, increase in social welfare payments, increased costs to the health, housing and criminal justice systems amongst others. The AVECO Commission on Youth Unemployment calculated the net value of cost to the Treasury for the decade ahead to be £28 billion.<sup>3</sup>

## **Using social clauses is a socially responsible, cost saving proposal**

There are clearly both ethical and economic reasons why time and effort should be invested in developing the most effective solutions to the issue of youth unemployment amongst care leavers.

Key arguments in favour include:

- 1) The number of young care leavers who are currently not in education, training or employment, while constituting a disproportionate percentage of the overall population of young people who are NEET, is not huge.** At the end of March 2013 there were a total of 1238 care leavers aged 16-21 years in Northern Ireland.<sup>4</sup> Approximately one third of this total number was classified as not in education, training or employment (NEET) i.e. 412 young people.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/PDF/Youth\\_Index\\_2015\\_Report.PDF](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/PDF/Youth_Index_2015_Report.PDF)

<sup>3</sup> AVECO (2012) Youth Unemployment: the Crisis we Cannot Afford

<sup>4</sup> <sup>4</sup> DHSSPS (2014) NI Care Leavers Aged 16-18 2012/13 and DHSSPS (2014) NI Care Leavers Aged 19 2012/13, This overall figure can be broken down into 263 aged 16-18, 175 aged 19 and 800 aged 19-21.

- 2) This proposal has neutral cost implications for the Executive’s budget**, as all additional costs in terms of management, recruitment and ongoing support and mentoring of care leavers would be provided by the Health Services Employability Services.

On the basis of a Social Return on Investment calculation carried out by Include Youth, at the very minimum it could save the government upwards on £4 million per annum.<sup>5</sup>

- 3) Based on our research and consultations to date we believe that the insertion of social clauses in all NI Health and Social Care contracts could go a long way to ensuring that the NI Executive meets its target of having 75% of care leavers in sustainable education, training and employment.** As their corporate parent the Department of Health has the legal responsibility, delegated to the five Health and Social Care Trusts to support care leavers through education and training and into sustainable employment.

- 4) The use of social clauses to this end can also enhance the integration of the Executive’s procurement policy with other relevant Executive’s policies**, thereby delivering on government’s statutory obligations in respect of this group of vulnerable young people. The relevant policy frameworks includes DHSSPS (2007)Care Matters, NI Executive’s (2012) Pathways to Success: Preventing Exclusion and Promoting Participation of Young People, DEL/DHSSPS (2009) Promoting Positive Outcomes in Education, Training and Employment for Care Leavers: Regional Guidance, the NI Executive’s Delivering Social Change agenda and the (forthcoming) NI Economic Inactivity Strategy.

### **What’s happened to date?**

EU and domestic legal and policy frameworks make it clear that the use of public procurement to deliver social value is an entirely legal and valid objective for contracting authorities in Northern Ireland. Equally at the domestic level, government guidance from the Department of Finance and Personnel’s Central Procurement Directorate endorses the use of public procurement to contribute positively to the delivery of greater equality and social inclusion as well as broader sustainability goals.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed analysis can be provided on request

<sup>6</sup> CPD’s Procurement Guidance Note ‘Integrating Social Considerations into Contracts’ notes that it is widely acknowledged that “*public procurement can contribute positively to the delivery of greater equality and social inclusion as well as broader sustainability goals*”. The joint ECNI /CPD guidance on Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement, which the CPD Guidance note references, underscores the necessity for the approach to equality of opportunity to

Yet despite apparent legal clarity and political consensus on how to incorporate social/community benefits in the guidance from the EU, the UK government and the devolved administration, it is common to experience a tendency towards a rather minimalist, narrow interpretation of guidance. This is understandable, but can also cause innovation and progress to stifle - which in turn inhibits the development of practice and the achievement of outcomes for vulnerable groups such as care leavers.

A small number of social clauses have been inserted into Health and Social Care contracts to date, but this has happened on a small scale, ad hoc basis without the high level endorsement or consistency which would be preferable.

### **Our recommendations**

- 1)** A review of Social Clauses is due to be undertaken. We believe that the potential of social clauses to deliver employment related outcomes for this specific group of marginalised young people should be explored and addressed as part of that review.
- 2)** On the basis of the reasoning set out in this paper we would wish to see the insertion of social clause requirement in all Health and Social Care contracts specifically on behalf of young people in care.
- 3)** Social Clauses have the potential to deliver equality outcomes not only for care leavers, but also for other disadvantaged and vulnerable communities across Northern Ireland – these include the long term unemployed who are concentrated geographically in those areas most heavily affected by the conflict, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic communities and young people generally.
- 4)** We are recommending that in its final report the Heenan-Anderson Commission highlights and endorses the potential of social clauses to deliver equality outcomes for the benefit of care leavers and other groups of people in our society who are experiencing enduring inequality.

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be active, *'with policy and decision makers and practitioners **seeking out opportunities to promote equality of opportunity and sustainable development**'*<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added).