

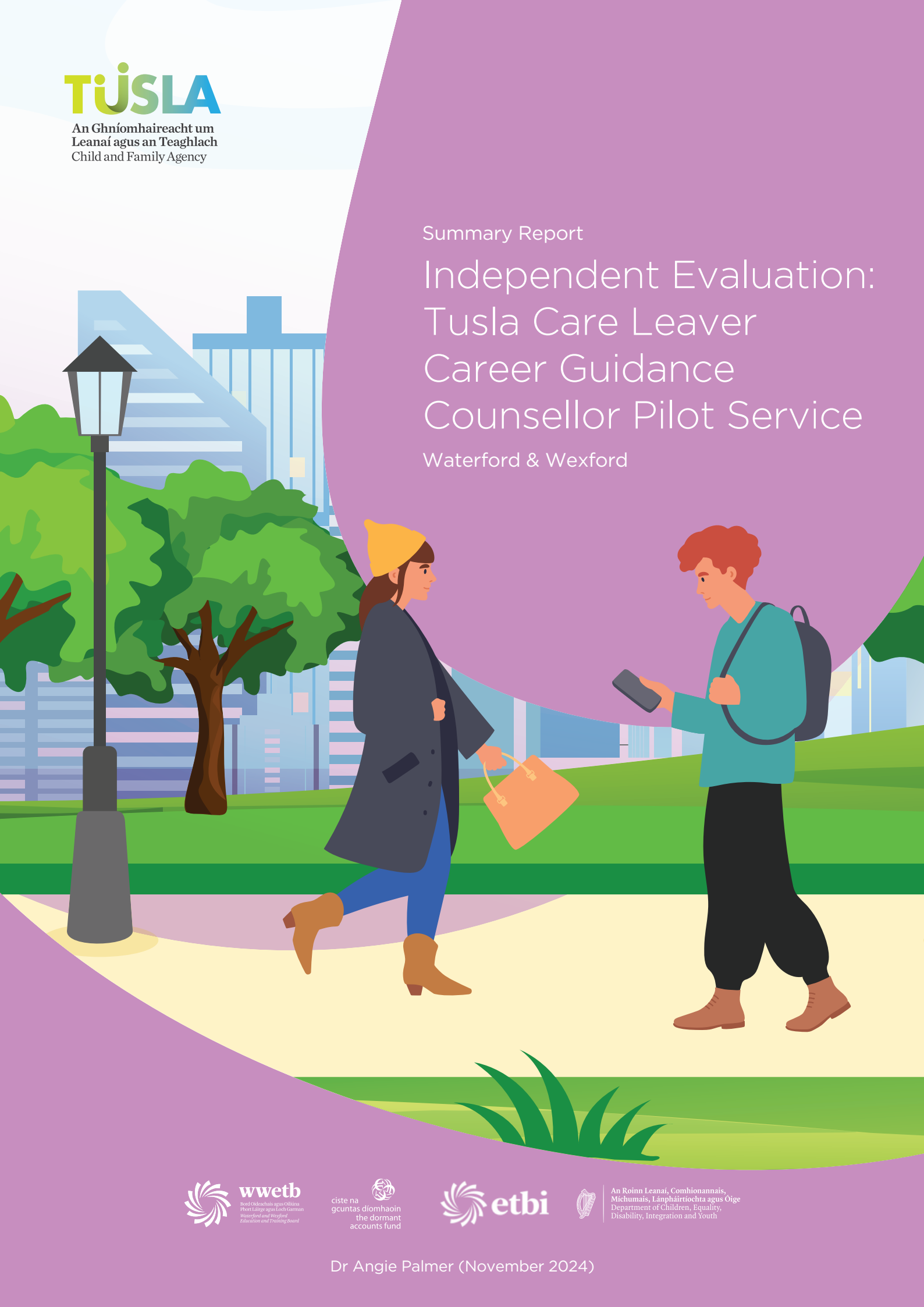


An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

Summary Report

# Independent Evaluation: Tusla Care Leaver Career Guidance Counsellor Pilot Service

Waterford & Wexford



**wweth**  
Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna  
Phoirt Láirge agus Loch Garraí  
Waterford and Wexford  
Education and Training Board

  
ciste na  
gcuntas diomhaoin  
the dormant  
accounts fund



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

Dr Angie Palmer (November 2024)

# Abbreviations

<b>CSO</b>	Central Statistics Office
<b>CGC</b>	Career Guidance Counsellor
<b>DAF</b>	Dormant Accounts Fund
<b>DARE</b>	Disability Access Route to Education
<b>DCEDIY</b>	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
<b>DFHERIS</b>	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
<b>DHLGH</b>	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
<b>DRCD</b>	Department of Rural and Community Development
<b>EPIC</b>	Empowering People in Care
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Boards
<b>FETC</b>	Further Education and Training Centres
<b>HEAR</b>	Higher Education Access Route
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institute
<b>PLC</b>	Post Leaving Certificate
<b>Reach</b>	Support programme for disadvantaged learners in education
<b>SUSI</b>	Student Universal Support Ireland
<b>SICAP</b>	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
<b>TESS</b>	Tusla Education Support Service
<b>Tusla</b>	The child and family agency, Ireland
<b>W/Wex</b>	Waterford and Wexford
<b>WWETB</b>	Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board

**Disclaimer**

The views, results, conclusions and recommendations detailed in this summary report are strictly those of the author. The evaluation was carried out independently of Tusla, which takes no responsibility for any omissions, errors or inaccuracies of information therein.

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# Introduction

This summary report provides an overview of the key insights from an independent evaluation of the Tusla care leaver career guidance pilot, carried out in the context of a service improvement perspective.<sup>1</sup> Funded through the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) *Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) Action Plan, 2021*,<sup>2</sup> the pilot operated in Waterford and Wexford (W/Wex) between March 2022 and September 2023. It was initiated by Tusla Aftercare Services and Tusla Education Support Services (TESS), in close collaboration with Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB). The Tusla career guidance counsellor (CGC) service (W/Wex) provided guidance to young people aged between 16 and 22 years (inclusive) and was initiated to support care leavers to access further education and training through a structured career guidance service. Its purpose was to answer a recognised need for bespoke career guidance for care leavers transitioning from the care system into further and higher education, training and/or employment.

This summary report presents the key results of the main evaluation report which involved interviews (n = 10) and survey responses (n = 20) with young people who used the service, supplemented by interviews with key informant professionals (n = 11). An interview with the guidance counsellor who carried out the pilot service (W/Wex) was also included to provide key insights into the operation, management and delivery of the pilot service. The evaluation used the Logic Model (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004) to systematically collect and record information about service objectives, activities, progress, outputs and outcomes, and to inform service expansion across Tusla regions. The evaluation was granted Tusla ethical approval and was finalised in June 2024.

<sup>1</sup> The results reported in this summary report are taken from the internal report by the same author, entitled *Independent Evaluation Report: Tusla Care Leaver Career Guidance Counsellor Pilot Service, Waterford-Wexford* which answered an action of the *Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for Young People and Young Adults 2023-2024*. The internal report was circulated across the DCEDIY and Tusla, in August 2024, with the purpose to inform Tusla Regional Career Guidance Service development planning.

<sup>2</sup> The Plan approved funding for a dedicated career guidance counsellor pilot service, to be administered by Tusla, under the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

# Context for Pilot Initiation

Existing literature points to the need for targeted and specialised support services for young people leaving care. Such support should recognise the unique position some of these young people experience in relation to limited informal social support networks and the pressures of transitioning to independent adulthood at younger ages than their non-care peers (Palmer et al, 2022).

A defining theme from the current literature elucidates that adequate holistic support networks implemented over time can counteract the challenges care leavers face in accessing third level qualifications and employment. For example, systemic support systems which offer a 'safety net' to give them time and resources to try different paths (Goebel et al, 2021) before settling on the right career/ education pathway. In contrast to peers in the wider population, care leavers have to make life-long education and career decisions with limited life experience and less opportunity for phases of trial and error (Brady and Gilligan, 2020).

The Central Statistics Offices (CSO) *Educational Attendance and Attainment of Children in Care, 2018-2023* report, published in 2023, provided some useful insight into the challenges for care experienced children and young peoples' continued progression in

school and in further/ higher education when compared with their peers in the wider population. Future iterations of the above CSO report, in addition to the outputs from the DCEDIY-Tusla *Care Experiences Programme*<sup>3</sup>, launched in 2022, will likely provide more learning for policy and service improvements, in the forthcoming years.

National and international literature has also highlighted how adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse and neglect, can have lasting impacts on an individual's later life experience in various psycho-social domains, such as isolation, depression, difficulty trusting others, stigma, self-harm and re-victimization (Prince et al, 2019; Curry and Abrams, 2015; Daly, 2012; Biehal et al, 2010; Cashmore and Paxman, 2006). These early experiences can often negatively impact other pathway domains such as access to education, level of employment, health, mental health, substance abuse, involvement with the justice system and early parenting (Courtney et al.: 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Pecora et al., 2005; Courtney et al., 2001). Existing knowledge must, however, be understood in the context of limited data in Ireland concerning the experiences and outcomes of care leavers across a range of domains, including education and career pathways (DCEDIY, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> For further information on the *Care Experiences Programme* see <https://www.gov.ie/CareExperiences/>

A number of authors, across the literature reviewed, highlight the benefits of adequate and timely Aftercare planning, provision of social and practical support, educational service engagement, trusted relationships and inter-agency working as intrinsic for care leavers successful transition to independent adulthood (Taylor *et al*, 2021; Townsend *et al*, 2020; Glynn and Mayock, 2019; Daly 2012). Evaluation of these services is also key to continued service improvement (DCEDIY, 2023; Clarke and Eustace, 2010).

# Policy, Legislative and Service Context

Tusla Aftercare and affiliated agencies provide financial and other support services to assist eligible young people in preparing to leave care and transition to independent adult life. Since 2017, through the commencement of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015, dedicated Aftercare Services Teams have been established in each Tusla operational area. Important in the context of this evaluation is the 2023 publication of Tusla's *Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for Young People and Young Adults 2023-2026*.<sup>4</sup> The development of the Strategic Plan involved wide consultation with over 350 key stakeholders. The Strategy recognised the importance of the Tusla career guidance pilot and recommended that the service be evaluated to inform any expansion of the service nationwide (Tusla, 2023: *Recommendation 6.4.2*).

The ongoing review of the Child Care Act 1991 is also important in the context of this evaluation as it is the primary legislation for the protection and welfare of children in Ireland. The Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2023 seeks to revise and update the 1991 Act to reflect the changes in child welfare and protection services and

capture current legislative, practice and policy developments.<sup>5</sup> Section 45 of the 1991 Act stipulates that social services *may* provide Aftercare assistance to a young person, in cases where Tusla is satisfied that the young person needs those services. It also provided for an extension to the upper age limit, to 23 years, if the young person is in education or accredited training.

In addition to the financial support Tusla provides through the Aftercare Allowance for young people and young adults in accredited education and training, other supports for further education are available. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant, the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and the DCEDIY Dormant Account Funded educational bursary scheme<sup>6</sup> provide financial support for care experienced young people. To support the promotion of school completion prior to aging out of care, Tusla's Education Support Service (TESS), under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, supports school attendance, participation and retention.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Strategic\\_Plan\\_on\\_Aftercare\\_Services\\_for\\_Young\\_Adults-2023-26.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Strategic_Plan_on_Aftercare_Services_for_Young_Adults-2023-26.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> For more information see <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/97d109-review-of-the-child-care-act-1991/>

<sup>6</sup> In 2021, the DCEDIY, in conjunction with Tusla, launched a Dormant Account Funded bursary scheme to fund practical supports for educational and career development through a grant system of up to €5,000 for care experienced young people. Eligible young people must be aged over 18 years, have a minimum of six months care experience and be applying for an educational or training course not funded by the state. The educational bursary has been implemented for subsequent academic years.



Tusla also informally engage with other organisations, such as Education and Training Boards (ETBs), to facilitate care leaver's needs with regards to educational and career progression.

For those young people who can remain living with their foster family on turning 18, the stress of transitioning from state care into Aftercare can be somewhat eased. However, approximately 55% of care leavers since 2017 (Tusla, 2017 to 2022) have not had this option. These young people need multi-faceted support, which requires a cross-agency and whole government approach. Recent policy developments have acknowledged this through a number of developments.

Care leavers are recognised as a priority group in the *National Access Plan, A strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028* published by the Department

of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). The DRCD and Pobal's *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023*<sup>7</sup> recognised care leavers as a target group and initiated inter-agency engagement between local Tusla Aftercare Services and SICAP programme implementers to support care leavers. *The Housing for All Youth Homeless Strategy, 2023-2025* prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) seeks to end homelessness for young people, aged between 18 and 24 years through a variety of measures. This strategy identified care leavers as a vulnerable priority group at *heightened risk of homelessness* (p.44).

These developments recognise the multiple support needs for young care leavers and the importance of cross-departmental and multi-organisational approaches.

<sup>7</sup> SICAP is funded through the DRCD and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion, and Learning.

## Collaborative Context and Implementation of Tusla CGC Pilot Service.

Interagency collaboration was a central component to the successful implementation and delivery of the career guidance pilot service in W/Wex. The WWETB was a key collaborative partner in the initiation and delivery of the pilot. The National Lead for Aftercare Services in Tusla and the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) National Manager provided coordination and operational guidance for pilot service implementation and delivery. The Tusla Aftercare Manager, W/Wex, provided line management to the career guidance counsellor. Pilot service oversight and progress reporting was governed by an inter-agency Steering Committee<sup>8</sup>

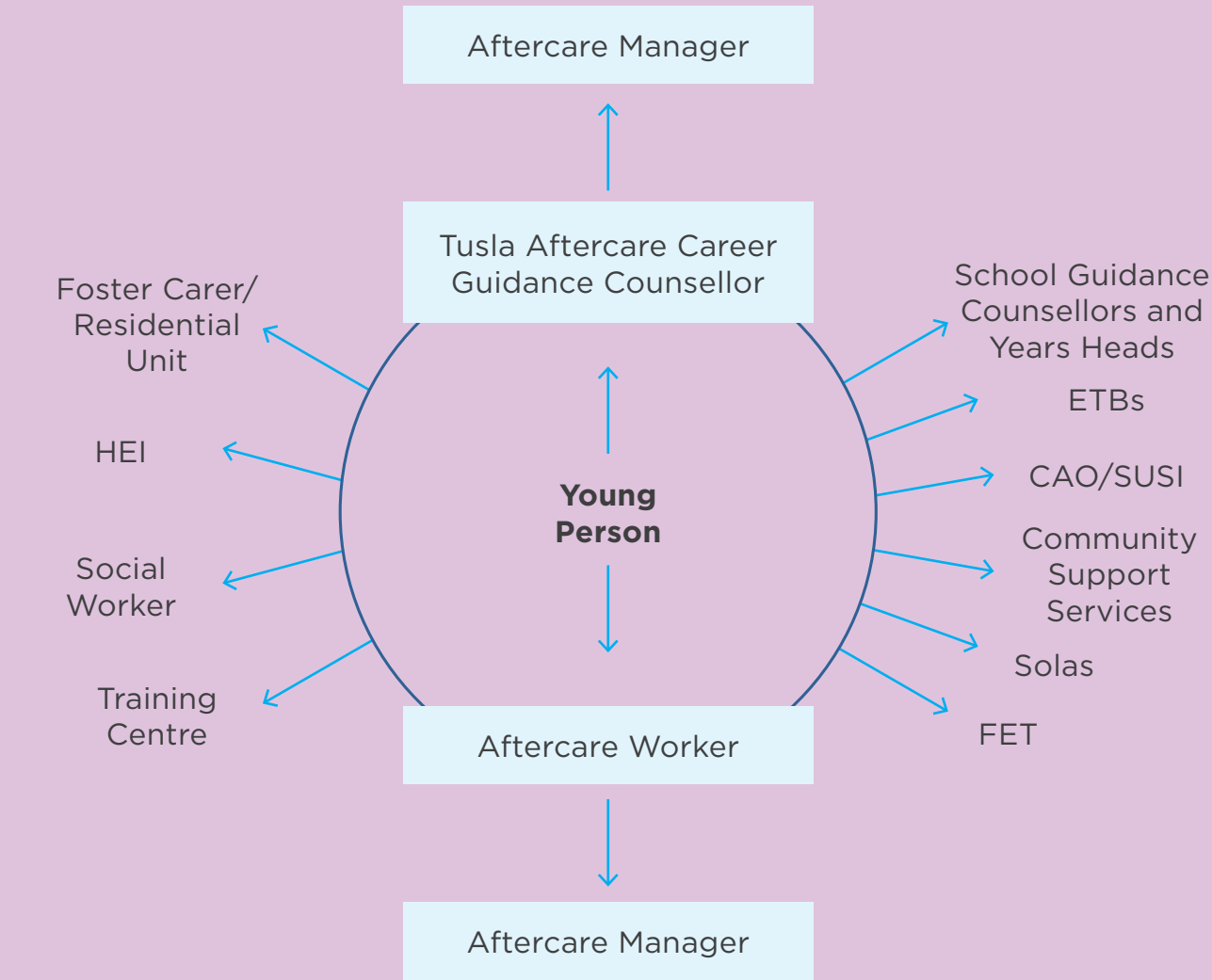
The role of the Tusla CGC in the pilot service was to provide information and support to young people in Aftercare in the Waterford and Wexford area. The counsellor provided one-to-one support and counselling in the following areas:

- administering strengths and interests test,
- providing links to colleges,
- apprenticeship schemes, businesses, youth work skills classes,
- educational welfare services,
- school completion programmes,
- EU funding streams and initiatives and,
- other opportunities to facilitate the care leavers access to employment or education.

Over the course of the pilot delivery a total of 311 meetings and engagements were recorded with young care leavers. It was delivered within a holistic framework (see diagram 1) rooted in inter-agency collaboration and was predominantly led by the educational needs of the young person and their individual circumstances.

<sup>8</sup> The Steering Committee members comprised Tusla Aftercare Managers, Empowering People in Care (EPIC) representatives, WWETB personnel, Further Education Training Centre (FETC) personnel in Waterford and Wexford and a HEI representative.

Diagram 1: Holistic framework of care leaver career guidance pilot service W/Wex



In the event of a national roll-out of the Tusla CGC pilot service to the six regions, it is important to understand the context of the Aftercare service provision at a countrywide level.<sup>9</sup> In quarter 3 of 2023, there were 2,261 young people aged between 18 and 22 years, receiving Aftercare services.

As shown in Table 1, this included 72% of young people aged 18-20 years, 28% aged 21-22 years. There was a 15% (298) increase in the number of young people in receipt of Aftercare services between 2017 and 2023 (Q3), which may be attributable to improvements to Aftercare services over this timeframe.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the reliability of some data presented in this section of the report may be impacted by industrial action (work-to-rule) in effected Tusla grades from October 2023 onwards.

Table 1: Adults aged 18 to 22 years (inclusive) in receipt of Tusla Aftercare services, 2017 to Q3, 2023.

Age group	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (Q3)
18-20 years	-	1,491	1,580	1,613	1,618	1,631	1,621
21-22 years	-	526	528	630	721	623	640
Total	1,963*	2,017	2,108	2,243	2,339	2,254	2,261

\*For 2017, only total figure available for 18-22 years (inclusive).  
Source: Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Services Available, Tusla reports, 2017 to 2022 & Tusla Quarterly Service Performance and Activity Report, Quarter 3, 2023.

Understanding the current educational and career pathways of young people leaving care is also crucial knowledge for the expansion of a Tusla career guidance service nationally. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of young people in Aftercare enrolled in different types of education or accredited training over a four year period, from 2019 to quarter 3, 2023. The data is separated by age category for each year, into

18-20 year olds and 21-23 year olds. For the 18-20 year old cohort, the majority are enrolled in second level education (increase of 5% between 2019 and Q3 2023), PLCs and third level college/ university. For the 21-23 year old cohort, the majority are in third level college/ university, followed by PLCs, with an increased uptake in accredited training (e.g. Solas) in 2022.

**Figure 1: Percentage of 18-20 year olds and 21-22 years (inclusive) in receipt of Aftercare services in education and accredited training, 2019 to Q3, 2023.**



\*Unspecified but includes disability schools.

Source: Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Services Available, Tusla report, 2022 & Tusla Service Performance and Activity Report, Quarter 3, 2023.

Although this data provides an overview of enrolment, it reveals less about outcomes (i.e. course completion rates, course change rates, drop-out rates, etc.). Understanding changes in educational pathways could provide much needed knowledge on how to better tailor educational/career guidance support for young people at this critical juncture in their lives. Evaluation of

these metrics could also provide informative knowledge on educational pathways of young people leaving care which could lead to improved policy and service support responses. However, the next iteration of previously mentioned CSO report, *The Educational Attendance and Attainment of Children in Care*, will likely provide some useful insights.

# Pilot Service Implementation and Delivery

The overarching structure for the pilot service was between the WWETB, Tusla Aftercare Service and TESS. The guidance counsellor reported quarterly progress to the pilot cross-agency Steering Committee. The factors which contributed to the success of the pilot service, as well as key learnings which emerged from the interview with the Tusla GCG, are summarized into seven categories below:

- 1. The link between the Tusla CGC and the Aftercare Team** was instrumental in situations where the Tusla CGC picked up on additional needs for the young people.

I felt that that structure of having the Aftercare Team around me was really good..., if I picked up on anything in a meeting—say, sometimes I picked up on that the young person needs personal counselling. I would go back to the Aftercare Worker. So I never felt like, so where do I go with this?  
(Tusla CGC)

- 2. Pro-active guidance** involved the Tusla GCG actively ensuring progress and engagement, such as providing notes of items discussed in guidance meetings to all attendees, agreeing a follow-up appointment date and time at the end of each meeting and ensuring follow-up of meeting tasks (i.e. Tusla CGC engagement with school staff to support any educational challenges). The pro-active approach was also important to provide agency to the young people by giving them a task for completion before the next meeting, such as reviewing information provided. This approach built a good working relationship.

They had to see that I was invested in them rather than me just loading it all onto them, saying, 'This is what you need to do for your next appointment,' because I just knew it wouldn't work. (Tusla CGC)

- 3. Guidance through the person-centred approach** (Carl Rogers, 1986) was central to the pilot service, whereby a non-judgmental environment facilitates self-exploration and self-understanding, in which the client progresses naturally toward self-actualization. In this manner, the young person was at the centre of the pilot service provision, with the Tusla CGC working with them based on *their* stated goals. The Tusla CGC sometimes worked collaboratively with other professionals,<sup>10</sup> many of whom would already have existing relationships with the young person. This embodied the holistic and person centred approach which the Tusla CGC said,

'was like a collaboration on the [young] person's future plan'.

- 4. Collating guidance data** allowed the Tusla CGC to record service user meetings, track progress and, record tasks completed to support the young person's personal and educational goals. As the number of clients increased over the course of the pilot service, consistent recording of guidance service data facilitated ongoing service evaluation of what was working, what was not working and what needed to be improved.

- 5. Ensuring flexibility in service provision** recognised the multiple other pressures these young people had on their time and created a respectful working relationship. Flexibility, for example, in scheduling meetings at times and in locations which were convenient to the young people and providing multiple platforms for contact, such as WhatsApp, phone call, and/or virtual or face-to-face meetings.

- 6. The optimal age for engagement** with the Tusla career guidance service, recommended by the Tusla CGC, was pre-fifth year, if the young person was engaged with secondary education. From the experience of delivering the W/Wex pilot service, the Tusla CGC felt this provides adequate lead-in time to facilitate informed decision-making.

- 7. In expanding the service nationwide**, the Tusla GCG felt the development of a professional network of Tusla career guidance service providers would encourage knowledge transfer and consistent service provision. Additionally, he recommended that national peer group information sessions, either online or in-person, would benefit young service users across the country to encourage knowledge transfer and support networks.

<sup>10</sup> For example, professionals nominated by the young person to attend these meetings could include a school principal, post-primary co-ordinators, HEI/School/PLC guidance counsellors, relevant Tusla service provider personnel, a carer or HEI representatives.



# Perspectives on Pilot Service Provision from Service Users and Key Professionals

Perspectives on the pilot service provision was gathered from three separate cohorts. Ten young people, aged between 19 and 21 years, who used the service were interviewed (listed as YP1 to YP10). A further 20 young people, aged between 18 and 23 years, completed an anonymous online survey about their experience of the service (listed as SR1 to SR20). Finally, 11 professionals (key informants) working with young people in Aftercare through practice, education and advocacy services were interviewed (listed as KI 1 to KI 11). The evaluation results provided an overview of these perspectives, which in many respects mirrored the learnings drawn from the interview with the Tusla CGC, and are summarised below in six categories.

## 1. Stable guidance at a critical life juncture

One fundamental theme raised centred on the support and security young people leaving care need as they transition to adulthood. Many KI's spoke about the Aftercare allowance being the driver, for many care leavers, behind career and educational choices. Commenting that for some care leavers, the financial incentive to keep the Aftercare allowance often over-rides the decision for choosing an **educational/career pathway appropriate to their skills and future goals**. This can sometimes lead to course dropout rates within a couple of months.

*It followed through that [young care leavers] either weren't ready for or had gone down the road of the completely wrong course and then it was starting to fall apart quite quickly. (KI 3)*

Choosing a course based solely on retaining the Aftercare allowance did not emerge significantly within the interviews with the young people, however, those interviewed did reference the **stability** which the

Tusla CGC represented and how this assisted their decision-making.

*Like, if I didn't [have the Tusla CGC]... I'd be still stuck at the same place and I wouldn't know where to go from there. (YP6)*

*I had another person there [Tusla CGC] and he was always helping me. So it was like a stable thing. Like, it was never unstable. Like, I always had someone there supporting me for education while there was all these different things going on. (YP9)*

## 2. Influence and agency in informed decision-making

The underlying principle of any career guidance service should be to ensure that young people feel they are **active participants in their own lives** and active participants in the conversations that are happening around the circumstances of their lives. For all KI's interviewed, this facet of the pilot service was instrumental to its success.

*I think giving, you know, young people in the care system the opportunity to articulate what it is they want for themselves can only be a positive thing. (KI5)*

The Tusla CGC was seen as a facilitator by service users encouraging them to be **decisional drivers in their future life**, within a positive working relationship built around good rapport, trust and respect.

*Like, [Tusla CGC] wouldn't let you walk in or anything. He'd wait. He'd wait till you get to the door and, like, he'd shake hands with you when you walk in and all that. (YP5)*

*[The guidance counsellor] definitely took time to get to know me and help me understand what I want to do. (SR8)*

Many KI's spoke about how for some young people, when a career or educational course does not work out for them, it can impact negatively on their confidence, and they may internalise the blame for this unachieved outcome. Whereas, the reason may relate more to the lack of stability in their lives, which was highlighted by one young person interviewed.

*I had been moving around for the previous years a few times... I was still trying to, like, just get through the [school] year and so there was a lot of pressure. I just wanted to, like, know what I wanted to do for my future, like a general idea, just to help me get a little bit there, you know. (YP1)*

The importance of connecting young people with a variety of existing support infrastructure, such as the SUSI, HEAR, Reach and the DARE programmes, community welfare officers and access officers for support was highlighted across all KI interviews.

### 3. Closes gap in existing service provision (tailored to specific needs)

The pilot service answered what some KIs recognised as a gap in existing Aftercare service provision. Career guidance is not a specific skill of Aftercare Workers and school guidance counsellors do not always possess the requisite skills to understand the niche requirements of care leavers.

*[Aftercare Workers are] not experts in that area... and feedback we'd have got was that maybe the career guidance being delivered in the school wasn't maybe meeting their need or in some places wasn't present at all. (KI 4)*

Many young people interviewed had experienced school based career guidance counselling, but did express that it lacked the personal connection tailored to meet their individual needs. The support within the Tusla CGC service was based on **personal communication through a foundational knowledge of their care experience** and all the challenges they had thus far overcome.

*[Tusla CGC] knew that you were in care. I just felt more comfortable as well because in school there is that help there as well but they don't really know. So it was just nice having someone there, someone comfortable who knew your kind of position... you kind of feel that you have a team [Aftercare Worker and Tusla CGC] helping you. (YP9)*

Through exploration of personal career and planning online assessments,<sup>11</sup> the young people were provided bespoke person-centred career guidance based on their individual skills and interests. The **multi-faceted career guidance** approach utilised by the Tusla GCG also made them realise that there are multiple educational routes one can take and this increased their personal agency to succeed.

*I was looking at my points. I didn't get enough points, and I was very upset. So having somebody [Tusla CGC] on side just to say, 'it is okay, you can do it this way as well'. (YP2)*

The level of educational achievement of young people, who responded to the evaluation survey, when they initially met the career guidance counsellor is outlined in figure 2, a total of 80% (16) had attained the leaving certificate or junior certificate. A smaller number had third level degrees, had completed local training initiatives and some had no formal education post-primary school. The reasons for contacting the career guidance service, as outlined in figure 3, varied from help with CAO applications, furthering career aspirations (be this through further training or interview preparation) and switching education courses. The two respondents who indicated 'other' in figure 3 subsequently stated that they needed support in finding the right course to suit their career goals.

<sup>11</sup> Careersportal's MyFuture+ online interactive programme tools were used to help young people who were unsure of their career/education path to develop their self-awareness, recognise their skillset and find out more about different education/training options and career sectors in Ireland.

Figure 2: Level of education of respondents at first contact with career guidance service

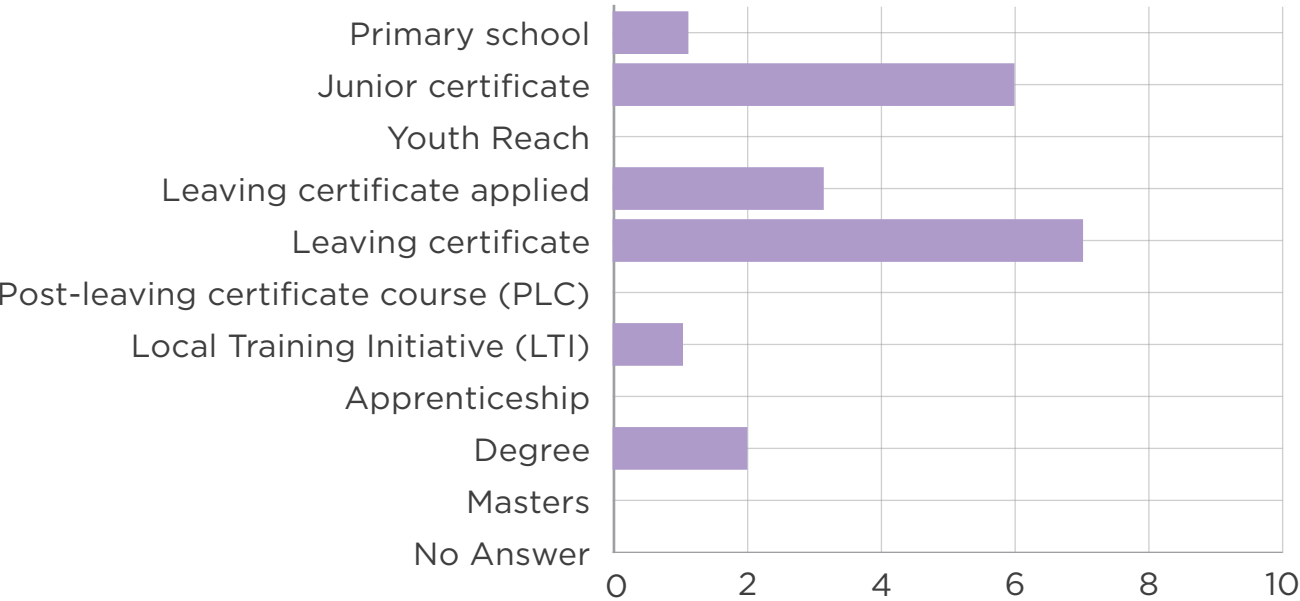


Figure 3: Reasons given by respondents for accessing the career guidance service



4. Provides space for skills exploration and development

The practicalities of Aftercare planning is a time structured exercise, for the young person and their Aftercare Worker, with firm deadlines and an end point. The pilot benefited from being separate to the time-sensitive Aftercare process. Care leavers controlled the number of appointments they needed and the pilot service offered them **time to discuss and consider their options**, whereby the counsellor opened their eyes to options they had not realised they had.

*I'd recommend this to anyone that doesn't know what to do with their life or anyone finding it difficult to pick a course (SR20)*

*I didn't know there was that much options for a young lad like me, like, you know what I mean? [Prior to meeting the Tusla CGC] you know, I was kind of scared, like, you know. (YP7)*

5. Age at engagement with career guidance service

A large majority of the young people interviewed and surveyed spoke about the benefit of having Tusla career guidance service prior to leaving school. The **benefit of guidance at an earlier age** can create a disincentive to early school drop-out. Most of the survey respondents were aged between 16 and 20 years when they first contacted the Tusla CGC (see figure 4) and the majority were still in school/college (see figure 5).

Figure 4: Survey respondent age at first contact with Tusla career guidance service

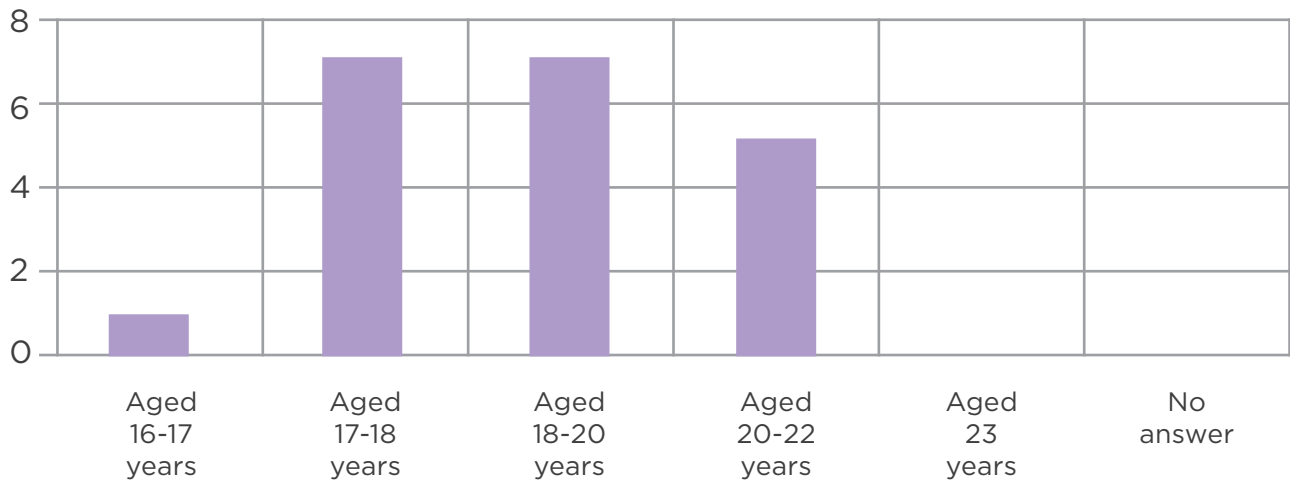
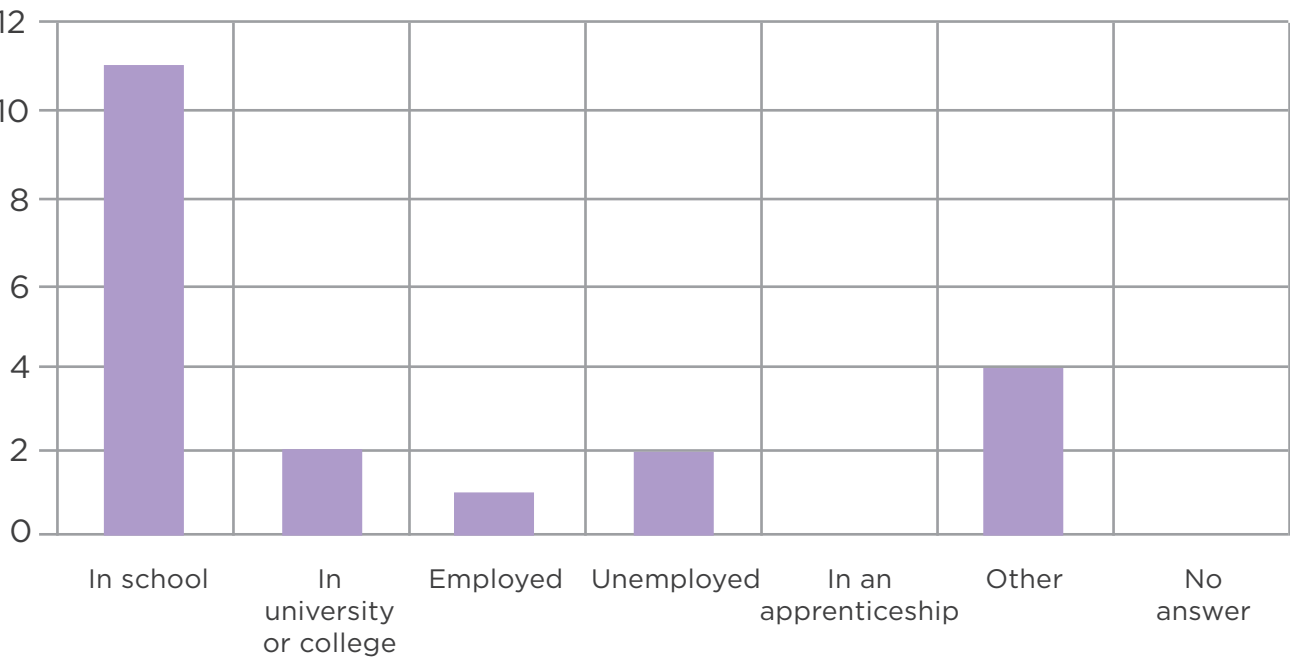


Figure 5: Survey respondent education/career status at referral to Tusla Career Guidance service



The **importance of work experience and apprenticeships** was also cited by service users to provide ‘tasters’ of what a long-term career might look like.

*I think if I would have went to [Tusla CGC] when I was about 16, early 17, I think it would have been more benefit for me because I’ve more time to apply... getting a [summer] part-time job and stuff, like, for the CV would have been better. (YP4)*

The need for the career guidance service to follow the young person, regardless of placement transitions/ location changes, was seen by KI’s working with children in care in school based settings as essential to ensure a **consistent service provision for the young person**. The argument being that school based career guidance is only beneficial if the young person is attending a school or actively engaged in that service provision.



## 6. Multi-organisational approach and service evaluation

Inter-agency collaboration between Tusla guidance counsellors and local agencies was seen by many KI's interviewed as fundamental in any potential roll-out of a national service provision.

*Working with local guidance counsellors as well from the ETBs would be hugely important as well; that whoever the [CGC] is, whether it's in Limerick, Clare or Dublin or whatever, that they're linking in with the guidance service that already exists. (KI 8)*

Maintenance and expansion of these **inter-agency networks** would, it was argued, greatly benefit the knowledge base of the regional Tusla Aftercare career guidance services.

**Partnerships between Tusla and HEI's** across the country was also seen as central. This collaborative arrangement would facilitate a named contact person with the appropriate and sensitive interpersonal skillset within the college as the 'go to' person for care experienced students starting their college journey. The future development of these networks could build on the established networks already in place.

*So we do have contacts in the colleges... And we do have people in the colleges that would be those points of contact for [care experienced young people]... so there's kind of a prototype that can be replicated across the country. (KI 2)*

The **importance of tracking data** was also seen as key for ensuring that any national service provision is meeting demand and the specific requirements of the targeted cohort. This can ensure services are evaluated, assessed and improved.

*There's a lot of interagency work going on, but it's not formalised... the referrals come in, but there's no recording of that data... It's important that we record and track progress. (KI 7)*

However, an ethical caveat here is the need to ensure a young person's consent to track this type of data, as some young people do not want to be labelled as having been in care for fear of stigmatization. For some, they may not wish educators or other organisations to know that they are care experienced.



# Evaluation Recommendations

**1. Expansion of Tusla CGC service** to other parts of country, as replicating the service model piloted in Waterford-Wexford will benefit a larger number of care leavers.

**2. Multi-faceted career guidance & opportunities** to provide a national career guidance service not focused solely on traditional routes for university education. Incentivised arrangements with private/public sector recruiters could prioritise paid apprenticeships for care leavers.

**3. Access to career guidance service from 16 years of age** should be a priority for care leavers within future service expansion to alleviate stress, support retention rates in school, build confidence and, support personal agency in achieving post-school education, training and career goals.

**4. National service provision consistency & oversight:**

- The allocation of care leaver career guidance counsellors in Tusla regions should consider population and geographic spread of care leavers within each region to provide consistent levels of service provision across the country.
- Regional guidance counsellors would benefit from line management from local Aftercare Managers, for the reciprocal exchange of support and expertise within a holistic service framework.

**5. National and local data collection and evaluation:**

- A national service delivered in different Tusla regions should include consistent methods of anonymous data collection on service delivery and progress, to facilitate evaluation of the services delivered, regional comparative analysis and knowledge exchange.
- National data collection would also benefit from inclusion of care leavers' further education course completion rates, course change rates, drop-out rates and rates of care leavers returning to education at older ages.

**6. Inter-agency collaboration:**

Building a local collaborative framework between career guidance counsellors, Tusla Aftercare personnel and regional steering committees, HEI's, schools, further education providers and external career guidance counsellors, etc., would assist in the holistic provision of a well informed and effective future service delivery.

**7. Networking:**

- *Career Guidance Counsellor Networking Fora* bi-annually for Tusla CGC's across the country would provide cross-regional learning and a national professional support system.
- *Service user networking events and workshops* to create a community where experiences can be shared, understood and supported. These could be bi-annual national events, with travel cost subsistence offered for young people attending and could include theme-led break-out workshops. Online career guidance information seminars for young people could also be considered for those who cannot attend in person.

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