

ACRCG's response to Ofsted consultation on proposals for a new judgement on the experiences and progress of care leavers to be included in our local authority children's services (ILACS) inspection framework 29th July 2022

Please tell us in which capacity you are completing this survey:

The Access to Care Records Campaign Group (ACRCG) is made up of a multi-disciplinary group of individuals who have had long-term professional involvement with care experienced people. Some of them also have personal experience of being a care leaver. One of our aims is to ensure that care experienced people are able to access social care records in order to have comprehensive information about their family background, the circumstances of their coming into care and their time in care. We believe there should be specific legislation that addresses the information and support needs, across the life course, of care experienced people. In the meantime, we believe that existing policy and legislation should be implemented with far greater sensitivity to the specific information needs of care leavers.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to introduce a separate new judgement within ILACS: 'The experiences and progress of care leavers'?

This change is crucial to increasing support for, and understanding of, the experiences and information needs of both young care leavers and care experienced adults. A new judgement that takes a lifelong perspective on the needs of care leavers will allow for more in-depth information to be gathered, particularly in relation to care experienced people who make a subject access request. As we understand it, statistical information about who applies for subject access requests and how these have been responded to, as well as how the care experienced person has evaluated their service, is sparse and is something of a postal lottery.

What are the most important factors for us to take into account when setting out what good looks like for care leavers? When responding to this question, please also consider how these factors will affect our evaluation criteria for 'the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families'

This is an important question that care leavers need to be consulted about, so that accurate information is gathered about 'what good looks like' for care leavers. The ACRCG considers that there should be a commitment to continued support, once files have been accessed, and to accessible information about where care leavers can access this support. Statistics should also be gathered and made available on whether support offered is taken up and, if not, why not. This should include data on why care leavers request their files and why they request support, so that service responses can be improved and developed over time.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce the new judgement from January 2023, after all local authorities have had at least one ILACS judgement inspection?

It is crucial to implement the new judgement as soon as possible, in order to enhance services to care experienced adults under 25. With respect to care files access, we would also strongly advocate this be viewed as a lifelong requirement. The benchmark for good practice to improve access to

records for all is set out in the 2014 revision of the Children Act guidance/regulations Vol 3: planning transition to adulthood pp 36-43. This recognises that care leaver support on files access now extends to the age of 25. It also sets out clear expectations in this area of work. However, it also expects, “the principles of good practice on accessing records to apply to any care leaver regardless of age” (section 4.27). Whatever the legal hurdles, this benchmark for services should be used when inspecting care experienced services in this specific area of support for care leavers, both under and over the age of 25, when accessing their care files.