

Norfolk Virtual School

Summary

The aim of the 'Virtual School' is to improve outcomes for children and young people who are looked after, by specifically tracking their progress through school and identifying and putting in place the specific support that they need to help them to succeed.

Norfolk has been one of the most successful national 'Virtual School' pilots. The methodology adopted in Norfolk is now being shared with other local authorities as good practice. We have statistical evidence to demonstrate the positive impact on outcomes that the 'Virtual School' has had and is having for looked after children and young people in Norfolk.

Authority/partner organisation(s):	NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL
Improvement East theme:	PERFORMANCE
Improvement East initiative (workstream):	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Authors:	TERRY COOK, HEAD OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE, ORGANISATION AND INCLUSION MALCOLM GRIFFITHS, CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE MANAGER FRED CORBETT, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, STRATEGY & COMMISSIONING
Date:	MARCH 2010

Main messages

The Norfolk Virtual School for Children in Care is a good example of a project that has delivered measurable improvement in outcomes, efficiencies and whole system learning and development of multi-disciplinary working. The project has:

- for individual children in a countywide cohort, improved the quality and standard of education for looked after children
- resulted in significant improvement in educational attainment for the children and young people to date
- developed the multi-disciplinary approach across Schools, integrated children's services and engaged elected Members from District Councils, County Council and multi-agency partners
- been included as a national pilot programme and the learning has informed the design of the model that will be recommended nationally
- success has been achieved at a relatively low cost by efficiently identifying and utilising existing resources and working in a highly effective cross service/multi-disciplinary way.

Case Study

One outcome of the White Paper 'Care Matters' was for the DCSF to set up a pilot programme of Virtual Schools. 86 authorities bid to be a Virtual School pilot, 11 were accepted, of which Norfolk was the largest successful authority. The concept was for all looked after children and young people to be treated as though they are at a single school. This enables their progress to be tracked and support to be offered to the pupils and their schools to improve their outcomes.

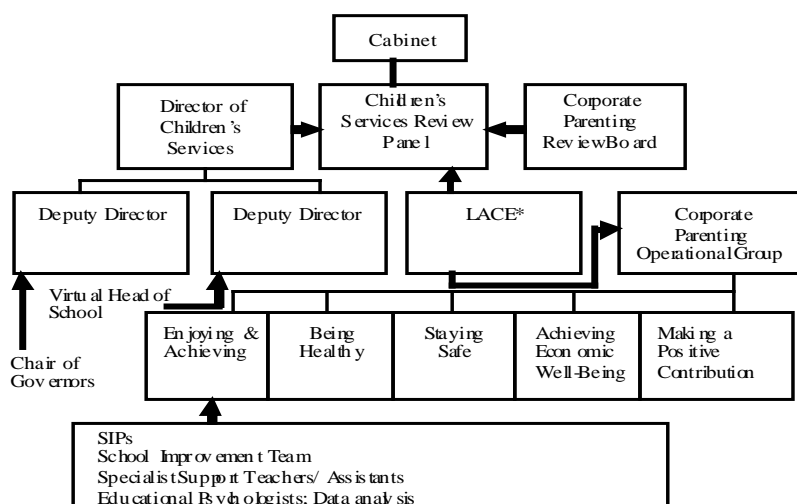
At any one time there over 800 children and young people of school age in care in Norfolk, although some schools may have only one child who is looked after. The Virtual School ensures that the needs of these children and young people are identified and met effectively.

The key success factor of Norfolk's Virtual School has been the establishment of a Headteacher, Chair of Governors and a Governing body. Therefore the model is that of a traditional school and it is this that has been recognised nationally as its strength. The head teacher and governing body operate as if they were managing a single school. The role of the governing body is to oversee the development of the Virtual School and ensure the promotion of high standards of educational attainment. It is constituted as a formal governing body and meets four times a year.

The head teacher is Head of School Performance, Organisation and Inclusion within Children's Services with a school leadership and teaching background. The Head of Corporate Parenting at the County Council is the Chair of Governors, achieving a balance of the educational and social care aspects of the children and young people's well-being. This partnership is key to the effective cross service working of the school. By having senior staff who can identify resource needs (in terms of staffing etc) and have the seniority to be able to commission this resource from across Children's Services means that the full resource of Children's Services is available to the school. Also importantly the posts of Headteacher and Chair of Governors are part of the role and function of their Head of Service roles and so have not required additional staffing appointments.

The effective cross service working is further enhanced by the governing body who also aid inter-agency working. The way that this group was constituted was deliberately designed to ensure that it was on the basis of a community school with the maximum number of governors permissible (20). Therefore it could be formed with representatives from all key organisations with an interest in / or responsibility for children in care. So for example the Vice Chair is the director of the county's largest PVI care home; schools are represented by the head teachers of a primary, secondary and special school; key partners and services are also represented i.e. community services etc. The role of 'parent governors' is fulfilled by three elected Members from the County Council some of who are also District Council Members.

Another key feature in terms of efficiency is where the governing body and the headteacher and chair of Governors sit within the strategic structure of Children's Services (see chart below). The Headteacher and Chair of Governors report in line management directly to the Deputy Directors through to the Director. This therefore makes lines of communication short and so efficient in times in relation to decision-making. They are also in a senior position to commission services and resources from across Children's Services. They are also members of the Corporate Parenting Review Board and Corporate Parenting Operations Group that report directly through to the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet. This again makes lines of communication short and the decision making process efficient.



The Corporate Parenting Operations Group is formed of five main working groups (based on the five Every Child Matters outcomes) and the Virtual School is the Enjoy and Achieve outcome. To support the efficiency of the operation of both the Corporate Parenting Operations Group and of the Governing Body at least one member of each of the five Every Child Matters outcomes working groups is a member of the Governing Body.

This again leads to great efficiencies in terms of time, decision-making and use of resources. For example the chair of the economic well-being working group from the Operations Group is also the Director of Connexions, a Governor of the Virtual School and Chair of the governors sub group for 14-19. This enables her to be in a key strategic position to lead developments and commission key other partners from outside the Local Authority as well as inside the Local Authority to positively contribute to Virtual School developments. It is also efficient as again communication channels are short and effective, there is no duplication of meeting or need for additional time or resources to be used.

Other benefits from this structure include:

- The headteacher instead of needing to appoint specialist staff to the Virtual School can draw upon and commission services from teams within the Early Years, Schools and Communities division of Children's Services. This avoids the costs of additional appointments and fully utilises the existing specialist resources within Children's Services i.e. subject specialists for Literacy and numeracy; 14-19 specialists; ICT specialists; staff with key skills in supporting vulnerable children – SEN / English as an additional language / Gypsy Roma; Gifted and Talented
- The headteacher and chair of governors being able to draw upon specialists services residing with members of the governing body i.e. Early Years; Web developments; voice of the child and in-care councils; links with local authority and independent care homes and specialist services
- The headteacher and chair of governors being able to identify key Children's Services staff to be members of the governing body to ensure they are aware of the needs of the Virtual School are able to service the needs quickly and efficiently i.e. the Head of the Information and Research Centre is a key governor and contributes greatly to data analysis and the flow of crucial information
- The chair of governors is able to bring the expertise and knowledge and understanding of care placement work to balance this with educational placement – this leads to more effective overall placement and cuts the risk of costly placement breakdowns
- The headteacher and chair of governors are able to negotiate with other senior managers i.e. Principal Education Psychologist to provide part /whole posts to work within the school to the benefit of the service as a whole
- The headteacher and chair of governors are able to ensure the governing body drive the direction of the Virtual School via its 'School Improvement and Development Plan'. This plan is ratified, monitored and evaluated by the Governing Body. To ensure accountability, each of the 13 priority areas identified in the Plan is led by a dedicated governor, for example: the 14-19 agenda is led by Connexions' Head of Operations. Each priority area has an action plan and a sub-group of key partners to co-ordinate its implementation

A key part of this whole structure is the main working group of the governing body - the Virtual School Governing Body Operations Group. This is made up of key members of the governing body and has a short meeting fortnightly to track the progress of the delivery of the School Improvement and Development Plan and deals with any operational issues

The vast majority of the resource put into the Virtual School has been existing resource or resource that has been attracted into the school via successful performance and winning of additional grant funding. Over the course of the development of the Virtual School the only additional funding put into the project has been the appointment of a Senior Advisory Learning Support Teacher on Teachers Pay and Conditions (TLR2), a scale 4 administrative support assistant and since the end of the Virtual School Pilot funding a Business Manager on scale M1.

Additional monies that have been 'won' from outside of the Local Authority by competitive bid into pilot programmes have been £95,000 per year for 2.5 years to cover the costs of the Virtual Head and £15,000 as start up finance to be part of the Boarding School Pathfinder. Both of these sets of monies were sourced from the DCSF. Also at the start of the project £125,000 was sourced from LPSA monies as a result of successful performance in raising the attainment of children in care in relation to stretch targets that had been established as part of this initiative.

The rest of the resources have been sourced via the unique cross service management model established in Norfolk to set up and manage the Virtual School led by the Head of School Performance, Organisation and Inclusion (Educationalist) who took on the role of Virtual School Headteacher and Corporate Parenting Service Manager (Social Worker) who took on the role as Chair of Governors.

This resulted in no other new posts being created to run or service the school. Instead a model was developed and existing Children's Services resources were identified to run and service it. Key to the whole process is that the Virtual School is modelled on the structure of a conventional school – with a Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Governing Body, school staff and pupil cohorts from Year 1 through to Year 13. The triangulation of working between the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and Governing Body has enabled the efficient identification of need, the identification of the resources needed to meet this need and the commissioning of this resource to ensure needs are met.

Outcomes and impact

It can therefore be seen that the Virtual School has had a very small additional financial input to ensure its establishment and operation. It has instead largely utilised existing resources, established an efficient strategic and operational structure and ensured bureaucracy and lines of communication are kept as short as possible. With this 'lean and mean' structure the question is what has been the impact of the school and what difference has it made.

The evidence shows, both from internal and external evaluation, that the Virtual School has had a significant impact on outcomes for looked after children and young people, with trends on key performance indicators rising against national, regional and statistical neighbours. The table below illustrates the impact that the Virtual School is having of key attainment indicators for looked after children. Nationally the gap between the attainment of looked after children and other pupils has widened – in Norfolk it has narrowed.

6 Year Trend Figures From Start of the 'Embryonic Virtual School' in 2004

Measure	Norfolk 2009 %	National 2008 %	Stat N 2008 %	Norfolk Trend from 2004	National Trend from 2004	Norfolk re National Trend
25+ Absence	6.7	13 (07)	10.1	Down from 15.1	Up from 12.3	Better
KS1 Writing	42.9	50	52	Up from 34.6	Up from 48.3	Better
KS1 Reading	47.6	57	58.6	Up from 38.5	Up from 54.4	Better
KS1 Maths	52.4	62	66.2	Down from 57.7	Down from 63.5	Worse
KS2 English NI 99	47.6	46	53.2	Up from 26.3	Up from 39.9	Better
KS2 Maths NI 100	52.4	44	46.3	Up from 36.8	Up from 37.2	Better
KS3 English	41 (2008)	30	32.0	Up from 18.2	Up from 22.5	Better
KS 3 Maths	49 (2008)	33	32.0	Up from 31.8	Up from 25.8	Better
Perm Excl	0.0	0.5	0.0	Down from 1.1	Down from 0.9	Better
SEN	33.7	27.9	33.6	Down from 34.3	Down from 27.4	Same

Six year Trend Figures for Key Stage 4

Progress Trend since start of Virtual School	Norfolk 2009 %	National 2008 %	Norfolk Trend from 2004	National Trend from 2004	Norfolk re National Trend
Key Stage 4 Sat GCSEs	47.4	68.8	Up from 62.3	Up from 59.1	Better
Key Stage 4 1+A*-G	461.6	65.6	Down from 62.3	Up from 56.1	Worse
Key Stage 4 5+A*-G	452.1	43.4	Up from 37.7	Up from 39.4	Better
Key Stage 4 5+A*-C	416.4	13.9	Up from 5.1	Up from 9.4	Better

However,

Indicator	2008	2009
Any GCSE or Equiv	NA	71.2%
5+ A*-G GCSE or Equiv	NA	58.9%

5+A*-C GCSE or Equiv	NA	20.5%
5+A*-C incl Eng and maths GCSE or Equiv NI101	10.5%	12.3%

When analysing the OC2 trend data over a six period during which the Virtual School began in an embryonic way and for the last reporting year, in a more established format, the trend data overall for improvements in standards are positive. We have improved across the board in relation to National data apart from Key Stage 1 Maths and Key Stage 4 1+A*-G. However at Key Stage 4 we have improved better than National in the number sitting GCSEs, achieving 5+A*-G and 5+A*-C. At Key Stages 1 for Maths we are now implementing the national pilot for catch-up maths and anticipate seeing the same dramatic rates of improvement as we have seen at Key Stages 1 and 2 English.

But when comparing the Key stage 4 trend data the Virtual School has been making impressive progress. In addition now that after significant lobbying the DCSF is starting to establish a 'level playing field' for the analysis and publication of data for children in care we starting to see a much clearer and true picture. For example when the OC2 data rule changes for the end of September to the end of March within an academic year we will be able to record more effectively the work and progress we have undertaken/achieved over the longer time period (at present the old rule applies and so we cannot quote National or statistical neighbour 2009 data until it is verified in April 2010). Also now that the same rule applies for children in care and the whole school cohort in relation to recording GCSEs and equivalents for everyone (whereas in the past only GCSEs counted for children in care) a more positive picture emerges as is shown in the chart above.

LAC Three Year Trend Figures for the Virtual School since 2006

Measure	Norfolk 2009 %	National 2008 %	Stat Neig 2008 %	Norfolk Trend from 2006	National Trend from 2006	Stat Neigh Trend from 2006	Norfolk Trend re National Trend	Norfolk Trend re Stat Neigh Trend
Statements	33.7	27.9	33.6	Up from 24.9	Up from 27.4	Up from 31.7	Worse	Worse
25+ Absence	6.7	11.9	10.1	Down from 15.1	Down from 12.3	Down from 13.1	Better	Better
Key Stage 1 Writing	42.9	50	52	Up from 34.6	Up from 48.3	Up from 47.2	Better	Better
Key Stage 1 Reading	47.6	57	58.6	Down from 57.1	Down from 57.3	Up from 50.9	Worse	Worse
Key Stage 1 Maths	52.4	62	66.2	Down from 57.7	Down from 64.6	Up from 56.7	Worse	Worse
Key Stage 2 English	47.6	46	53.2	Up from 40.9	Up from 42.8	Up from 38.9	Better	Worse
Key Stage 2 Maths	52.4	44	46.3	Up from 52.3	Up from 40.9	Up from 39.1	Worse	Worse

Key Stage 4 Sat GCSEs	74	68.8	75	Up from 64.9	Up from 65.6	Up from 68.2	Better	Better
Key Stage 4 1+A*-G	61.6	65.6	72.4	Down from 64.9	Up from 63.2	Up from 63.8	Worse	Worse
Key Stage 4 5+A*-G	52.1	43.4	50.4	Up from 29.8	Up from 41.4	Up from 41.4	Better	Better
Key Stage 4 5+A*-C	16.4	13.9	19.8	Up from 10.5	Up from 11.8	Up from 16.2	Better	Better
Permanent Exclusions	0.0	0.5	0.0	Down from 0.4	Down from 0.8	Down from 0.2	Better	Better
Year 11 NEET	13.7	16	22.1	Down from 17.5	Down from 20	Up from 19.5	Same	Better

When analysing data the long term trend (6 years) gives a good view and 'irons out' the dips and blips. However, it is also good to analyse the medium term (3 years) as this also picks up the starts of trends (and is a time measure used by OFSTED). It is also good to measure progress that picks up the impact of actions taken. In this instance 3 years is the timescale since the start of the Virtual School Pilot and the above trend figures show good progress in relation to National Data across a range of areas, particularly at Key Stage 4.

We are above the National figures for the % of those pupils sitting GCSEs and for those achieving 5+ A*-G. However, the shorter term data does show where we still need to focus attention particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2. Also at Key Stages 1 and 2 our figures are subject to what looks like at times large changes but we must recognise that we are dealing with small cohorts. This means quite often 1 pupil can make as much as 5% difference.

Therefore the large gains we have made over time should not be deflected by a 5/10% plus or minus in any one year. Although we have been behind both national and statistical neighbours in the past we are narrowing the gap at a fast rate and in many instances overtaking. Our work is being greatly aided by the great success we have had in bringing down significantly the level of absence and permanent exclusions as well as being successful with our NEET figures at the end of Year 11.

Until the end of April 2010 the National and Regional comparative data will not be available but based on last year the narrowing the gap data was.

Narrowing the Gap (N) Data for Looked After Children

KS2%	LAC Norfolk	National	East of England
L4+ En	+ 3 (Norfolk all + 2) N	+ 0.1 (National all +1) W	- 5 (East all +1) W
Ma	+ 19 (Norfolk all no change) N	+ 0.6 (National all no change) W	+ 3 (East all + 1) N
Sc	+ 4 (Norfolk all no change) N	+ 2 (National all no change) N	+ 1 (East all no change) N

KS4 – 5+A*-C	+ 6 N (Norfolk all + 3.8 Norfolk LAC + 6)	+ 1.3 W (National all = 3.3 National LAC = 1.3)	- 1 W (all = + 3.5 LAC = 1. 1)
--------------	---	---	--

N = Gap narrowed W = Gap widened

Whilst Norfolk has narrowed the gap at both the end of KS2 and KS4 (as well as seeing results improve) in terms of:

- National, the gap has widened in English and Maths and the end of KS2 and at the end of KS4
- East, the gap has widened at the end of KS2 in English and at KS4 but has narrowed in Maths at the end of KS2 (but not as much as in Norfolk).

Other Key Projects contributing to Efficiency

- The 'Catch Up' literacy project has raised the reading age of participating pupils by an average of 17.15 months – some progressing by 30 months. The scheme involved looked after primary pupils receiving two 15-minute sessions of Catch Up Literacy tuition very week for two terms. It is a targeted at pupils who are struggling to read and involves choosing book for them from a graded list and then following this up in the tutorial sessions each week.

The Virtual School delivers this programme through 5 Area Learning Support Teachers who go into the schools to provide Catch Up tuition, carers and care home staff. It is extremely cost efficient as it is a sustainable project and not just geared to one off delivery. Once staff and carers have been trained they can deliver to pupils now and to future cohorts. Also the scheme is supported from colleagues in Community Services through the libraries who provide special book packs and resources.

The scheme recognises that looked after children have a lot of dislocation and need additional support. This project, along with other programmes put in place by the Virtual School to improve attendance and motivation, as seen the proportion of looked after children in Norfolk leaving primary school with level 4 in English rise from 26% in 2004 to 53% in 2008. The programme is now being repeated for pupils struggling with numeracy.

- The Virtual School also focuses self-esteem and not just academic outcomes, in order to address exclusions and persistent absence. For example, after school and holiday activities are organised in collaboration with local partners (e.g. Castle Museum, North Walsham Rugby Club) and book and ready clubs run by local libraries. The contributions of our partners both in Children's Services, the wider Local Authority and the community is a vital element of the success achieved
- In the early stages of the Virtual School being established there were no looked after pupils being identified for Gifted and Talented programmes in Norfolk schools. We now have a significant number participating through work with local and regional groups have had much success in this area including having had a pupil exhibiting at a national art exhibition, and another taking part in an international climate change conference in Norway
- Via our partnership working with the Principal Educational Psychologist we have been able to utilise within the Virtual School two 0.5 educational psychologists who link with CAMHS

and the Healthy Schools programme to ensure the mental health needs of children are also being met.

- Norfolk is also leading the way nationally in identifying pupils who would benefit from being educated at a boarding school by being a key member of the DCSF Boarding School Pathfinder. We have an established network with boarding schools in the county and currently have 11 pupils placed, four more have applied for boarding places in September, one pupil is awaiting parental approval and we have approximately five others that look potentials as well as an ever increasing number of enquiries.

As well as the educational and social gains an additional benefit is a saving of over £100,000 per pupil in some instances. We are also working with an educational charity for additional financial support for these placements. Some example case studies for this project are in Appendix 1.

All the case studies in Appendix 1 have cost savings and involve children in care going into boarding or preventing accommodation and therefore prevent the costs this involves. They also conform to our quality standards for placement – this provision is not for every child – it must be the right child for the right provision. Therefore the skills of identification and matching need are essential. Also crucial is our relationship with our partner independent schools – we guarantee support and backup and only work with schools in Norfolk or on Norfolk’s borders so that our pupils can stay in touch with their communities. In addition our close partnership with a national educational charity is becoming ever more productive.

The case study evidences whole system improvement and efficiencies that extend beyond the specific children and young people who were/are included in the Virtual School roll. The learning and development of those involved from foster carer, teachers, social workers, governors, elected Members has additional benefits for their work outside of the Virtual School as part of the wider children’s services workforce.

There have been measurable improvements in the educational outcomes of the children and young people since the Virtual School was founded and linked improvements to support their achievement across the 5 ECM outcome aims, narrowing the gap between them and their peers. The governance and organisation of the multi-agency and elected Member support through Corporate Parenting governance arrangements in Norfolk, supported by clear operational arrangements with partners for all of the ECM outcome aims has been added value to the work and fostered a greater whole system response to meeting the needs of this vulnerable group of children.

Contact details

Improvement East contact:	Lynsay Cook, Programme Manager Lynsay.cook@improvementeast.gov.uk
Authority contact:	Terry Cook, Head of School Performance, Organisation and Inclusion – terry.cook@norfolk.gov.uk Malcolm Griffiths, Corporate Parenting Service Manager – malcolm.griffiths@norfolk.gov.uk Fred Corbett, Assistant Director Strategy and Commissioning , Early Years Schools and Communities - fred.corbett@norfolk.gov.uk
Other partner organisations:	

Appendix 1

Placements in September 2009.

1) Child A

Background

Child A taken in to care aged 6, she will be 13 in September. Two younger siblings were also taken into care, one of whom has since been adopted. Child A currently living in XX Residential Assessment Unit and attending YY High School. She has recently been reprimanded by the police and was extremely anxious this may affect her chances of being placed at boarding school. Child A looked around a local independent school and asked the Headteacher, "Can you offer me a decent education here...as I have figured this is my only way out of my life at the moment?". A place was offered and social care allocated a suitable foster placement.

Costings

Current costs:	Projected costs for September
XX Res Unit £3, 200 per week, £153,600 per year	Level 5 Foster care £481 per week, £23,088 per year
YY High School £0	Independent Boarding £15,000 per year
Total: £153,600 per year	Total: £38, 088 per year

Projected saving : £115, 512 per year

2) Child P

Background

Child P taken into care after being left at ZZ Police Station by mother three years ago. After numerous foster placement breakdowns was placed at BREAK Unit. Mother reports that she would "dearly love P to live at home, we just can't cope full-time". Parents divorced, father currently living abroad but contributes £300 a month towards P's accommodation at BREAK. Plan is for eventual family reunification.

Current costs:	Projected costs for September:
BREAK UNIT £69,500 per year	Independent Boarding School £20,985 (plus £1k associated costs like uniform)
BB High School £0	Foster care £23,088 to be phased out over year
Total: £69,500 per year	Total: £45, 073 to reduce to £21, 985

Projected saving: £24, 427 rising to £47, 515

3) Child J

Background

Child J currently living in Children's Home after attempting to kill himself before Christmas. Family situation under great strain, mother recently separated from partner. Plan is for J to board and return home in holidays/ some weekends. Birth father also able to accommodate J at weekend.

Costings

Current costs:	Projected costs for September
RR Res Unit £2, 800 per week, £145,600 per year	Initial foster care support £23,088 per year
CC High School £0 15 hrs support per week in school £20x38=£760 2x£30 DJing per week £60x38=£2,280 1x£45 Carpentry £45x38=£1710	Independent Boarding School £15,000 per year
Total: £150, 350 per year	Total: £38, 088 per year reducing to £15,000 per year

Projected saving: £112, 262 per year rising to £135,350

Additional Placements

- Child E placed at BB Independent Prep Boarding School transferring to Independent 14-19 Boarding school in September
- Children F and G (2 siblings) placed at HH Independent Prep Boarding School (1 due to transfer to GG Senior in Sept.)

Planned Boarding Placements:

- Child D currently at XX residential unit due to start at V V Independent Prep Boarding School this Sept, with considerable cost savings
- Child M due to start at SS Independent Boarding School again with considerable cost savings but how much depends on whether social care fund additional back up care as requested by school.
- Child L had place at Independent Prep Boarding School with potential savings but mother not sure about having him home (partner just left), agreed to discuss again in September.