From: Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

Christine McInnes, Interim Corporate Director of Children, Young People & Education

To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee

Date: 09.09.2026

Subject: LADO Education Safeguarding Service (LESAS) Annual Report 2025-26

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The LESAS Annual Report for 2025-26 is attached. The report provides an account of the Council's LADO Education Safeguarding Service performance from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

Recommendation(s): Members of the CYPE Cabinet Committee are asked to note and comment on the LESAS Annual report and its findings.

1. Introduction

1.2 This year's annual report covers the actions from 2024-25, Management Information, Traded Activity and recommendations for the service moving forward.

2. Body of the report.

2.1 Please see the Table of Contents.

3. Financial Implications.

3.1 The report covers details of the income generated by LESAS from its Traded Activity.

4. Legal implications.

4.1 None.

5. Equalities implications.

5.1 None.

6. Other corporate implications.

6.1 None.

7. Governance.

7.1 None.

8. Conclusions.

8.1 In this year of consolidation LESAS has continued to demonstrate a high level of throughput on statutory work, manageable caseloads and an increase in income from Traded Activity**.**

9. Recommendation(s):
Members of the Cabinet Committee are asked to NOTE and COMMENT ON the LESAS Annual Report and its findings.

10. Background Documents.

10.1 No additional background documents.

11. Contact details.

Report Sign Off:
Louise Fisher, Assistant Director Safeguarding Professional Standards & Quality Assurance

Telephone number: 03000 414791

Email : louise.fisher@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director:
Kevin Kasavan, Director for Children's Countywide Services

Telephone number: 03000 416334

Email: kevin.kasaven@kent.gov.uk

KENT LADO EDUCATION SAFEGUARDING
ADVISORY SERVICE

KENT LADO EDUCATION SAFEGUARDING
ADVISORY SERVICE
KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

LADO Education Safeguarding Advisory Service

(LESAS)

Annual Report

2025-2026

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

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1. Introduction and Context

1.1 This is the annual report of Kent County Council's Integrated Children's Services, "Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Education Safeguarding Advisory Service" covering the year 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026 (the reporting period). The Service will be referred to as LESAS in the report.

1.2 The identified role for LESAS is to build upon the statutory LADO function for the whole of the children's workforce and support education settings (early years settings, childminders, schools, and colleges) in Kent who work with children aged 0-18 to meet their safeguarding responsibilities and respond to safeguarding concerns in line with relevant legislation and government guidance, including the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004, the Education Act 2002, Working Together to Safeguard Children, Keeping Children Safe in Education, and Early Years Foundation Stage.

1.3 The LESAS provides the following services.

- Undertaking the statutory LADO function for Kent Children's Workforce.
- Strategic safeguarding advice, including online safety, for education settings to support them to meet their safeguarding responsibilities via the LESAS enquiries service.
- A programme of core training throughout the academic year for Designated Safeguarding Leads and other staff in education settings, delivered face to face, virtually or through e-learning, alongside commissioned bespoke training.
- Support for education settings in times of crisis and unexpected critical safeguarding incidents.
- Targeted outreach work, including subsidised support, for education settings following critical safeguarding needs.
- Responses to Ofsted Category 2 & 3 Safeguarding Complaints about schools and other safeguarding related Ofsted enquiries.
- Exemplar Child Protection and Acceptable Use Policy Templates.
- A child protection newsletter for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) that is published six times a year.
- DSL Network meetings held three times a year in each of the four Education Areas in Kent and three times a year DSL Network Meeting for Early Years Settings.

1.4 This report identifies themes from the work of LESAS and provides a medium to highlight areas of good practice and identify those areas which require continued development.

1.5 In summary, LESAS continued to demonstrate a high level of throughput on statutory work, manageable caseloads, significantly increased income generation and refinement in its Power BI reporting. LESAS maintained a comprehensive and efficient service combining statutory functions, contribution to quality assurance and a well-respected traded activity that brings added value to Kent County Council (KCC).

2. Recommendations from Previous Report 2024-2025

The actions referred to below are taken from last year's LESAS Annual Report

2.1 **Evaluate, redesign, and implement a simplified referral process for members or the public (e.g., via Microsoft Form), then monitor referral rates with a target of a 10% increase.**

During the reporting year, LESAS explored the possibility of the KCC portal being used to receive LADO referrals from members of the public and it was agreed this was preferable to the use of a Microsoft Form or Word document. This was agreed by the Liquid Logic Operational Group, but the implementation was delayed by the Liberi system upgrade. After April 2026, LESAS supported the implementation through testing. This was implemented urgently as in 2025-2026 there were 21 referrals from the public, 4 less than the previous year so this improvement target was not met.

2.2 **All parts of LESAS will collect and report KPI data, with quarterly management information reviews to identify achievements and areas for development. Ensure all LESAS service areas meet or exceed 80% of their KPIs.**

During the reporting period, LESAS performance against the agreed KPIs was as follows;

2.3 **LADO Enquiry Form Received to closure (in 2 working days).**

2157 out of 2160 = 99.9%

2.4 **LADO Referral to Threshold decision (in 1 working day).**

1684 out of 1808 = 93.1%

2.5 **LADO Threshold decision to Outcome (in 90 working days).**

486 out of 595 = 81.7%.

This demonstrates good throughput of casework.

2.6 **LESAS Enquiries about agency checks, strategic education safeguarding advice, safeguarding resources, strategic advice on online safety (in 5 working days).**

1007 out of 1007 = 100%

2.7 **Ofsted Category 2 & 3 complaints will be completed within 40 School days.**

For Category 3 Ofsted Complaints 279 out of 281 (99%) were completed in timescale.

For Category 2 Ofsted Complaints 19 out of 20 (95%) were completed in timescale.

For Category 2/3 Ofsted complaints 46 out of 48 (96%) were completed in timescale.

2.8 **The LESAS staff group will complete at least 50 Safeguarding Reviews of settings every financial year.**

34 Safeguarding Reviews were undertaken. This work generated £28,200 in income.

The Service offered a free review for a school where there were significant concerns. LESAS also monitor Ofsted reports to see if there are any schools of concern. It is recognised this was an ambitious target, not previously achieved by the dedicated Education Safeguarding Service which existed prior to LESAS. Around 35 reviews is the consistent average. A target of 40 will be set for next year as that would still be a 15% increase on this year's attainment, without setting an unreachable target.

2.9 **All schools in Kent will be invited to Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Network Meetings 3 times per year**.

The KPI is for 75% of invited schools to attend the Network Meetings. LESAS ran DSL Network Meetings for Schools in June 2025, November 2025 and March 2026. Throughout the year, LESAS strived to sophisticate the method of inviting DSLs to the meetings so there is more accuracy in invites and reporting data.

Overall attendance data was 21.7% for June 2025, 29% for November 2025, 29% for March 2026.

2.10 **Learner evaluations from core and bespoke training and safeguarding reviews will be 90% good or excellent for: "please rate the course on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is excellent, 4 is good, 3 adequate, 2 poor, 1 very poor".**

Overall feedback was 94% Good or outstanding for Core Training and 100% for Bespoke Training.

2.11 **Feedback from LADO Statutory work with settings will be good or excellent for: "please rate the advice you have received from the LADO on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is excellent, 4 is good, 3 adequate, 2 poor, 1 very poor".**

The LESAS feedback form went live in July; 36 Feedback forms were completed about LADO Statutory work between then and March 2026. There were 25 grades of 5/5, 6 of 4/5, 1 of 3/5, 1 of 1/5 and 3 blanks, representing an overwhelmingly positive response with many comments noting the ease of use of the form and the prompt way queries are responded.

The LESAS management team review the feedback each month and discuss any improvements to be made to any aspect of service delivery, and any individualised issues are investigated and explored. This led to changes such as allowing time for questions and discussions at DSL network meetings.

2.12 **LEA oversight of Internal Investigations will be recorded by the tenth working day of the investigations being advised.**

&

The LEA will request an update every 90 days from the Police in respect of ongoing investigations/internal processes of staff in the children's workforce.

LESAS has not been able to collect specific data on these last two items. The possibility of having the case pathway in the allegations section of Liberi was considered, but this was not possible due to technical restrictions from System C (the provider which owns Liberi). These KPIs were developed due to a desire to combat the potential for drift in the follow up of cases. How long police and/or internal investigations take is beyond the LEA's control, so this is not really a useful KPI for the service.

The National LADO Network (NLN) ceased to use this as a KPI due to concerns LADOs may close cases prematurely. Additionally, learning from the peer audit with another local authority about closing a case too prematurely, so this is something the LADO & Education Safeguarding Manager actively discourage. The Management Information Unit (MIU) have, however, developed alternative management tools so the Manager can monitor on casework without needing these items as KPIs in the future. The manager is now able to see how long it has been since a case was updated from Power BI, without needing to open each on Liberi. This enables the LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager to address any longer-term cases, requiring updating.

2.13 **Complete all scheduled SLIP projects with Isle of Wight and Reading Borough Council; collect and review external audit and inspection feedback from partner authorities, securing £127,142.50 in annual income from the DfE.**

Both SLIP projects with the Isle of Wight and Reading Borough Council were completed during the reporting period and in total £92,977.15 was awarded by DfE. This was a shortfall of £34,165.35 on the original grant but is representative of the fact both projects began in earnest at the end of the 2024-25 year, and the delivery straddled both financial years. The DfE confirmed SLIP will be ceased in 2026-27 as funding will only be available to Families First pathfinder local authorities.

2.14 **Increase participation in Early Years safeguarding training by 25% (from January 2025 baseline), ensuring subsidised or free training is provided to EY settings across all areas.**

In the reporting period, 425 Early Years delegates booked to attend LESAS training, with 386 attending. In 2024-25, 386 learners attending LESAS training were from Early Years settings.

This meant Early Years practitioners represented over a quarter of the LESAS core training audience, accounting for 28% of bookings (425) and 27% of attendees (386). While the number of Early Years attendees remained

consistent with the previous reporting period, bookings increased, indicating continued demand for and engagement with the LESAS training offer from the sector.

Although no subsidised or free Early Years training was delivered during the reporting period, participation from the sector was maintained. The difference between bookings and attendance is consistent with known challenges within the Early Years sector, where staffing capacity, statutory ratio requirements and workforce pressures can make it difficult for settings to release staff to attend training. LESAS currently offers bespoke training sessions at twilight times (4-6pm) to early years settings to help alleviate some of these issues.

2.15 **Establish and deliver area-based network meetings for Early Years settings thrice annually; provide guest speakers and safeguarding updates; deploy area-based support for local training and reviews.**

The first DSL Network meetings for Early Years Settings were held in November 2025 with 34% attendance from those invited. The second meeting took place in March 2026 with attendance of 27%. The meetings were well received and LESAS is working to expand the invitation list so all settings in Kent are captured and learning shared widely. To support the continued growth of the network, LESAS introduced a new registration process and worked with partner agencies to promote the meetings across the Early Years sector, including nurseries, pre-schools and childminders. This approach aims to increase participation and ensure safeguarding information reaches as many providers as possible.

2.16 **Achieve a £50K increase in traded income, reaching at least £449.3K total income by 2026, through implementation of a targeted LESAS marketing plan and expansion of outreach activities.**

Table 9 on page 22 compares the traded income between this reporting year and the preceding year. £484.3K was the income for the traded activity from training and products which was an increase of £92.1K from the previous year. A further £15.2K was earned from commissioned work to develop a series of online safety training and resource packs for Kent Family Hubs. The undertaking of Safeguarding Audits and Safeguarding Policy checks for the expanded Holidays Activity and Food (HAF) programme as well as the £92.9K from SLIP as mentioned above brought the total LESAS income figure to £592.4K.

2.17 **Develop and launch in-house purchasing on “My Ed” platform; implement outreach tracker via Microsoft List; systematically monitor and pursue engagement and sales opportunities.**

LESAS provided comprehensive input into the proposed Service Specification for “My Ed” in February 2026 which detailed what LESAS would need to replicate and enhance its current arrangement with The Education People (TEP) which hosts LESAS products at the moment for a relatively low cost (£14.4K in the reporting year). There is no further update on the progress of “My Ed” but at the time of writing no further feedback was received.

In terms of the outreach tracker, LESAS created a new Microsoft List within the LESAS SharePoint, which enables staff to log their contacts with settings. During the reporting year, 126 contacts were made with settings. Many of these came from liaison work the LADO and Education Safeguarding manager did with the Front Door following reviews of contacts where the quality of referrals could have been improved. The impact of this tracker is demonstrated through the LESAS KPIs. In addition to this, we have been liaising with others across children's services such as Kent Pupil Referral Unit & Attendance Service (KPAS), the Special Educational Needs (SEN) department, child education and employment team, early years team in The Education People (TEP) and school improvement officers in order to gather and share information about school concerns.

2.18 **Complete quality assurance visits to 100% of Kent's Family Hub network and children's homes, using LESAS frameworks and reporting findings to the Board.**

In hindsight it was not realistic to expect LESAS to have completed all 13 Family Hub Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) visits in the reporting period. The Family Hub QAF is not led by LESAS; rather LESAS are part of a multi-agency group conducting quality assurance activities in the family hubs. The first QAF did not start until July 2025 and there was also a delay due to Family Hub staff availability. Nevertheless, six QAF visits were completed by 31st March 2026 and the feedback from colleagues was positive about what the LADO Education Advisors (LEAs) were able to bring in terms of their safeguarding knowledge and advice.

The first phase of QAF will conclude in October 2026 at which point LESAS will be involved in evaluating the effectiveness of phase 1 and what phase 2 may look like.

2.19 **Continue shared learning partnership with Lancashire County Council, ensuring at least one peer review occurs by 2026, and findings are actioned by July 2025.**

Two Peer Reviews took place last year with Lancashire and Oxfordshire respectively, and recognition of Kent's involvement in shared learning with the National LADO Network was maintained. LESAS staff travelled to Lancashire in June 2025 for this peer audit to take place in person, and Oxfordshire colleagues travelled to Kent in August 2025.

From these two reviews, many strengths were identified in terms of Kent LADO practice including clear thresholds, outcomes and the quality of recording.

Some learning was identified in that the threshold decision for the LADO does not need to wait until after a social work team have decided about a strategy discussion being required and Position of Trust (POT) meetings can be utilised when cases are complex or involve multiple employers and agencies but are not necessary in every case. Learning was taken when considering if the person of concern is on a long-term absence e.g. maternity leave. Other actions shared with the staff group include where a Section 47 outcome and a LADO outcome

differ in terms of decision making this is to be expressly explained in LADO case summary.

2.20 **Update all LESAS training and products to reflect KCSIE and EYFS by September 2025 ensuring 100% compliance and availability for purchase/use at the start of the academic year.**

All LESAS core policy templates, eLearning courses, training materials and products were fully reviewed and updated between July 2025 and September 2025 to reflect changes to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), ensuring they were compliant and available for use at the start of the 2025-26 academic year. Where appropriate, updates also incorporated feedback from trainers and learners to strengthen content, usability and relevance.

In addition to the planned annual review, LESAS maintained an ongoing programme of product and content development throughout the year. Further updates were made in response to changes in national and local safeguarding guidance, emerging safeguarding themes, learning from safeguarding practice reviews, and sector feedback. Additional guidance and resources were shared through the LESAS DSL newsletters, including information relating to mobile phone use in education settings, responding to online hoaxes and harmful online challenges, and frequently asked questions regarding the Ofsted complaints process. This approach ensured LESAS training and products remained current, responsive and aligned with emerging safeguarding priorities throughout the reporting period.

2.21 **By December 2025, implement a centralised Microsoft Lists-based tool to categorise and track all DfE and Ofsted enquiries/complaints, ensuring 100% of relevant cases are consistently logged.**

The Microsoft List was achieved internally and sits within the LESAS SharePoint, and the next stage is to enable reporting on performance to be added to the LESAS Power BI and work is ongoing with MIU colleagues to achieve this reporting mechanism.

3. Management Information

LADO Activity

3.1 LADO activity in Kent is underpinned by statutory guidance notably ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ 2026 (WTSC). The guidance sets out Local Authorities should have a Designated Officer (LADO) to be involved in the management and oversight of allegations against staff working within the Children’s Workforce. The legislative framework is also reflected in the Children Act 2004. The Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP) publishes local guidance on allegations management procedures.

3.2 Nationally, all agencies and settings providing services for children, or employing staff or volunteers working with children, are required through WTSC to have and

to implement procedures for responding to allegations against staff members and adults in positions of trust, whether paid or voluntary. The definition of 'working with' children is an adult who is working or volunteering with children, anyone under the age of 18 years old, or in contact with children through work on a regular basis and would be seen as being in a position of trust over them. In addition, this would also apply to someone under eighteen in the same position, for example, a seventeen-year-old teaching a musical instrument or instructing a group. The LADO remit was traditionally person specific, but as the role evolved and learning taken from various reviews, it is now expected the LADO is conscious of the wider safeguarding measures employers have in place.

3.3 WTSC provides the Harm Threshold applied when an allegation is made against a member of the children's workforce and it is believed the individual has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child.
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child.
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

3.4 LESAS accepts referrals meeting this threshold and supports employers with enquiries about practice concerns just outside it, such as quality of care or professional conduct.

3.5 In education services, the LADO Service follows Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance, updated annually, for managing allegations against staff in schools and colleges.

3.6 Alongside statutory guidance, rules under the Childcare Act 2006 address situations leading to disqualification from work in domestic settings. The LADO will also review risk by association issues and risk assessments involving a variety of settings.

3.7 The LADO's first consideration is always to ensure children involved in an allegation are appropriately safeguarded. The LADO will also consider the safety of other children who could encounter the adult, whether that is at the setting they work in, or children in the person of concern's own family.

The Statistical Report

3.8 The LADO section of LESAS manages two main tasks: Enquiries and Referrals. In 2025-26, the Kent LESAS processed 2160 enquiries (excluding Ofsted matters) and 1874 referrals.

Enquiries

3.9 A LADO Enquiry is when professionals, often line managers or employers, question whether a formal referral should be made to the LADO. Professionals making enquiries want advice and guidance in exploring alternative options such as using the organisation's own HR processes, signposting to other services or submitting referrals to the Front Door or to the LADO.

3.10 A LADO Education Advisor (LEA) is rostered to function as enquiries officer each day. This process enables settings to make enquiries without naming an individual and get advice on the harm threshold. The enquiries process also enables agency checks to be made. Enquiries can be made about individuals by Ofsted in relation to prospective children's home managers or childminders, and by independent or in-house fostering services in relation to prospective or existing foster carers. Settings enquiries include Ofsted, or the Inspectorate for Independent Schools (ISI) inspection queries, and complaints about schools received by Ofsted or the Department for Education.

3.11 When LESAS was formed in September 2024, the enquiries process was changed to combine strategic education safeguarding and online safety enquiries and those relating to the LADO process. A Microsoft form was developed to accommodate these enquiries, and this was shared with settings so they can use the form directly to contact LESAS and receive a response back via email containing the advice for their records.

3.12 LESAS has a commitment to sharing information about individuals and settings for the purposes of safeguarding children. LESAS contributed to this by running checks on 392 foster carers and those applying to become foster carers. In addition to this, LESAS responded to 71 requests made by the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) about individuals. LESAS responded to 5 requests made by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). These checks are to enable partner organisations to make informed judgments about safeguarding especially where there are significant concerns about individuals.

3.13 LESAS managed 30 Subject Access Requests (SAR) in this reporting last year. Common themes include individuals referred seeking clarity on their records and incomplete communication from employers regarding LADO referrals, outcomes, and future implications. LEAs continue to encourage employers to provide feedback and later in this report, in the complaints section, this is discussed further. LESAS also processed 6 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, some partially answered or exempt. As a comparison in 2024-25 there were 36 SAR and 6 FOI requests.

Referrals

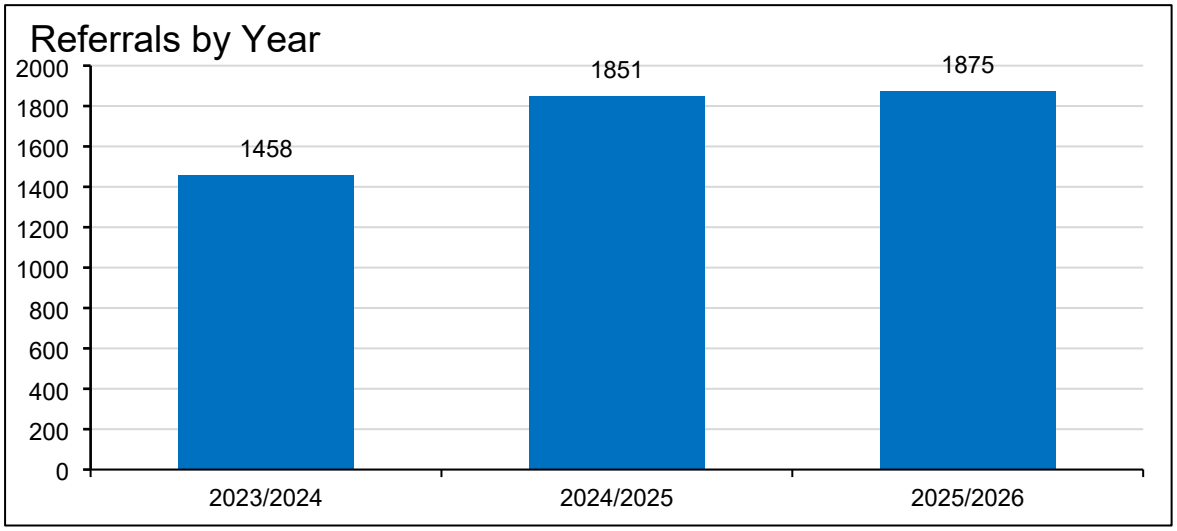
3.14 LADO Referrals are generally received via the Kent County Council Portal, and all professionals must refer via the portal. At present, members of the public have the option to download the LADO referral form and send it as an attachment via e-mail but as mentioned above work in continuing to enable public referrals through the portal as well.

3.15 A LEA is rostered to be on Portal duty every day and referrals are assessed by them to identify whether the concern meets the harm threshold.

3.16 Table 1 below helps to explain the recent pattern of LADO referrals. The LADO Service received 1874 referrals in the reporting year. This is a 1.24% increase from 2024-2025 where 1851 referrals were received. This is a welcome stabilisation in referrals compared to the significant increase last year which increased from 1458 referrals in 2023-2024.

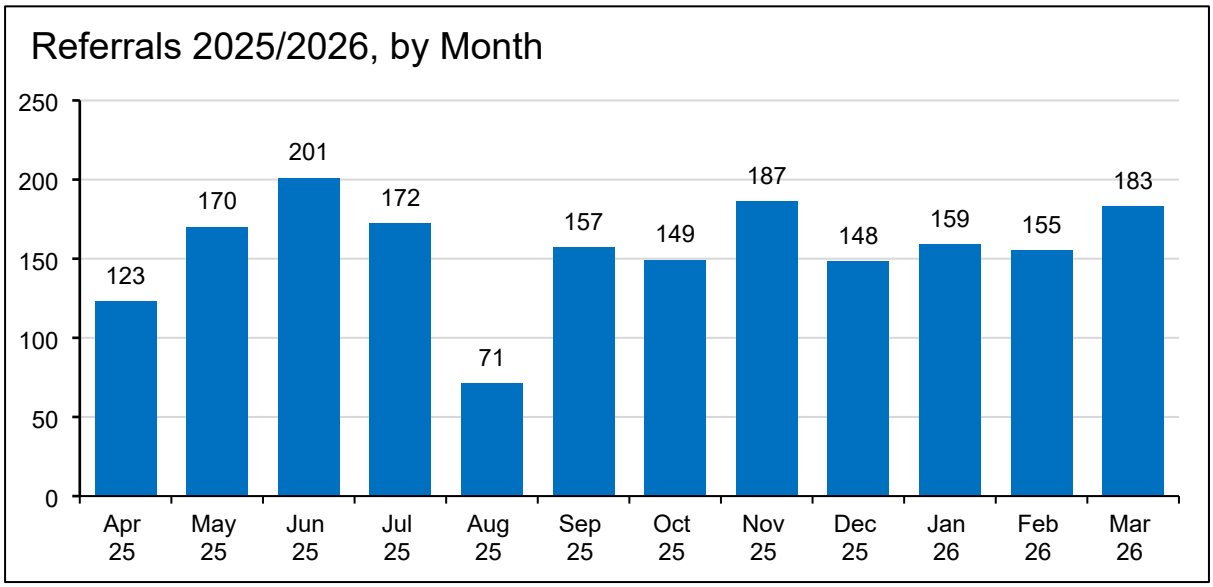
3.17 Kent's "Allegation Management: The Role of the LADO" training programme was launched in March 2025, and this was well received in terms of feedback and attendance on the courses. It appears that this learning has had an impact in helping partners' confidence in recognising a low-level concern and not submitting unnecessary referrals. During the reporting year LESAS ran five "Allegation Management: The Role of the LADO" courses via KSCMP with 150 learners attending. Additionally, we ran 3 bespoke courses, 2 for groups of newly qualified social workers and one for the staff of a further education college.

Table 1



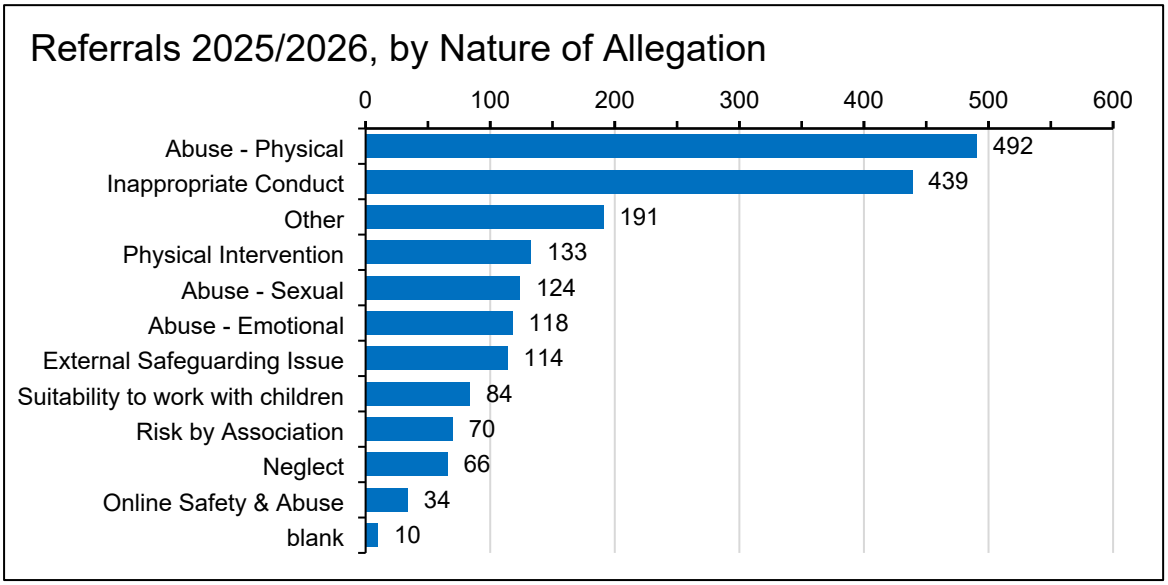
3.18 Table 2 illustrates referral numbers in each month. It is noticeable there are fewer referrals when schools are on holiday particularly in August to a lesser extent in April and December. Conversely, the last few years demonstrate an increase in referral rates in the lead up to the summer holidays during June and July.

Table 2



3.19 Table 3 identifies the different allegation types referred to the LADO. Physical Abuse was the highest allegation category. This is the case for a number of years not just in Kent but nationally. Inappropriate conduct allegations remain high. The 10 referrals which show as blank in this graph represent the fact those cases were ongoing at the time the data was taken from Power BI in readiness for the preparation of this report. It is usual to have cases continuing from one financial year to the next as some investigations, especially those involving police can be protracted.

Table 3

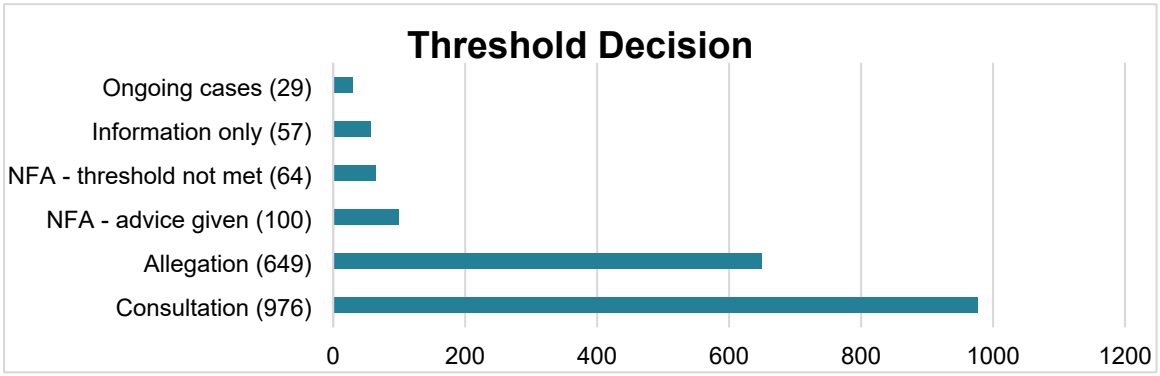


3.20 Table 4 shows the outcome of the LADO referrals made during the reporting period. 976 out of 1875 (52%) were recorded as Consultations. Referrals not meeting the LADO harm threshold can be treated as Consultations. Consultations can be dealt with by recommending management actions and typically advice, signposting or a risk assessment.

3.21 In 2024-2025 42% of referrals into LESAS were treated as consultations which was higher than the 2023-2024 figure of 33%.

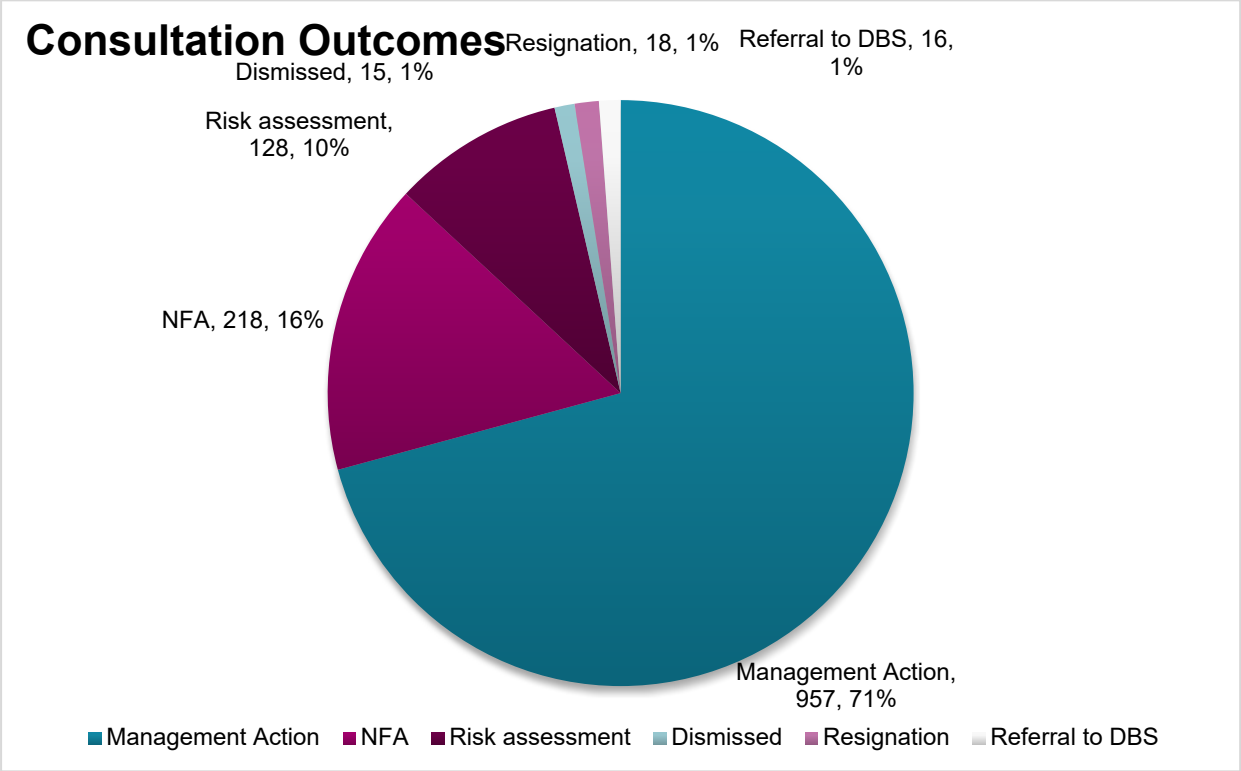
3.22 35% of referrals met the LADO threshold of harm which is a slight increase from the 2024-2025 30% and 27% in 2023-24.

Table 4



3.23 Table 5 shows the outcomes of those 976 referrals treated as Consultations. The majority 587 (60%) were dealt with as Management Action. A Management Action includes undertaking reflective supervision, additional training or support for staff. This may include debriefs following physical interventions that have not reached the harm threshold, for example. This could provide learning in relation to de-escalation techniques and exploration of how things may have been managed differently.

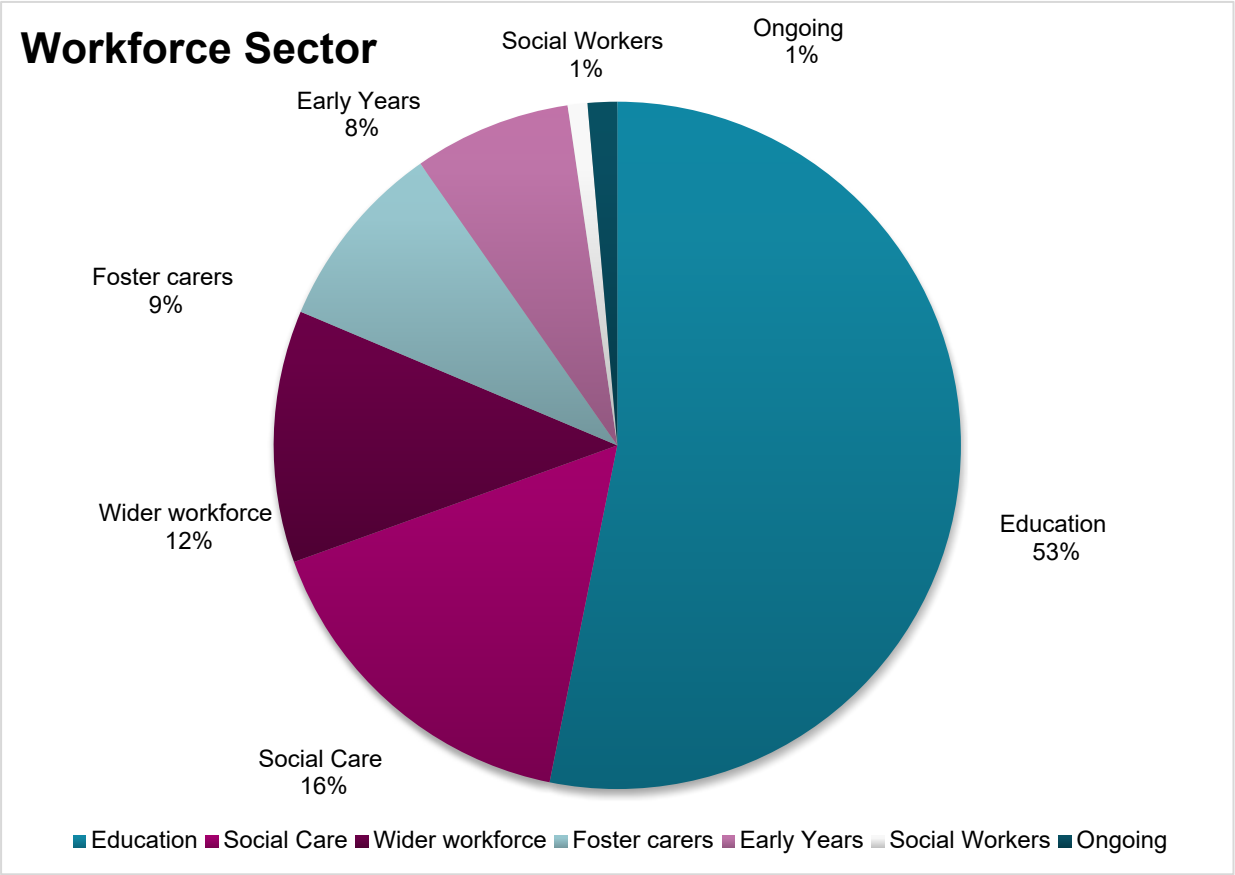
Table 5



3.24 Table 6 shows the range of workforce sectors where referrals met the threshold to proceed as a LADO allegation. Of the 649 allegations recorded during the reporting period, Education accounted for the largest proportion with 345 allegations (53%), this is expected and is consistent with other local authorities and previous years. Foster Care accounted for 58 allegations (9%), Early Years 48 allegations (7%), Wider Workforce 77 allegations (12%). The wider work force includes work in emergency services such as police or work in youth groups, community settings and faith-based settings.

3.25 Registered Social Workers only accounted for 6 allegations (1%). Social care represents 106 (16%) of allegations, this includes work in residential care, supported living as well as unregistered workers in the local authority or independent fostering agencies. It is expected this number would be high due to the number of children's homes and similar transitional care settings in the Kent area.

Table 6


Workforce Sector
Social Workers 1%
Ongoing 1%
Early Years 8%
Foster carers 9%
Wider workforce 12%
Education 53%
Social Care 16%
Education
Social Care
Wider workforce
Foster carers
Early Years
Social Workers
Ongoing

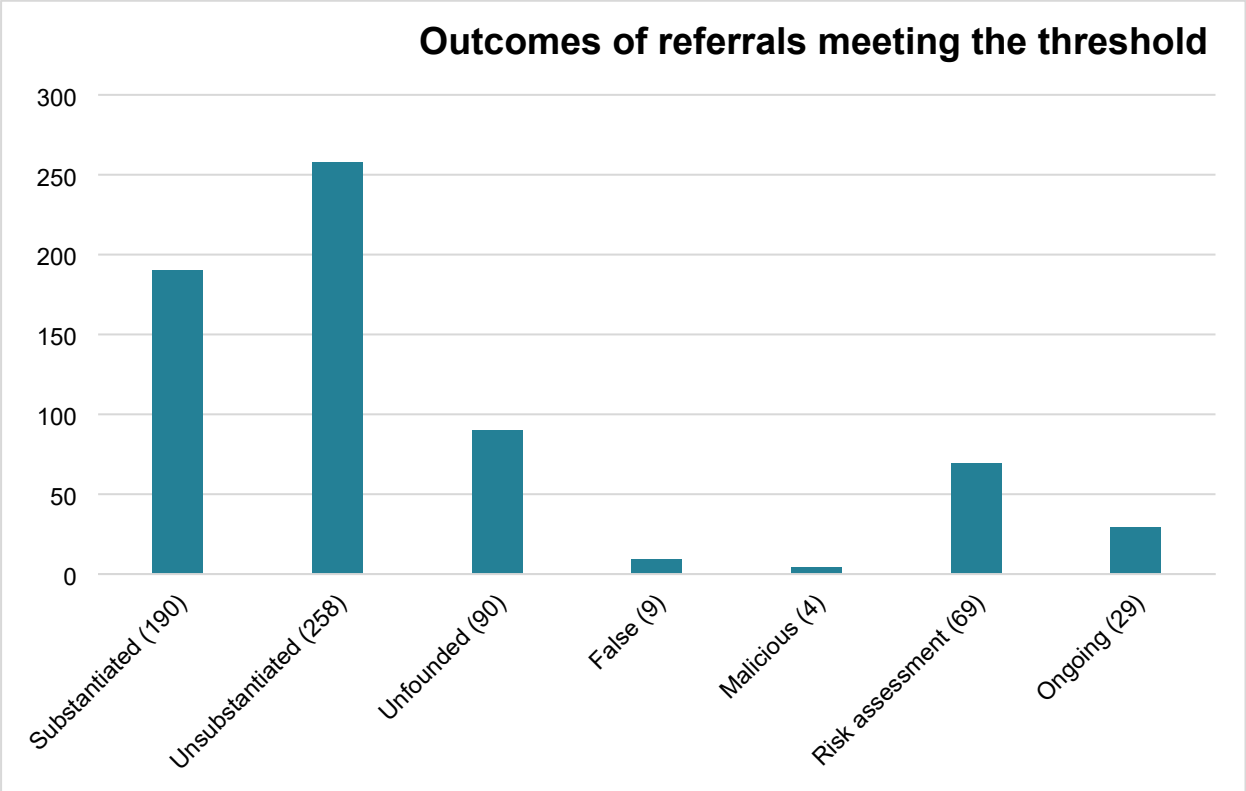
3.26 Table 7 shows the allegation outcomes for the 649 referrals that met the LADO threshold to proceed as an allegation. The most common outcome was Unsubstantiated accounting for 258 (40%) of cases. Unsubstantiated outcomes indicate there was insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove an allegation, although management actions may still be identified to strengthen practice.

3.27 The next common outcome was Substantiated 190 cases (29%). Substantiated outcomes indicate, on the balance of probabilities, the concern was evidenced and required an appropriate management response. 67 cases (10%) of concerns are substantiated but can be managed through management actions and training rather than a dismissal, which indicates less serious concerns. Substantiated resulting in Dismissal was at 9% (59 cases).

3.28 Unfounded allegations accounted for 90 cases (14%). This outcome is often used when circumstances are such the actions of the perpetrator were perhaps misinterpreted. An example of this might be a necessary physical intervention to safeguard a child and others around them from harm but which hurt or upset the child in the process.

3.29 In 2023-24 and 2024-2025, 9% of referrals resulted in substantiated concerns. We have had a significant increase in substantiated concerns this year, which indicates the referrals being received are necessary and the enquiries process fully embedded is effective at gatekeeping lower-level referrals, which we do not require.

Table 7



LEA caseloads and breadth of work

3.30 Caseloads for LEAs have become more manageable since the service merged to form LESAS as LADO casework is able to be shared amongst a greater number of colleagues. The caveat to this is that days spent delivering safeguarding reviews and training means minor delays in casework at times. However, an enquiries officer is available each day to deal with any urgent enquiries on open cases when the allocated LADO is out of office.

3.31 The LEA role combining education safeguarding and LADO work can be challenging to manage especially for part-time staff despite them receiving pro rata amounts of rostered duties and traded activities to be delivered. Further part-time working arrangements for any new or additional staff therefore cannot be agreed as these do not meet the business needs.

Ofsted/DfE Complaints against Schools and other Ofsted Enquiries

3.32 During the reporting, period LESAS coordinated responses to Ofsted and Department for Education (DfE) safeguarding complaints and enquiries about schools and other educational settings. Ofsted classifies complaints into three categories:

- Category 1: Handled by the Front Door Service
- Category 2: Addressed by the LEAs (qualified social workers)
- Category 3: Provided as information to the Director of Children's Services office and addressed by LESAS or Assistant Director for Education

3.33 Ofsted also contacts the LADO service for other matters, such as pre-inspection data for inspections, settings, and individuals.

3.34 Table 8 reflects LESAS records for this period. There was an increase in complaints by 24%, and this should be understood in the context of a wider national picture of rising parental complaints and increased escalation through external routes, including Ofsted, the DfE and local authorities. Recent national commentary highlighted that schools are reporting more complaints being escalated beyond informal resolution, with contributing factors including increased parental expectations, social media, pressures around SEND provision and a greater willingness to pursue concerns through multiple routes as well as the increased assistance of Artificial Intelligence to help complainants articulate their concerns.

3.35 The increase may also reflect local recording and process factors. LESAS now provides a more centralised point for the recording and handling of Ofsted/DfE complaints and related enquiries, which may mean activity is being captured more consistently than under previous arrangements.

3.36 It is therefore likely the rise reflects a combination of increased external escalation, wider awareness of complaint routes, improved local recording, and the broadening range of enquiries being directed through the service. The increase does not, in itself, indicate all matters met a safeguarding threshold or

required formal action, but does demonstrate continued demand on LESAS capacity and the importance of maintaining clear triage, recording and response processes.

Table 8

Ofsted Category/Complaint type	2024/25	2025/26
1	8	5
2	29	18
3	284	281
Multiple categories	40	48
DfE	22	43
Other Ofsted enquiries	46	166
Total	429	561

Learning from Corporate Complaints

3.37 Four corporate complaints were received during the reporting period. These related to the statutory LADO function. One was from a person of concern who was referred to the LADO, and following the employer's management investigation, substantiated allegations were found. This complaint went to Stage 2 and there was learning for the setting in how they communicated the substantiated finding to the member of staff concerns. This was followed up by the LADO & Education Safeguarding Manager with the setting. The complaint was resolved at Stage 2 as there was no fault with how LESAS managed the allegation.

3.38 One complaint went through the Council's complaint stages 1 and 2 to the Ombudsman and necessitated an apology from KCC for failure to fully communicate the reasons for the decision not to investigate a parent's safeguarding complaint against a school which was an Academy.

3.39 The learning here for LESAS was that communication to the parent in a complaint response by the Assistant Director for Education, which covered some of the LESAS aspects, led to confusion for the parent about KCC's safeguarding roles and responsibilities. The lack of clarity in this response was a point of learning and was recognised as an oversight. In future situations similar to this, LESAS will provide a separate explanation that it is the LADO who determines whether the harm threshold is met against specific allegation of harm against an individual and the type of school it is irrelevant.

3.40 LESAS also received a complaint from another parent who was unhappy with the service provided by a child's school. LESAS undertook many appropriate actions in relation to the situation. The learning from this complaint also was that the communications with the parent had not fully explained all the actions taken. Once this was completed, the complaint quickly resolved. Complaints from parents about schools, where the school are investigating can present difficult dilemmas as the LADO needs to appropriately encourage parents to engage in

the investigations being undertaken by schools and seek information from the school about the actions taken and the outcome.

3.41 Another complaint was raised by a member of the public who felt sympathy for a person referred to the LADO function. LESAS was not able to share any information with the individual who was not entitled to know about the actions taken with the person concerned so this was hard to resolve.

3.42 LESAS also assisted with 1 Member of Parliament enquiry from a constituent about a school and one member of public complaint about a school they attended as a child.

4. Traded Activity

4.1 Table 9 below shows the comparison in LESAS income over the past 2 financial years. The rise in training demand since the 2024 merger demonstrates customers' trust in LESAS, which is further supported by high satisfaction ratings from training evaluations. However, the service remains aware of the importance of regularly reviewing and improving its offers.

Table 9

	2024-25	2025-26
Income from Training and Products	£392.2K	£484.3K
SLIP	£101.9K	£92.9K
Other LESAS commissioned work		£15.2K
TOTAL	£494.1K	£592.4K

Training

4.2 During the reporting period, LESAS continued to deliver a diverse and responsive training programme across Kent's education sector, supporting both statutory safeguarding responsibilities and professional development. The LESAS traded training offer comprises of a core training programme for DSLs in schools and early years settings, bespoke staff safeguarding training and eLearning courses for staff, to meet the education sectors' diverse learning needs.

4.3 During this period, a total of 1,532 learners booked onto LESAS core training courses, with 1,449 learners attending, representing an overall attendance rate of 95%. Of those attending, 1,063 learners (73%) participated in school-focused courses, while 386 learners (27%) attended early years-focused sessions. Early Years practitioners accounted for 28% of all bookings (425 of 1,532).

4.4 This distribution reflects strong engagement from the school sector and highlights the continued need to address access barriers for early years settings.

4.5 In addition to core training, 60 bespoke training sessions were delivered to schools, colleges, early years settings and KCC teams. While this represents a reduction from the previous reporting period of 76, bespoke training continued to provide organisations with tailored safeguarding support designed to meet specific needs, address local priorities and reinforce safeguarding practice in context.

4.6 LESAS saw a continued uptake of its digital training offer, with 694 eLearning courses purchased during the reporting period (2024-25: 749). Of these, 370 (53%) were school-focused and 324 (47%) were Early Years-focused. While overall purchases reduced slightly compared to the previous reporting period, uptake of Early Years eLearning increased from 260 purchases in 2024-25 to 324 in 2025-26, representing a 25% increase. This demonstrates growing demand for flexible and accessible safeguarding learning opportunities within the Early Years sector and reflects the increasing importance of digital training formats across education settings.

4.7 The percentages of participants rating core training as good or outstanding (4 or 5 out of 5) during the reporting period was:

- Quality of content: 97%
- Quality of delivery: 95%
- Achievement of learning outcomes: 98%
- Overall, 96% of ratings across the three evaluation measures were good or outstanding.

4.8 Comments from learners included:

- “Very knowledgeable facilitators and good to have the opportunity to ask questions. Pace was just right.”
- “The nuanced case studies were very helpful as they are reflective of many of the issues we deal with as DSL. Hearing experts talk us through actions and considerations gave me a lot of confidence.”
- “Both [LEA] and [SSO] were approachable, deeply knowledgeable and skilled with their delivery. I could not recommend them more highly.”
- “Detailed, informative, well-paced and clear links to relevant updates/guidance.”
- “By far the best DSL refresher course I have attended. It was excellently delivered by two knowledgeable and experienced people and offered everything I needed in a very relaxed and stress-free way.”
- “The course was extremely well presented. The delivery was brilliant and although there was a lot of information to take in, it was done well with good pace. Thank you”
- “Excellent practitioners delivered a first class training session. Their knowledge and pitch was very good and everything said landed well with the cohort. Best delivery of this type of course to date.”
- “The presenters were fabulous. Really engaging and are clearly experts in their fields. Was highly engaging and informative.”

- “This training was brilliant. The presenters were knowledgeable and able to share the important information. This was my second DSL refresher, and it really helped me understand local processes once again.”
- “Both presenters were very knowledgeable and shared very valid and appreciated support. I feel more confident in my role because of attending the training. Thankyou”

Safeguarding Reviews

4.9 In the reporting period, LESAS conducted 34 safeguarding reviews across education settings, an increase of 2 from the previous year as illustrated in Table 10. While this may appear modest in volume, the figure reflects a strategic focus on capacity building, particularly the upskilling of inexperienced staff in the education safeguarding function. This still required some shadowing due to changes in personnel and for those returning from periods of extended leave.

Table 10

Type of Review undertaken	2024/25	2025/26
Early years safeguarding review	3	3
Online safety review	1	0
School safeguarding review	24	26
Monitoring review	4	2
Bespoke commissioned visit	0	3
Total	32	34

4.10 The reviews were well received by schools and settings, offering valuable insights into safeguarding practice. They were not only compliance checks but also aimed to assess whether children were being safeguarded in the most effective way possible. All the reviews were requested by the settings themselves.

4.11 LESAS ensures each review is thorough, reflective, and contributes to ongoing improvement in safeguarding practice across Kent’s education sector by offering setting specific recommendations. There was some positive feedback on the reviews undertaken. 11 feedback forms were completed, and all graded the experience as 5/5 and something that they would recommend to other settings. One setting noted the cost may be prohibitive for some smaller settings.

4.12 Some of the comments made are as follows;

- “LEA was excellent. She was thorough, considerate and caring. The report was well put together and provided us with excellent feedback”
- “Very open discussions and it felt very supportive throughout. There was no negative 'you should already be doing this' attitude, it was very fair and honest, and we have developed because of it”.

5. Summary and Conclusions

4.13 In this first full year of operation since the merger LESAS demonstrated it was able to modernise and meet its statutory requirements in the context of high levels of demand. The service reorganisation and recruitment were embedded, and the staff group able to respond to the challenging environment. This was aided by the refinements to management systems, and Power BI performance monitoring. Specifically, LESAS demonstrated operational resilience and adaptability throughout this transition, maintaining consistently high standards of safeguarding delivery. Training feedback produces consistently high satisfaction rates (96–100%) across core and bespoke training delivered through the traded arm.

4.14 The implementation of enhanced systems and Power BI dashboards, markedly improved data integrity, throughput, and service efficiency. The establishment of defined Key Performance Indicators and strengthened quality assurance mechanisms reinforced accountability and performance oversight.

4.15 The Service is aware that to replicate another income surplus of the magnitude obtained in 2025-26 will be very difficult, not least because the SLIP activity ceased. Nevertheless, there is confidence in LESAS products that traded activity income can be increased to £500K. Other income streams from HAF commissioned activity around safeguarding will also be cultivated this year so that at least 10K income can be received from this stream.

4.16 As well as considering the LESAS income target, the service plans to comprehensively evaluate the costs of providing training. This will include exploring what profit is being made, identifying where expenditure could be reduced (e.g. venue hire), and examining whether training charges need to be adjusted in line with inflation and other on costs. The service will also explore whether subsidised training can be offered to some settings in a more targeted way, such as the Early Years sector, and how the service can remain relevant as planning for Local Government Reorganisation begins in earnest.

6. Action Plan 2026-2027

Objective	Action	Owner	Timeline	Success indicator
The Service will increase the accessibility of LADO referrals for members of the public by reviewing and streamlining the parental referral process, ensuring at least a 10%	LESAS will implement a simplified and accessible public referral process through the KCC Portal and monitor changes in referral rates.	LADO & Education Safeguarding Manager	September 2026 for implement ation of the portal and March 2027 for 10% increase.	The Public report improved understandin g and accessibility. Documented increase in referral numbers from

increase in parental referrals compared to 2025-26 baseline of 21.				members of the public.
Ensure all LESAS service areas meet or exceed 80% of Key Performance Indicators through 2026-27, with monthly reviews to monitor progress and address any underperformance.	All parts of LESAS will collect and report KPI data, with quarterly management information reviews to identify achievements and areas for development.	LESAS Service Manager	March 2027	KPI targets achieved in all service areas; staff survey demonstrates clear role understanding; staff retention rate is maintained or improved.
The Service will increase the accessibility of the information that it provides to parents and stakeholders on Kent's own website.	Create the LADO webpage on Kent.gov.uk, and review the current privacy notice	LESAS Service Manager	December 2026	LESAS website content will be created with clarity.
Maintain 25% of participation in core safeguarding training from EY settings across all areas.	Maintain and deliver area-based network meetings thrice annually; provide guest speakers and safeguarding updates; deploy area-based support for local training and reviews. Produce a survey and send to early years settings about the time of day and day of the week of DSL network meetings and training courses. Consideration to be given for a twilight core DSL	LESAS Service Manager	March 2027	25% participation in training by EY attendees; expanded safeguarding reviews in EY sector to 5.

	training in the 27/28 academic year.			
Increase traded income to at least £500K total income by 2027.	Review traded activity, training delivery, product development and income reporting to support future planning and ensure the agreed activity programme continues to meet service and income expectations.	Assistant Director for SPSQA, LESAS Service Manager, Senior Business Support Officer	March 2027	£500K income target achieved.
Completion of Quality Assurance (QA) visits to Kent's Family Hub network LESAS will then partake in the phase 2 of the Family Hub Network (QA) programme which is due to start in Winter 26/27	LEA cohort to conduct QA visits using bespoke tools, as part of a multi-agency group of quality assurance colleagues.	LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager	October 2026 – phase 1 completion . Phase 2 will complete in the 2027-8 financial year	All Kent family hubs districts homes receive QA visits; Start for Life Board evaluations reflect learning and impact; settings report improved safeguarding awareness.
Continue shared learning partnership with other local authorities and the National LADO network.	Organise and participate in peer review; address recommendation -s and document outcomes for service improvement.	LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager	December 2026	Peer review completed; action plan implemented ; recognition from National LADO Network maintained.

Information held by KCC is useful, held lawfully, filed appropriately and is accessible when required.	The LADO archive needs to be explored, and a decision made about how to manage / file the items in the archive moving forwards.	LESAS Service Manager and LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager	March 2027	The archive is appropriately filed and no longer exists in its current form.
Updated guidance in accordance with the new National LADO Network handbook is available to the public, stakeholders and LADOs alike.	Create the LADO practice manual including LADO Alerts (internal) and update Allegations Management Guidance (public facing)	LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager	March 2027	Accessible guidance is available.