

These notes refer to the Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 (c.11) which received Royal Assent on 22 November 2002

Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002

EXPLANATORY NOTES

BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

3. In October 2000, the Social Services Inspectorate of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, published a report entitled "Promoting Independence: A Review of Leaving and After Care Services". The main finding of the review was that young people leaving care experience a range of disadvantages in terms of education, employment, housing and family support. The report concluded that there was a need for a better level of support from public sector agencies.
4. "Promoting Independence" noted that between 1996 and 1999, around 670 young people aged between 16 and 18 became care leavers. Approximately a quarter of these young people were only 16 when they left care. By contrast, the typical age for young people leaving their family home is 22.
5. Young care leavers are among the most vulnerable young people in society. Often they leave the care system without the educational attainments and the ongoing support necessary to underpin their successful inclusion within their community and the wider society. To make a difference these young people need to have access to staff and services capable of meeting their assessed needs. In particular they need help to redress some of the shortcomings associated with their early life experiences.
6. The Act meets a commitment given in the Programme for Government to introduce legislation to help support young people leaving care. The Act forms the basis for improved leaving and after care services and builds upon the existing statutory provisions contained in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 ("the Children Order").