



12 BY 24

Looked After Children aren't less clever than other children they are just less lucky

About 6% of care leavers under nineteen go to university

We want to double that number by 2024

Join us...

CSJ The Centre for
Social Justice



“Being in care is so hectic that it takes your mind off your long-term goals. When you are young your parents will be like what do you want to be when you’re grown up or someone in primary school will ask you. You’re more focused on your long-term goals because everyone around you is asking what do you want to be? What do you want to be? But then when you go into care they’re more focused on how you are going to be in the next year or next couple of years. How is your mental health going to be, how is your physical health going to be - you are only surrounded by short-term goals.”

Young person, 17

The 12 by 24 Pledge

Government figures show that 6% of 19-21-year-olds who experienced care growing up go on to university. We've been stuck at about 6% for more than ten years. This is a pledge to double that figure by 2024.

Changing lives is what the university sector does best, and we want to do everything we can to extend that opportunity to young people who have grown up in care. Young people from care backgrounds leaving education have some of the worst outcomes of any group, and we want to do what we can to help young people stay in education and get into university.

A care leaver is more likely to end up in a prison cell than a lecture theatre, and we want to change that. We should have aspirations for our young people in our care - the same aspirations we have for our own children. We believe anyone who has experienced care as a young person should have the chance to access university and benefit from the opportunities that come with it.

We're backing the 12 by 24 pledge to double the number of 19-21-year-old care leavers going to university from 6% to 12% by 2024.

Acknowledgement

The CSJ is grateful to Lorna Goodwin, Executive Director of First Star UK and the Sir John Cass's Foundation for their on-going support during this project. We are also grateful to The Children's Society for providing two secondees - Hannah Chetwynd and Charlotte Rainer - who did much of the work to produce this report. Without the generous support of all the above this project would not have been possible.

The Sir John Cass's Foundation:

Sir John Cass's Foundation is one of London's oldest education charities which provides grants to support the education of young people in London. One of the Foundation's priorities is to support projects which benefit young people in care and care-leavers. Since 2016 it has supported the First Star Academy at St Mary's University and more recently announced funding towards First Star Academies UK.



The Foundation is particularly delighted to support this piece of research in partnership with the Centre for Social Justice and First Star and hopes it will prove seminal in improving the opportunities for care-experienced young people accessing higher education.

www.sirjohncassfoundation.com | [@SJCFGrants](https://twitter.com/SJCFGrants)

The Children's Society:

The Children's Society is a national charity that works with the most vulnerable children and young people in Britain today. We listen. We support. We act. Because no child should feel alone. In 2017/18 we worked with over 11,000 vulnerable children and young people in our services.'



www.childrenssociety.org.uk | [@childrensociety](https://twitter.com/childrensociety)

Timeout:

We wish to thank Dominic Macauley and Timeout Children's Homes for their support during this project.



Timeout is family run organisation established in 2004, our ethos and philosophy is based on a systemic approach to promote a child's emotional well-being. We specialise in 1:1 care in both solo and dual occupancy homes and now operate in 16 homes across the North West & West Yorkshire. Timeout specialises in providing integrated, therapeutic, evidence-based care for young people in their homes. Each Timeout home is designed specifically to nurture young people so they can learn how to live a positive, independent life.

Timeout ensure that a holistic approach guides all aspects of the child's development, whether it is in education, therapy or therapeutic care. We believe that everyone who is involved in the child's progress has an understanding of the impact of abuse and neglect and its demonstration in presenting behaviours. Timeout Homes recognises that the educational needs of the child are fundamental to their success and developing their ability to learn and gain qualifications is key to a child's accessibility to further and higher education and/or vocational training and skills. Alongside support for children in a mainstream school setting, Timeout has established two specialist schools for those who have been excluded or require more detailed support.

www.timeouthomes.co.uk | [@TimeoutHomes](https://twitter.com/TimeoutHomes)

We're backing plans to increase the number of care leavers at universities to 12 by 24

Going to university is a life changing experience and remains an aspiration for many young people looking to build a better future for themselves. Evidence from this report shows it is an aspiration for young people in care too.

Simply finishing school shouldn't be the only aspiration for looked after young people. For many it's an incredible achievement in the circumstances but for those who want it higher education should be a realistic ambition.

There are few groups less likely to access higher education than young people growing up in care. About 6 per cent of care leavers leave school and go on to university. This figure hasn't changed in over a decade. Care leavers make up 0.1 per cent of all undergraduates. You're more likely to bump into an undergraduate from Cyprus than a student who grew up in a care.

This report shows that too many young people growing up in care feel university isn't for them. They told us it is simply not what happens when you leave the care system. We should change that. If we want an education system that promotes social mobility and tackles long standing disadvantage then it shouldn't matter where you've come from, but where you're going.

Improving attainment at school will always be the best thing we can do to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds get on. This report sets out the extent to which care experienced children still fall behind their peers. The message from a roundtable of experts conducted during this report was clear: If we want to see more children from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing university and higher education, we need to engage our young people in care much earlier to ensure that where they have fallen behind, they are given the help they need to catch up.

The evidence contained in this report shows that if we act early enough, we will see more young people leaving the care system and entering higher education. Among all the facts and figures, this report presents a simple challenge to government and the higher education sector to do more to help young people who have had the worst start in life to have the best future.

The challenge to us all is on the front cover of this report: when it comes to care leavers, finishing school and going onto university we can do better than six per cent. At the very least, we should aim to double this number and set out a plan to do so within the next five years.

Many universities are working hard to improve these figures, but this report shows that barely a third of universities have set out detailed plans to take action to change the number of care leavers on their courses.

12 by 24 recognises that we can close the gap between young people leaving care and their peers. We should accept the challenge.

Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable MP

Liberal Democrat, Twickenham,
Leader of the Liberal Democrats,
2017-19

Tim Loughton MP

Conservative, East Worthing and
Shoreham, Former Children's
Minister, 2010-12

Steve McCabe MP

Labour, Birmingham Selly Oak
Chairman, All Party
Parliamentary Group for Looked
After Children and Care Leavers



Why we wanted to work with First Star...

The CSJ is different from other think tanks, we go beyond the 'Westminster bubble' to find charities that are solving big social problems somewhere far away from the SW1. We call this linking the back streets to the corridors of power. For the CSJ identifying the best small charities is a methodology and feeds into all our work. This report was inspired by a visit to a First Star Academy at St Mary's University, Twickenham. We were so impressed with what we saw that we wanted to make sure we brought it to the attention of policy makers in Whitehall.

First Star is the UK's only long-term university preparatory programme for Looked-after Children. First Star Academies are not academies in the traditional UK sense instead First Star finds local Looked After Children from around the age of 14 (the beginning of GCSEs) and links them to a university where they are given additional academic support alongside a wider curriculum of life skills up to 18. This support is provided through monthly campus-based sessions and a summer school all with the aim of preparing young people from care backgrounds to seriously consider higher education as an option for them. The American version of the First Star Academy programme has a 67% success rate in helping foster children into higher education, or a 91% success rate into further and higher education. This success rate is astonishing and the capacity for life change is profound. This has always been an important principle for the CSJ, that poverty might be something you are born into but successful policy enables you to change your circumstances. This approach to life change runs through the First Star model.

First Star students choose to join the programme and commit four weeks of their summer vacation to the residential academy every year for four years as well as monthly top up sessions on campus. Each Academy runs for four years - ensuring each cohort experiences the complete programme, and once a student enters the First Star programme they remain part of First Star even if their care circumstances change.

There is no 'cherry picking' of the brightest and best, broadly First Star students come from the middle 50% of ability. Among this group are many who can and should aspire to university but haven't been given the encouragement to think about higher education. The only selection is through conversations with teachers, Virtual School Heads and social workers to make sure that a young person would benefit from a First Star Academy and speaking to the young person themselves to make sure they are willing to commit.

The first academy in the UK has opened at St Mary's University in Twickenham with many more to come. We hope this work inspires future academies and the up-take of First Star Academies at every university in years to come.

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Use of images: To protect the identity of young people who contributed to this report and stock imagery has been used however all quotes are from young people from care backgrounds and their voice is an essential part of this work.



“I have had four changes of school, secondary school that is - I have only ever been to one primary school. It is really difficult every time I have to change and it still is but I always just get through it. Catching up on school is hard because they are all learning different things, different sections and I miss bits because I haven't been in the same school and making friends is difficult and like talking to new people is just difficult anyway.”

Young person, 15

Why we use the 6% DfE figure in this report

Throughout this report, we make it clear that about 6% of 19-21-year-olds go to university. We focus on this age range because 19-21 remains the typical age at which young people go to university and this participation rate remains particularly low. While it is understandable that a care experienced young person may take longer to arrive at university than their non-care peers there is also an inherent danger in simply accepting this. We know for example that the NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate for young care leavers is much higher than the general population alongside the likelihood of being involved with the criminal justice system and experiencing homelessness. It is a judgement made by the authors of this report that we should be aware of these risks and a longer gap between periods of formal education and where appropriate encourage a seamless continuation from school to higher education to mitigate this risk.

It is important to note research around other estimates which are relevant. Dr Neil Harrison, for instance, estimates that, in total, 11.8% of care leavers enter higher education. He arrives at this figure by adopting a broader metric. Dr Harrison's definition includes care leavers who enter higher education between the ages of 18 and 23.

While the DfE figures are based on returns made by individual local authorities, Harrison's methodology includes tracking young people from school via unique identification numbers - he suggests that this is a more accurate approach, as some local authorities lose track of care leavers once they reach the age of 16 (for instance because they move out of their home local authority areas or because they refuse local authority assistance). Harrison's definition includes any individual in care in their sixteenth year, whereas the DfE defines care leavers as '[a]ll children who had been looked after for at least 13 weeks which began after they reached the age of 14 and ended after they reached the age of 16'.

Looked after children/care leavers have overwhelmingly poor access to universities and should remain a priority for widening participation. Definitions in this area will always be challenging. We would like to see greater understanding brought to this area and within that a new data set that recognizes potential risks associated with moving out of formal education and an ambition where it is appropriate to encourage young people to remain in education and move on into higher education without significant gaps.

Why are we looking at university?

The focus of this report is on access to universities for young people in the care system in England. A university education is, of course, just one of many options available. But all routes of learning should be available to all children, regardless of background, and this is plainly not the case for looked-after children and care leavers, who have shockingly little access to universities.

This matters because a university education can open the gateway to opportunity. According to the Department for Education's Graduate Labour Market Statistics, graduates are better off in the labour market than non-graduates.¹ The median salary for the working-age population graduates is £33,000, while non-graduates earn £23,000, and graduates earn 55% more during their working lives than those who start work at 18.² On average, a working-age graduate earned over £10,000 more than the average non-graduate in 2017.³ In 2017, graduates from the working-age population (16-64 years old) had an employment rate of 87.5%, while non-graduates had an employment rate of 71.1%.⁴ Moreover, 40% of jobs require a higher education qualification.⁵

1 Department for Education, Graduate Labour Market Statistics: 2017, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/graduate-labour-market-statistics-2017 [accessed January 2019]

2 propel.org.uk/uk/is-higher-education-for-me

3 Department for Education, Graduate Labour Market Statistics: 2017, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/graduate-labour-market-statistics-2017 [accessed January 2019]

4 Ibid.

5 <https://propel.org.uk/uk/is-higher-education-for-me>

Recent efforts have been made through the specialist Propel website to promote university to young people from care backgrounds. The website allows young people to search for the course and university that is right for them, as well as providing information on practical support such as finance and accommodation. Propel provides young people with a list of reasons to go to university (“Propel’s top ten reasons to go to university”⁶) which includes learning to live independently and building important and potentially life changing social networks. These friendships among non-care experienced peers can last long after graduation and into adulthood.

Methodology

Research aims

- Help understand the educational attainment of, and subsequent outcomes for, looked-after children/care leavers.
- Provide an overview of the number of care leavers attending higher education.
- Help understand the perceived and actual barriers that looked-after children/care leavers face in relation to accessing higher education.
- Identify good practice already in place to support looked-after children/care leavers who decide they want to access higher education.
- Develop a set of standards for universities to encourage positive engagement and support for looked-after children/care leavers.

The research was conducted between September 2018 and December 2018 and incorporated a range of data collection methods:

Literature and policy scoping

A brief review of published literature to understand the educational attainment of looked-after children/care leavers and the support that exists for them in the education system.

A survey of looked-after children and care leavers

This included two streams of responses:

- a. A survey of 109 looked-after children and care leavers aged 13 and over, commissioned through the research consultancy ComRes; and
- b. A Smart Survey of 51 looked-after children and care leavers, aged 13 and over, by the Children’s Society.

The surveys asked if respondents had thought about going to university and posed further questions about the reasons behind their decisions and the support they had received (see Appendix B for survey questions).

6 Ibid.

Interviews with young people

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen young people aged 14-24, who were either still in care or were care leavers, and who aspired to or had made the decision to go to university. The young people were at various stages in their academic studies or careers.

- Four young people were in care and attending secondary school
- Five young people were in further education (of whom four were care leavers and were living in either supported accommodation or in staying put arrangements)
- Five young people were care leavers and at university
- One young person was completing an apprenticeship

See Appendix C for full interview schedule.

Freedom of Information (FOI) to all English public universities that provide undergraduate courses

Sent to 97 universities in England in September 2018 (excluding all Scottish, Welsh and Irish universities, all private providers, some specialist institutions, and those which only provide post-graduate study), 82% of institutions responded.

The FOI asked:

How many care leavers, according to your institution's definition of a care leaver (for example, the Department for Education defines a care leaver as "[a]ll children who had been looked after for at least 13 weeks which began after they reached the age of 14 and ended after they reached the age of 16"), started an undergraduate degree course at your university in the academic year 2017/18?

Analysis of data obtained from the Higher Education Statistical Agency

A data request was made to the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) in October 2018 in relation to the number of care leavers attending each higher educational institution in England. The data obtained included the number of UK domiciled undergraduate students who were care leavers at UK higher education providers between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

This was broken down by:

- Care leaver marker
- Higher educational provider
- First year marker
- Age on entry (17 years and under, 18-20 years, 21-24 years, 25-29 years, 30 years and over, age unknown)
- Continuation status (2013/14-2015/2016 only)

Analysis of the 2018/19 Access and Participation agreements from all English public universities that provide undergraduate courses

This included 102 universities in England. The analysis focused on which universities included care leavers as a target group in their agreements and those that had also targeted activity around the cohort.

Roundtable

A roundtable event took place in London in December 2018. There were 24 attendees from a range of backgrounds, including representatives from the Department for Education, the Office for Students, the National Association of Virtual School Heads, local authorities, third-sector organisations that work with looked-after children and care leavers, academics specialising in widening participation for care leavers at university, and a care leaver.

Attendees discussed the design of a potential framework of best practice for universities, including the standards that should be included to best support care leavers, how to incentivise universities to use the framework, how the framework should be used in practice, and how the framework should be communicated to young people.

Focus group with young people

A number of the young people we interviewed as part of our research for this project (please see above) also took part in a focus group to give their views on the standards developed during the roundtable event.

Ethics and oversight

The ethical conduct of the research was assured through the Children's Society's, as well as the 'Research Ethics and Engagement Framework' (REEF).

Foreword

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is proud to support the 12 by 24 Pledge. The NNECL represents over 100 organisations working to help care leavers access, succeed in, and progress from, further and higher education. The network was first established in 2011 and became an independent charity in November 2018.

In November 2017 we commissioned 'Moving on Up', a research report compiled by Dr Neil Harrison. Its findings chime closely with those of this report. For example, 'Moving on Up' found that only 12% of care leavers had entered higher education by the age of 23. The Centre for Social Justice has found that only half of these (6% of care leavers) entered higher education by the age of 21, confirming that care leavers are both less likely to enter higher education than other young people, and that when they do they tend to do so at a later age.

Both 'Moving on Up' and this report recognised the value of developing a quality mark or 'Gold Standard' for higher education providers to articulate a minimum set of expectations for those working to support care leavers, to share best practice, and to recognise providers that really stand out. The NNECL is extremely grateful to the UPP Foundation for providing funding to pilot and test a quality mark framework, and it has been an honour and a pleasure to join forces with the Centre for Social Justice and First Star Academies, both of which have led the development of the core criteria that will be used to develop a working process ready to roll out nationwide by early 2020.

It has also been a pleasure to work with Spectra First to explore ways in which the NNECL can support the Care Leaver Covenant outcomes, which will also be closely linked to the new 'Gold Standard'. Finally, I am (as always) extremely grateful to the NNECL's members and partnership organisations, and especially to the National Steering Group and Board of Trustees, for their unerring support and wisdom as we develop the new 'Gold Standard'.

Colette Fletcher

Assistant Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester
Chair of the Board of Trustees, National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL)



At the time of my GCSEs, I moved out of my long-term foster placement to another foster placement...I had been in it eight years...it was right in the middle of it... I could have done a lot better, I got one B and four Cs. I was down to get really good grades but because I had all that going on literally as I was doing my GCSEs, I didn't have time to revise or do anything really.



Executive summary

Looked-after children and care leavers are some of the most vulnerable people in society.

The majority enter the care system as a result of abuse and neglect. Many have experienced significant childhood trauma. Almost half have a diagnosable mental health disorder, and they are four times more likely to have a special educational need than all other children.

Care-experienced individuals are also at high risk of becoming homeless and entering the criminal justice system.

Their educational outcomes are often dire. They progress far less well than non-looked-after children between primary school and Key Stage 4, and their average Attainment 8 score is just 19.3 compared to 44.5 for non-looked-after children.

These individuals are also much less likely than average to move into higher education. The Department for Education (DfE) calculates that just 6% of care leavers aged 19-21 go on to higher education, compared to 34% of 19-21-year-olds in the general population. This matters a great deal, because access to higher education can be a powerful gateway to opportunity, particularly for those who have started with so little in life.

The government has recognised the need for action and has put in place a range of measures to help looked-after children and care leavers overcome the barriers they face, and promote high aspirations - just like any parent should.

Yet it is clear that this, on its own, is not working.

Part of the answer, of course, lies in addressing family breakdown, improving the support which looked-after children receive in schools, and improving our foster care offer. However, higher education institutions also have a crucial role to play, and this is our focus in the present report.

There is substantial variability in the number of care leavers who attend different universities in England, and while many universities are taking their responsibilities towards care leavers seriously, there is still far too much variability in the focus and efficacy of these measures.

It is time to change our approach.

Informed not just by statistics, but also by the opinions of those who have lived experience of foster care, the recommendations we propose in this report are aimed at improving care leavers' access to a university education and giving them the chance to enjoy the many returns which such an education brings.

Summary of recommendations

The ‘Gold Standard’

- The Department for Education should endorse and support the ‘Gold Standard’ framework, which will be delivered by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNCEL). This support should be extended to grant funding for the administrative costs associated with a national roll-out of the ‘Gold Standard’, as well as official endorsement.
- The Care Leaver Covenant should promote the ‘Gold Standard’ as set out in this report as a framework that all participating institutions should follow in their work to support care leavers in further and higher education.
- To ensure there is a consistent approach to all care leavers, the Office for Students, in advance of the ‘Gold Standard’ framework being rolled out, should consult on the definition of a care leaver to be used by higher education institutions in their Access and Widening Participation agreements.
- To ensure that the voice of care leavers and young people in care is always heard, the DfE and National Network for the Education of Care Leavers should establish a Youth Advisory Board to consult with young people on the development and implementation of best practice standards.

Improving transitional support

- The Minister for Children and the Office for Students should strongly encourage all higher education institutions to include looked-after children as a priority group within Access and Participation Plans. This should be extended to cover specific activity and targets related to this group.
- Higher education providers should ensure that all applications from care-experienced young people are given a ‘triple check’ based on the King’s College London model, while also ensuring that no care-experienced applicant is rejected without extensive investigation into their application and senior oversight.

Data collection

- Developing a pipe-line: The DfE should extend its data collection and monitoring of care leavers’ outcomes up to the age of 25 in line with corporate parenting requirements. This would capture care leavers who access higher education aged 21 and above.
- The DfE should collect and publish data on the number of care leavers and children in care who go on to study for further education qualifications. This should include reporting on the educational outcomes for looked-after children/care leavers at Key Stage 5.
- The DfE should work with the HESA to develop an annual report on the number of care leavers studying on degree-level courses by institution. The transparency should provide policymakers with an annual snapshot of the care leavers student population.



“Like most kids in care think I’ve ended up here so I don’t care what I do with my life but I think they should be pushed and they should know that they can go to university because there is more to life.”

Young person, 17

Chapter 1 - The characteristics of children in care

To understand how universities might better position themselves to support children in care and care leavers, we must first understand who these individuals are and the challenges they face.

Numbers

- On 31st March 2018, there were 75,420 children in care in England.⁷ There was a 4% increase in the number of looked-after children between 2017 and 2018.⁸
- In 2018, 32,050 children of all ages entered the care of local authorities; just under half of that figure (46%) were aged 10 and over.⁹
- The most common age for entry into the care system is between 10 and 15 years old; 9,390 children and young people between these ages entered the care system in 2017.¹⁰
- 17% of those who entered care in 2017 were aged 16 and over.¹¹ Late entry into care is associated with greater personal instability and worse outcomes, especially in relation to education.¹² (According to the Rees Centre, for example, achievement at Key Stage 4 is linked to the age of entry into care and reasons for coming into care, and those who have been in care longer tend to do better at Key Stage 4 than those who have been in care in the short term.)¹³
- The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who enter the care system has risen in recent years. On 31st March 2018 there were 4,480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in care,¹⁴ representing around 6% of all looked-after children in England. These children have their own set of specific needs, especially in relation to education.¹⁵

7 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2017-2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018> [accessed December 2018]

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2016-2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017> [accessed December 2018]

11 Ibid.

12 The Centre for Social Justice, Survival of the fittest? - Improving life chances for care leavers, January 2014 [<https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/survival-fittest-improving-life-chances-care-leavers>]

13 Sebba, J., D. Berridge, N. Luke, J. Fletcher, K. Bell, S. Strand, S. Thomas, I. Sinclair and A. O'Higgins, The educational progress of looked after children in England: linking care and educational data, November 2015

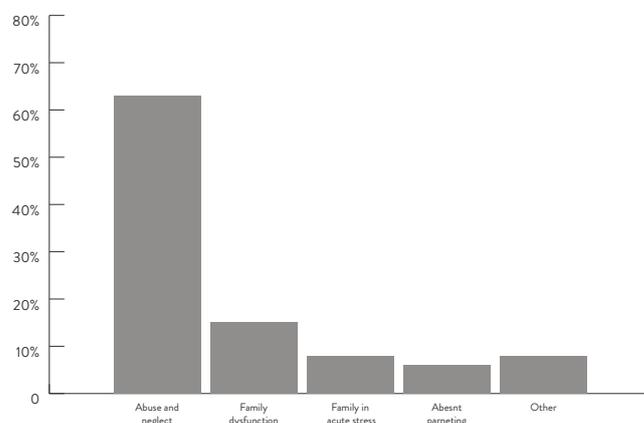
14 Ibid.

15 Unicef, Education for refugee and asylum seeking children: Access and equality in England, Scotland and Wales, 2017 [<https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Access-to-Education-report-PDF.pdf>]

Reasons why a young person enters care

Children and young people become looked after for many different reasons, but the official data identifies five broad types of primary need. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of looked-after children enter the care system as a result of abuse and neglect (63%).¹⁶

Figure 1: The proportions of children looked after by primary need on 31st March 2018 (DfE, 2018)



The impact of childhood trauma

Many young people in care have experienced significant childhood trauma.¹⁷ Almost half of children in care have a diagnosable mental health disorder.¹⁸ Mental health difficulties can increase vulnerability and create additional barriers to education while simultaneously contributing to low educational outcomes.¹⁹

Researchers have also found a link between the prevalence of special educational needs and experiences of trauma, and many looked-after children's special educational needs stem from childhood trauma, including behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, mental health issues or learning difficulties.²⁰

Special Educational Needs

Looked-after children are four times more likely to have a Special Educational Need (SEN) than all other children, and are almost ten times more likely to have a statement of special educational need, or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.²¹

In 2017, 56.3% of looked-after children had a special educational need, compared to 14.4% of all other children.²² Social, emotional and mental health were the most common primary needs for looked-after children; these accounted for 37.6% of those with a statement or EHC plan and 45.6% in need of SEN support, compared to 12.4% with a statement or EHC plan and 17.3% with SEN support in the child population more generally.²³

16 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2017-2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018> [accessed December 2018]

17 Harrison, N., Moving on up: pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education, 2017

18 Department for Education, Department of Health, Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England, March 2015 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children-2>]

19 Harrison, N., Moving on up: pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education, 2017

20 Ibid.

21 Department for Education, Outcomes for children looked-after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/695360/SFR20_2018_Text_1.pdf [accessed January 2019]

22 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2016-2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017> [accessed December 2018]

23 Ibid.



“Primary school. I wish I had [attended]...I wish, when I had gone into care teachers had been focused on getting me to do my work and staying on task so I could do better and achieve better. That’s something I really do wish like they do more to help kids in care stay on task, to do the work, to turn up to school because I feel that’s where it all goes wrong and why a lot of people don’t go to uni....it does have a lot to do with support in schools.”

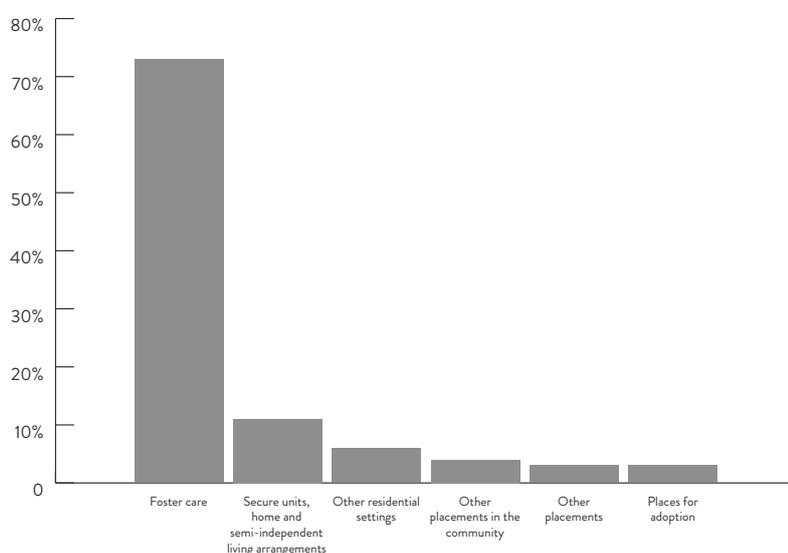
Young person, 15

Having a special educational need means that these children are overcoming extra challenges to achieve their potential. The Rees Centre has shown that specific forms of SEN, such as severe/multiple learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional or social needs or autism spectrum disorders are associated with poorer educational achievement at Key Stage 4.²⁴

Placements

Children in care are placed either with foster parents, in residential children’s homes, or in residential settings such as schools or secure units. As Figure 2 highlights, the majority of looked-after children are placed in foster placements (73% in 2018).²⁵ An increasing proportion of children in foster care have been placed with relatives or friends (up from 14% in 2014 to 18% in 2018).²⁶ In 2018 11% of children were placed in secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent living arrangements.²⁷

Figure 2: The proportion of looked-after children by placement type on 31st March 2018 (DfE, 2018)



The Social Market Foundation estimates that 100,000 children flow through the care system each year, and many move in and out of care, and between care placements.²⁸ Official statistics from the DfE show that, in 2018, 68% of looked-after children had only one placement during the year; 21% had two placements, and 10% had three or more placements.²⁹ For almost all placement types, there are far more shorter placements than longer placements, and in 2017 36% of placements lasted less than six months.³⁰

Children in care need stability - not only to provide a sense of security, but also to avoid disrupting their education by moving placements and schools. School changes and placement changes have both been shown to increase the risk of educational underperformance, and lower levels of disruption are linked with better outcomes.³¹

24 Sebba, J., D. Berridge, N. Luke, J. Fletcher, K. Bell, S. Strand, S. Thomas, I. Sinclair and A. O’Higgins, The educational progress of looked after children in England: linking care and educational data, November 2015

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Social Market Foundation, Looked-after Children: The Silent Crisis, September 2018 [<http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Silent-Crisis-PDF.pdf>]

29 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2017-2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018> [accessed January 2019]

30 Ibid.

31 Sebba, J., D. Berridge, N. Luke, J. Fletcher, K. Bell, S. Strand, S. Thomas, I. Sinclair and A. O’Higgins, The educational progress of looked after children in England: linking care and educational data, November 2015



“But I feel in a way that unis need to more and schools. Like schools definitely need to provide that support a lot more. I haven’t heard my school mention once about living situations and stuff like that and how that will come into account in uni. They’ve just been like yeah you should all apply even if you don’t want to go to uni. Like some people might not have the confidence to voice that and say I am in a difficult situation and I might not know where the hell I am living can you support me in finding out this information about whether there’s accommodation available, if there is funding, if there are scholarships available for me. I feel like unis have started to do that a bit more but I feel like schools need to put it out there a lot more.”

Young person, 17

Chapter 2 - The support which looked-after children and care leavers receive to promote their education

The government has, over the years, introduced a number of initiatives to boost the educational outcomes of looked-after children and care leavers. We outline below some of the main initiatives that exist in each case.

Looked-after children

Guidance for schools

Statutory guidance (*promoting the education of looked-after and previously-looked-after children*)³² sets out a number of expectations for schools which work with looked-after children to ensure they are fulfilling their educational potential.

Virtual School Heads

The Children and Families Act 2014 obliges local authorities to introduce Virtual School Heads (VSHs). VSHs³³ must ensure that looked-after children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational achievement [examples].

Designated teachers

The Children and Young Person's Act 2008 requires maintained schools to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children who are on their rolls.³⁴ While the VSH coordinates support for all looked-after children in their local authority areas, designated teachers are the initial point of contact within schools for looked-after children and play a more day-to-day role in promoting their educational achievement [examples].

Personal Education Plans

Schools have a statutory duty to develop a Personal Education Plan (PEP) for each looked-after child. Said plan should set out how schools aim to meet the educational needs of these pupils, and how they intend to promote aspiration. The plan should also cover career advice, including guidance and financial information about further and higher education, as well as training and employment.³⁵ Discussions about long-term goals should start early.³⁶

32 Department for Education, Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities, February 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

33 The Children and Families Act 2014, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

34 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents>

35 Department for Education, Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities, February 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

36 Ibid.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

The Children Act 2004 has made it a statutory duty for local authorities to promote the educational attainment of looked-after children.³⁷ As corporate parents, local authorities should have high aspirations for children in their care.

Local authorities are required to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to protect and advocate for looked-after children during the care planning process. IROs should check whether PEPs are updated and working well, and should raise any concerns with social workers and Virtual School Heads.

Pupil Premium Plus

Looked-after children are eligible for additional funding at school, known as Pupil Premium Plus. The purpose of this funding is to help improve the educational attainment of looked-after and previously-looked-after children, and to close the attainment gap that exists between this group and many of their peers. VSHs should manage this funding and should ensure that resources support the goals outlined in PEPs.

In 2018/19, schools will receive a Pupil Premium Plus of £2,300 per looked-after child.³⁸ This compares favourably to Pupil Premium (£1,320 for primary-age pupils on free school meals, and £935 for secondary-age pupils). The relative uplift in funding for looked-after children reflects the additional barriers they tend to face.

Boarding schools

The DfE has also spearheaded a number of helpful initiatives to improve access to boarding schools for vulnerable children. The case study below provides some examples, and demonstrates the considerable positive impact which said examples have had on the lives of vulnerable individuals.

Support post-16

Pupil Premium Plus extends only as far as Year 11 and there is no requirement for further educational colleges (or sixth-form schools) to appoint a designated teacher. The role of the VSH extends to supporting young people in care up to the age of 18.

Care leavers

When young people leave the care system, it is vital that they get the support they need to build independence and continue to develop educationally. The government has introduced a number of initiatives to promote this. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 was particularly noteworthy, introducing, for the first time, a statutory framework of support for all care leavers, which includes educational support.³⁹ The Children and Social Work Act 2017, meanwhile, extended local authorities' corporate parenting responsibilities to the age of 25.⁴⁰ Statutory guidance sets out that, in line with the Children Act 1989 and the corporate parenting principles, young people transitioning from care should be supported in continuing their education and achieving their aspirations.⁴¹ The 2013 Care Leaver Strategy set out the importance of supporting care leavers in continuing their education,⁴² and the 2016 Care Leaver Strategy, Keep on caring, further entrenched this point.⁴³

37 The Children Act 2004, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents>

38 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2018-to-2019/pupil-premium-2018-to-2019-conditions-of-grant>

39 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

40 The Children and Social Work Act 2017, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted>

41 Department for Education, Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities, February 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

42 HM Government, Care Leaver Strategy: A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care, October 2013, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf

43 HM Government, Keep on caring: Supporting young people from care to independence, July 2016, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/>

The Care Leaver Covenant

The Care Leaver Covenant (CLC) is an important part of the government's Keep on Caring strategy. It encourages public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support care leavers - including, for example, through apprenticeships and work experience. As part of the Keep on Caring strategy, the government also committed itself to broadening care leavers' access to higher education. The CLC gives universities the opportunity to set out the measures they will introduce to support care leavers at university - at present 12 universities have signed up to the CLC.

Local offer

In the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the government also introduced a requirement for local authorities to publish a 'Local Offer', which should inform looked-after young people with information about the services available to them when they leave care. A key part of this offer should include services that relate to education and training, and the VSH should help inform this.

Personal advisers and pathway plans

When a young person leaves care, the relevant local authority must appoint a personal adviser to support them. Personal advisers provide care leavers with practical and emotional support until the age of 25.⁴⁴ One important aspect of the personal adviser's role is to develop a 'pathway plan'. This plan should set out how a care leaver's needs will be met as they move from care to independence. This includes developing relationships with further education colleges and higher education institutions - particularly those that are likely to understand and meet their needs.⁴⁵ Pathway plans should also set out the practical support care leavers can expect from their local authorities when studying at university - including, for example, in relation to accommodation and financial support during term-time and holidays.

Local authority support for further and higher education

Local authorities are expected to contribute to the financial costs of care leavers' further education. Care leavers aged 16-19 in full-time education are a priority group for the 16-19 Bursary Fund, which is worth up to £1,200 per individual.^{46,47} The 16-19 bursary differs from Pupil Premium Plus, as it is awarded directly to the student and is used to help with costs such as travel, meals and equipment. VSHs are expected to play a supporting role and to work with personal advisers.

The government has also introduced measures to help care leavers access higher education. The Children (leaving care) Act 2000⁴⁸ and the Children and Young Person's Act 2008⁴⁹, for instance, placed a duty on local authorities to provide support to care leavers who want to go into higher education - including by addressing two major obstacles: accommodation and finance. The Leaving Care Act introduced a duty for local authorities to provide care leavers with vacation accommodation (or the funds to secure it) while in higher education. In addition, the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 allowed care leavers who enrolled on recognised higher education courses to claim bursaries of £2,000 from their local authorities.

[uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf](#)

44 <https://careleaverpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Extending-PA-Support.pdf0>

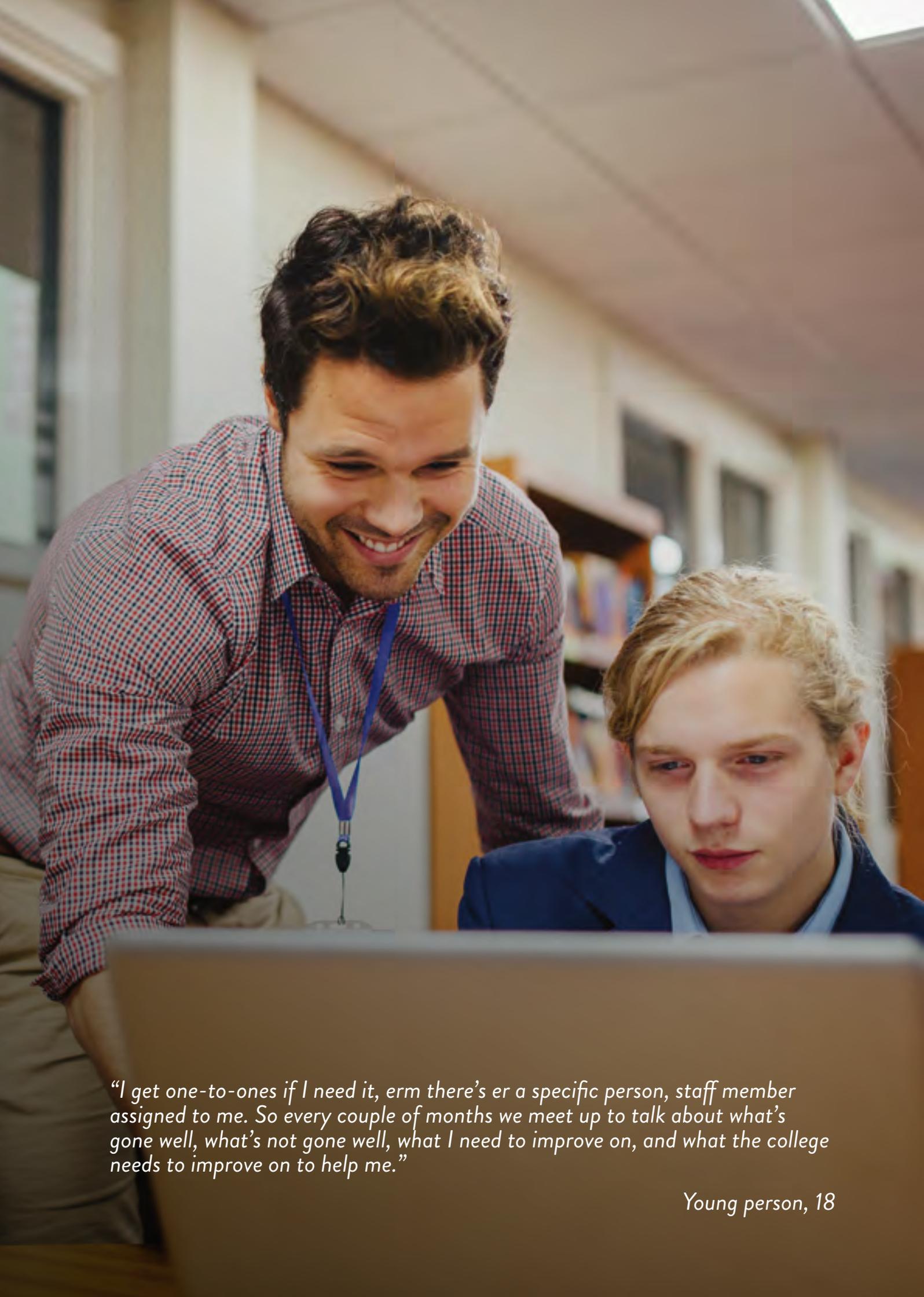
45 Department for Education, The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations: Volume 3: planning transitions to adulthood for care leavers, October 2010, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf

46 HM Government, Keep on caring: Supporting young people from care to independence, July 2016, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf

47 Response from Lord Agnew of Oulton to written question from Baroness Eaton on support in further education, 28th November 2018, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers/?page=1&max=20&questiontype=AllQuestions&house=commons%2clords&member=4184>

48 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

49 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents>



“I get one-to-ones if I need it, erm there’s er a specific person, staff member assigned to me. So every couple of months we meet up to talk about what’s gone well, what’s not gone well, what I need to improve on, and what the college needs to improve on to help me.”

Young person, 18

The specific needs of unaccompanied and separated children

The number of unaccompanied and separated children in the care system is increasing.

Research shows that education is important for refugee and asylum-seeking young people - it is seen as a way to gain qualifications and progress to higher education.^{50,51} However, these individuals face additional, distinct barriers when navigating their journey to university. They have, for example, arrived in the country alone, with limited or no financial means or social capital, and depend on the support provided by children's services or charities. Unaccompanied and separated children are prone to disruptions to their education - some asylum-seeking children of school age are not in education because they struggle to find places and some schools are reluctant to admit them.⁵²

The uncertainty of their immigration status can also cause problems, and can adversely affect mental health and motivation.⁵³ Many unaccompanied and separated young people must wait until they are granted 'indefinite leave to remain' (which may not be until they have been in the UK for over six years) before they can access support.⁵⁴ In addition, many unaccompanied and separated children are unlikely to be granted status before they turn 18.⁵⁵

The immigration process poses other formidable obstacles. An unaccompanied child's immigration status determines whether they pay home fees or international fees and their eligibility for student finance. For example, unaccompanied children who are still awaiting an asylum decision, or who have been granted 'leave as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child' (UASC leave) as opposed to refugee status, are classed as international students; this means they must pay higher fees and do not have access to student finance. High costs and lack of alternative financial support effectively exclude these individuals from higher education. The government has introduced a long residency category, which means young people who have lived in England for over half of their lives may be eligible for student finance and home fees in England;⁵⁶ but while this may apply to some unaccompanied and separated young people, it does not include individuals who have not been residents for long periods.

Unaccompanied and separated children are entitled to support from their local authorities, although this support can be compromised if their asylum claims are unsuccessful or if they do not secure further leave to remain.

50 Access HE, Falling through the Cracks: Enabling access to HE for unaccompanied asylum seeker children, <https://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdlx0u7/AccessHE-Report-Falling-Through-the-Cracks-WEB.pdf>

51 Unicef, Education for refugee and asylum seeking children: Access and equality in England, Scotland and Wales, 2017 [<https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Access-to-Education-report-PDF.pdf>]

52 <https://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdlx0u7/AccessHE-Report-Falling-Through-the-Cracks-WEB.pdf>

53 The Children's Society, Distress Signals, 2017 <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/distress-signals>

54 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0001/5825/11.11.00-RCC-Briefing-Access-to-Higher-Education-Final.pdf>

55 Access HE, Falling through the Cracks: Enabling access to HE for unaccompanied asylum seeker children, <https://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdlx0u7/AccessHE-Report-Falling-Through-the-Cracks-WEB.pdf>

56 Ibid.



Case study: Kristof

Kristof was 14 when he was taken into care.

Kristof wanted to go to university for a 'brighter future'. When he first arrived in the UK it took him time to adjust to the UK education system. He had previously worked in manual labour from a young age and his foster carer encouraged him to explore further education opportunities. She suggested he could go to university.

At the end of Year 11, Kristof was uncertain about his career plans and the educational routes open to him. Kristof sought help and advice from his friends and teachers. As he himself stated, 'they built me up slowly, slowly and my foster carer kept on encouraging me too.' By the time it came to starting college, Kristof felt that, by aiming for higher education, he could get a better job.

When he approached 18, Kristof's asylum claim was still unresolved - years after he had made his initial application - and social care officials told him that he could not go to university until his status was resolved.

Kristof decided to apply anyway and he researched his options. At this point he began receiving support from a national children's charity, which informed him of his legal right to access university if he could obtain funding to do so, and supported him in exploring and applying to grant schemes and scholarships. However, the universities Kristof applied to had no dedicated funding schemes for asylum seekers and with no offer of financial support from social services, he was unable to attend university that year.

Determined to improve his chances for the next academic year, Kristof and his support worker identified the universities in the UK that provided scholarships for asylum seekers. After narrowing this down to institutions that offered his chosen subject, Kristof applied.

He again reached out to social services for support but his personal adviser instead asked him why he had applied to university at all and told him that he could not go. Undeterred, and with supporting evidence from his support worker, he persevered and one university offered Kristof an interview. Kristof was successful and was offered a comprehensive package of funding. But he still needed to raise funds to pay for accommodation.

He asked Social Services if they would meet this shortfall in line with his rights as a care leaver, but they initially refused to do so. His support worker intervened and referred Kristof to a Community Care solicitor to challenge the decision if needed. However, his support worker advocated successfully on his behalf and his local authority agreed to fund Kristof's accommodation. As Kristof explained, 'they told me I was a rare case and that it had never happened before that someone like me had gone to university.'

Chapter 3 - What we know about the educational outcomes of looked-after children and children in care

Despite the support that exists for looked-after children and care leavers, they perform badly compared to their peers. This matters a great deal in the context of accessing university - there is, for example, an established link between good performance at Key Stage 4 and successful entry.

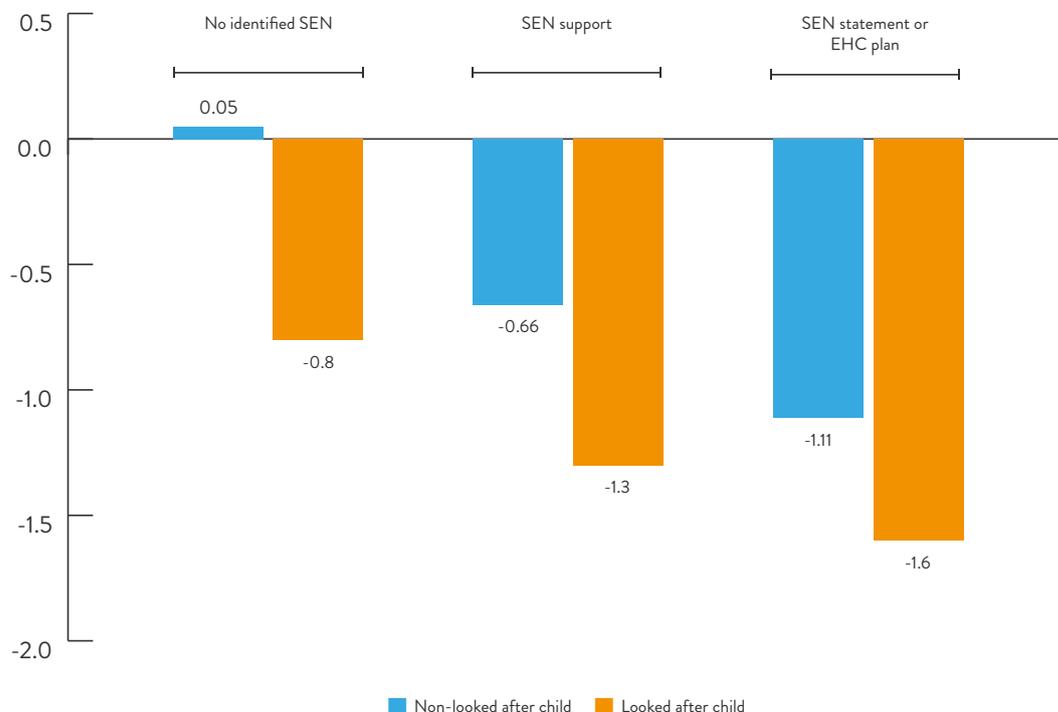
School

Attainment gaps between looked-after children and non-looked-after children are already apparent at the end of primary school. In 2017, 32% of looked-after children achieved the expected Key Stage 2 standard in reading, writing and mathematics compared to 61% for non-looked-after children.

Looked-after children also perform worse than their non-looked-after peers at GCSE level.⁵⁷ The average Attainment 8 score for looked-after children is 19.3 compared to 44.5 for non-looked-after children.⁵⁸

As demonstrated in Figure 3, looked-after children also progress less well than non-looked-after children between primary school and Key Stage 4. When they do not have special educational needs, children in care obtain, on average, almost a grade below the average for that cohort. And even when we factor in special educational needs, looked-after children perform proportionally worse at Key Stage 4 than peers who were performing at a similar level when they finished primary school.

Figure 3: Average Progress 8 scores for pupils with no identified SEN; SEN support; and SEN statements or Educational Health Care (EHC) plans (looked-after children versus non-looked-after children) (2018)



57 The Department for Education, Outcomes for children looked after by LAs: 31 March 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-las-31-march-2017> [accessed January 2019]

58 Ibid.

Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 as the headline indicator of school performance. The new measure captures the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school (Key Stage 2) to the end of secondary school (Key Stage 4).

A school's Progress 8 score is the average of all its pupils' individual Progress 8 scores. The DfE calculates a 95% confidence interval to remove outliers. This overall score gives an indication of whether, as a group, pupils in the school made above or below average progress when compared to pupils in other schools.

A score of zero means that pupils in a school do, on average, as well at Key Stage 4 as the average for pupils across England who obtained similar results at the end of Key Stage 2.

Attainment 8 measures a pupil's attainment across eight qualifications at Key Stage 4, including maths, English language, English literature and up to five additional recognised English Baccalaureate subjects. An individual's Attainment 8 score is calculated by adding together all the points allocated per subject (9 is the highest possible score per subject).

What appears to be driving poor performance at school?

O'Sullivan and Westerman have demonstrated that disruption - including placement changes and school moves - plays a key role in preventing looked-after children from achieving grades that teachers had previously predicted they could achieve.⁵⁹ Conversely, stable care placements are associated with better educational attainment.⁶⁰

Care-experienced individuals live complex, challenging and often disrupted lives.⁶¹ The Stability Index 2018 is a measure of the stability of the lives of children in care, and is carried out annually by the Children's Commissioner. The index gauges three aspects of stability in relation to children's placements, schools and professional relationships. It shows that most children in care experience instability, of some kind, over the course of a year; only 1 in 4 children experience no placement move, no school move, and no social worker change within a year. Moreover, only 1 in 10 children do not experience any of these things over a two-year period.⁶²

According to the 2018 Stability Index, 6,500 looked-after children aged 5-15 were also missing from education and did not appear to be enrolled in school neither at the start nor the end of the academic year.⁶³ This figure represents 16% of the total number of 5-15-year-old looked-after children in England in 2016. That is, 16% of looked-after children may not even be enrolled at a school.

Looked-after children are also twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school.⁶⁴ Exclusion can severely disrupt a child's education, particularly if they end up in alternative education which is not of a high standard; indeed, just 1.1% of pupils who sat their GCSEs in Alternative Provision gained five good passes including in English and maths in 2015/16, compared to 53.5% of pupils in the general population.⁶⁵

59 O'Sullivan A., Westerman R., Closing the Gap: Investigating the barriers to educational achievement for looked-after children, April 2007

60 Jackson S., Ajayi S., Quigley M., Going from university to care, 2005

61 The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked after Children and Care Leavers, Education Matters in Care: A report by the independent cross-party inquiry into the education attainment of looked after children in England, July 2012 [https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15782/1/Education_Matters_in_Care_September_2012.pdf]

62 Ibid.

63 The Children's Commissioner, Stability Index 2018: Overview and findings, June 2018, <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Childrens-Commissioners-2018-Stability-Index-Overview.pdf>

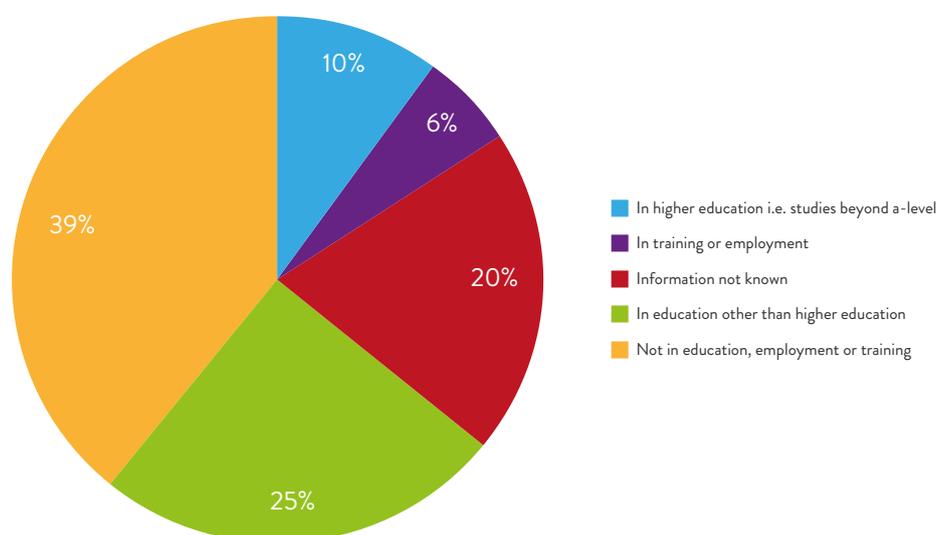
64 Gill, K., Quilter-Pinner, H., Swift, D., Making the difference: Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion, October 2017, <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>

65 The Centre for Social Justice, Providing the alternative: How to transform school exclusion and the support that exists beyond, July 2018 [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CSJJ6097-Alternative_Provision-Report-180719-WEB-v3-1.pdf]

Destinations (19-21 years old)

Official data allows us to determine the following trends regarding outcomes for looked-after children/care leavers. These are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Activity of care leavers aged 19-21 years old (DfE, 2018)



We also know that children who are in, or have been in, care are over-represented in the criminal justice system. In 2017, 4% of care leavers were in custody.⁶⁶ A survey of the adult prison population conducted by the Ministry of Justice found that 24% [of surveyed prisoners] stated that they had been in care at some point during their childhood.⁶⁷

Care leavers are also at a greater risk of homelessness.⁶⁸ A quarter of the care leavers who took part in a survey conducted by CentrePoint had sofa-surfed since leaving care, and around one in seven had slept rough.⁶⁹

While we are able to build an impression of outcomes for looked-after children, we do not have a complete enough picture. For instance, while the DfE collects information on employment for this cohort, it does not publish data on how many care leavers go into apprenticeships or other types of further education qualifications. And while the DfE collects data on the 'activity' of care leavers aged 17-21, there is no national data on longer-term outcomes beyond this point; in addition, this data only relates to the 88% of care leavers who are still in contact with their local authorities.⁷⁰

66 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2016-2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017> [accessed December 2018]

67 Ministry of justice, prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds results from surveying prisoner crime reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners, 2014

68 Homeless Link, Young and Homeless 2018, 2018 <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Young%20and%20Homeless%202018.pdf>

69 CentrePoint, From care to where? Care leavers' access to accommodation, <https://centrepoin.org.uk/media/2035/from-care-to-where-centrepoint-report.pdf>

70 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2017-2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018> [accessed December 2018]



“I feel like it’s the only thing I’ve ever seen that’s my route out of care. Like you always feel like you are fighting the system in some way and I feel like education is going to be my only way out...to do something good with my life, to be successful, to get a degree.”

Young person, 17

Entry into further and higher education

Poor educational performance makes it difficult to go to university.⁷¹ Leaving school with few qualifications adversely affects care leavers' progress towards higher education, apprenticeships, or skilled jobs.⁷²

According to DfE statistics, 20% of 19-21-year-old care leavers are in education other than higher education.⁷³ The Department defines this as studies excluding degrees, diplomas in higher education, teaching and nursing qualifications, HNDs, ONDs, and BTEC levels 4-5. The DfE does not hold information on the specific number of looked-after children/care leavers who are just in further education.⁷⁴

According to DfE statistics, just 6% of 19-21-year-old care leavers are in higher education,⁷⁵ compared to 34% of 19-21-year-olds in the general population.⁷⁶

Dr Neil Harrison has explored the pathways which care leavers and care-experienced individuals take into higher education. He has suggested that care leavers are less likely than other young people to make a direct transition from school or college into higher education and are more likely to do so at an older age.⁷⁷ In addition, care leavers are more likely to follow non-traditional and lower-status routes into higher education than their peers.⁷⁸ Dr Harrison has also identified a strong link between Key Stage 4 attainment and entry into higher education, noting that care leavers in particular are less likely to find a pathway into higher education with low attainment, compared to other young people.⁷⁹

Recommendation

- Developing a pipe-line: The DfE should extend its data collection and monitoring of care leavers' outcomes up to the age of 25 in line with corporate parenting requirements. This would capture care leavers who access higher education aged 21 and above.
- The DfE should collect and publish data on the number of care leavers and children in care who go on to study for further education qualifications. This should include reporting on the educational outcomes for looked after children/care leavers at Key Stage 5.
- The DfE should work with HESA to develop an annual report on the number of care leavers studying on degree level courses by institution. The transparency should provide policymakers with an annual snapshot of the care leavers student population.

71 Sebba, J., D. Berridge, N. Luke, J. Fletcher, K. Bell, S. Strand, S. Thomas, I. Sinclair and A. O'Higgins, The educational progress of looked after children in England: linking care and educational data, November 2015

72 HM Government, Keep on caring: Supporting young people from care to independence, July 2016 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf

73 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2016-2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017> [accessed December 2018]

74 Ibid.

75 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2017-2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018> [accessed December 2018]

76 Department for Education, Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic Years 2006/2007-2015/16 (Provisional), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/648165/HEIPR_PUBLICATION_2015-16.pdf [accessed January 2019]

77 Harrison, N., Moving on up: pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education, 2017

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.



“My carer definitely wanted me to go. Her previous foster child had been to university as well so I think she could see the benefits of her going to university so she was like you could do this as well.”

Young person, 19

Chapter 4 - The cost of not addressing poor outcomes

It is not possible to place a monetary value on lost hope and unfulfilled potential. These latter two points are surely cause enough to step in and do what we can to improve the life prospects of looked-after children and care leavers. But we understand that the government must always cast its mind to matters of public expenditure and the most equitable option it has in terms of investing its limited resources. In this context, it is worth thinking about the resources that might be freed up to support other disadvantaged individuals if we empowered more looked-after children to go to university and enjoy the many returns this brings.

As part of our research, we commissioned Numbers for Good, an economic research agency, to determine the current costs of care, the near-term costs of care leavers as of 2017, and the medium- to longer-term public finance costs of being care-experienced discounted back to a 2017 cost. The calculations did not consider the 'resource cost', i.e. any loss to the individual, family and economy.

In recent years, a significant number of unaccompanied and separated children have entered the care system - nearly 80% of these individuals are 16 or older and represent over 20% of those aged 16+ leaving care each year. They therefore have a significant bearing on both the near-term costs of care leavers and the medium- to longer-term public finance cost calculations. Therefore, in this report two cost calculations have been produced - one which excludes unaccompanied and separated children, and one which includes said children. However, it must be noted that the life trajectories for unaccompanied and separated children have been much harder to understand and project.

Numbers for Good took various measures to ensure that the estimates produced were a reasonable reflection of group sizes and unit costs for looked-after children. It made conservative assumptions, omitting some 'hard to measure' sub-groups, and therefore its work should be viewed as an underrepresentation of the true cost. For a full methodology please see Appendix A.

The current cost of care

For England, the total direct cost to public finance of children being in the care of their local authorities is calculated to be at least £3.8bn per annum, based on 2016/17 data. This figure is broken down in Figure 5.

Figure 5: The expenditure on looked-after children in England in 2016/17 (DfE, 2018)

Types of expenditure for looked-after children, excluding unaccompanied and separated children (2016/17)	
Placement costs	£2.86bn
Achieving permanence – adoption/special guardianship	£0.55bn
Pupil Premium Plus and post-LAC Pupil Premium	£0.08bn
LAC care and support social work costs	£0.19bn
Total annual expenditure, excluding unaccompanied and separated children	£3.68bn
Unaccompanied and separated children costs	£0.15bn
Total annual expenditure including unaccompanied and separated children	£3.83bn

Even these very significant figures do not include all costs. Further costs which we were not able to fully quantify at this stage included: dedicated Looked-After Children nurses, Looked-After Children specific emotional wellbeing services, higher representation of LAC in Alternative Education provision settings, and so on.

Based upon the average duration of children and young people in care, that is, 10.5 months (DfE, 2018), and the number who experienced care in 2017, that is, 102,590 (DfE, 2018), the above figure gives an average total direct cost to public finance of £37,000 per annum per child who enters care. However, there is a significant gap between those who briefly enter care for a few weeks and achieve permanence quickly, costing a few £000s, and those who may spend most of their life up to 18 in care, with significant periods in residential care, costing in the order of £1-2m per looked-after child.

The near-term costs of care leavers aged 16-24

The total cost to public finance of care leavers aged 16-24 was calculated to be £2.27bn per annum based upon 2016/17 data. This is broken down in Figure 6.

Figure 6: The public cost related to care leavers in England 2016-17

Near-term public finance costs of care leavers aged 16-24	
Local authority care leaver services	£0.30bn
NEET - direct, underemployment and economically inactive	£0.99bn
Criminal justice system engagement	£0.31bn
Youth homelessness	£0.33bn
Total annual expenditure, excluding unaccompanied and separated children	£1.93bn
Unaccompanied and separated children related costs	£0.34bn
Total annual expenditure including unaccompanied and separated children	£2.27bn

The above costs are in addition to the current costs when young people are in care and do not include any costs related to health services due to the way health data is captured and reported.

Medium- to long-term costs of being care-experienced

Numbers for Good calculated the medium- to long-term costs of being care-experienced based on factors identified by the National Audit Office report on Children in Care (2014). It estimated that the medium- to long-term costs to public finance of being care-experienced stand at approximately £3bn for each annual new care leaver cohort and a further £0.5bn when including unaccompanied and separated children. This is broken down in Figure 7.

Figure 7: The medium- to long-term public finance cost related to those who became care leavers in England 2016/17

Medium to long-term public finance costs of care leavers, 2016/17	
Underemployment	£0.55bn
NEET - direct, underemployment and economically inactive	£1.09bn
Criminal justice system engagement	£0.63bn
Homelessness	£0.19bn
Pension age benefit effect	£0.57bn
Total annual expenditure, excluding unaccompanied and separated children	£3.03bn
Unaccompanied and separated children related costs	£0.50bn
Total public finance cost including unaccompanied and separated children	£3.53bn

These figures do not include any costs related to health services due to the way health data is captured and reported.

This cost of £3.5b is based upon the number of care leavers in 2016/17. However, it does not take into account those young people of care leaving age who have experienced episodes of care earlier in their life but are not recognised as being care leavers under the DfE definition. A conservative estimate of this cohort is a further 2,000 young people who will have negative impacts upon their education, employment and training trajectories and therefore on average greater cost to public finance than their peers. It has not been possible to create a different life cost for this sub-cohort to date from the information available, but if this was similar to Care Leavers then this would add a further £0.6b per annum to the above medium to long term public finance costs of being care experienced.

Total cost of a child being care-experienced to public finance

The total current, near-term and medium- to long-term public finance cost based upon 2016-17 data is £9.63bn per annum and is summarised in Figure 8.

Figure 8: The total annual public finance cost of looked-after children current, near-term and medium- to long-term in England based upon 2016/17 data

Total annual cost of looked-after children current, near-term and medium-to long-term, 2016/17	
Current looked-after children costs	£3.83bn
Near-term care leaver costs	£2.27bn
Medium - to long-term costs of care leavers	£3.53bn
Total public finance cost	£9.63bn



“I was with my current carer for the last few months of school and when she knew I had exams she would text saying how did it go and I found that really sweet. My own mum wouldn’t do that. She wanted me to do well.”

Young person, 20

Chapter 5 - Listening to what children in care have to say about what shapes their decisions

The support the government has made available for looked-after children and care leavers should, in theory, promote better educational outcomes for these individuals. However, the dire educational outcomes that they tend to experience, including the fact just 6% of young people in care/care leavers aged 19-21 go to university,⁸⁰ suggest that these measures alone are not sufficient.

In this context, it makes sense to look at other ways in which support could be provided to these young people. Lack of educational attainment is, on its own, a formidable barrier to studying at university. But it is not the only one - and in this chapter we unpick some of the other barriers that exist.

To learn more about the barriers that care-experienced individuals perceive, we interviewed fifteen young people who were either in care or care leavers, to find out what they perceived as barriers to entering university.

We also commissioned a ComRes survey of young people in care aged 13-20 to gauge appetite to go to university, and reasons for wanting/not wanting to go. In total, 109 young people in care completed the survey. 88% said they had considered going to university. For those young people who had not considered going to university, the top reasons included: expense, not thinking they were clever enough to attend, and wanting to earn money as quickly as possible.

The responses we received suggest that at least seven prominent factors play a significant role in decisions to go university for these young people:

1. Level of aspiration and belief
2. The support provided by schools and colleges
3. Disruption to learning
4. Supportive carers
5. Personal motivation and resilience
6. Support with getting to university
7. Concerns around finance and accommodation at university

Many of the responses further reinforce findings in much of the existing literature around the importance of stability of both placement and schooling. It is important for young people to understand there is someone who really cares about them and their achievement.^{81,82} We outline further details below, and also include details on the specific barriers which unaccompanied and separated children face in relation to accessing university.

80 Department for Education, Statistics: looked-after children, Children looked after in England including adoption 2017-2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018> [accessed December 2018]

81 Cameron, C., Jackson, S., Final report of the YIPEE project: Young people from a public care background: pathways to further and higher education in five European countries, 2011

82 Buttle UK, Assessing the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education, 2013, http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.buttle.org.uk/Our_QM_docs/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf

Aspirations and belief

The young people surveyed often emphasised the importance of key support figures instilling in them a belief that they could achieve academically.

'Like most kids in care think I've ended up here so I don't care what I do with my life but I think they should be pushed and they should know that they can go to university because there is more to life.'

Young person, 17

Some individuals lacked confidence in their ability to go to university.

'Not being as smart as others who go there...because I haven't been to school a lot so that and people going to university might like be well smart and I'm not going to know anything.'

Young person, 15

Raising aspirations can play a key role. One young person told us how their school encouraged them to attend a school sixth-form rather than a college, as the school believed they would perform better there.

Q: If you didn't have your school, social worker, and carer helping you to go to uni do you think you would have gone?

A: *Probably not. I don't think I would push myself. I don't think I would realise that I can actually do it without them pushing me constantly.'* - Young person, 19

Many young people spoke about the transformative impact that support from individual teachers could have. Almost all the young people we spoke to were able to tell us about one key teacher who helped make a difference.

'When I was in Year 11 my English teacher...he really went out of his way to push me to do well...He is actually seeing that I am not ok and I need someone to listen to me... He went out of his way to show me where I improved and where I made mistakes that I have stopped making, which helps when you feel like you're not doing well'

Young person, 20

'She [English teacher] really made a difference to me, she really made me believe in myself and I think she was the one teacher who got me through GCSEs.'

Young person, 17

Being in care can switch people's focus to a more short-term approach, which may prevent longer-term planning/aspiration-building

'Being in care is so hectic that it takes your mind off your long-term goals. When you are young your parents will be like what do you want to be when you're grown up or someone in primary school will ask you. You're more focused on your long-term goals because everyone around you is asking what do you want to be? What do you want to be? But then when you go into care they're more focused on how you are going to be in the next year or next couple of years. How is your mental health going to be, how is your physical health going to be - you are only surrounded by short-term goals.'

Young person, 17

Support from schools and colleges

School

The support available at school can play a significant role in decisions to go to university. Research from Buttle UK, for example, found that school staff were highly influential in encouraging students to apply for university.⁸³

In our survey, we asked respondents who was providing them with help and support to get to university. 49% of respondents cited schools, colleges and virtual schools as their main source of help, which means it is crucial that the quality of this support is good.

Our interviews raised examples of good practice. Examples of more positive support included one-to-one support and extra support from the virtual school.

'The virtual school provided maths tuition and they did meetings in my school to check my progress and stuff which led to the maths tuition. They gave me a laptop that I use for my school work all the time - that really helped and we still have progress meetings at college. I feel supported in that way'

Young person, 17

For some, however, this extra support only served to highlight that they were in care and sometimes this made them feel uncomfortable and singled out.

'I was constantly being watched and looked at then if something went wrong being dragged into an office... it was like I was being pointed out in front of everyone, like I was the one that needed to go to the office if I'm not doing well in certain subjects.'

Young person, 19

While PEP reviews were largely seen as positive, it is important to ensure they take place at a time that does not cause disruption to a young person's learning.

'For me, I wanted my reviews like my LAC reviews and my PEP reviews during lessons that I didn't really need. So like my PE practical, I would want it to be during that....but they didn't do it like that, they just organised it and said is that alright with you? They didn't really listen that much to what I wanted and what I needed.'

Young person, 18

There appeared to be some variability in the support young people received.

'They kind of just left me to do my work on my own, just like a kid who wasn't in care. They just left me to do it on my own and if I needed help I went to the teacher like an average kid would.'

Young person, 18

'I had to push to speak to teachers on their own so they could help me and even then I had to go during my break or my lunch or after school to talk to them which wasn't fair because they should give more support than what they did.'

Young person, 18

When we asked respondents what additional support they felt would have helped them more at school, some responses included more one-to-one support and tuition, and a dedicated member of staff for children in care - support that should already be in place in schools.

83 Buttle UK, Assessing the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education, 2013, http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.buttle.org.uk/Our_QM_docs/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf

College

Without the statutory requirement for a designated teacher in FE colleges, the support provided to students in care may differ widely from college to college.⁸⁴ Indeed, this point came across in our interviews. Some young people felt that they had little support in college.

'I didn't feel supported at all in any shape or form.'

Young person, 24

In addition, one young person also identified the fact that some support ceases to exist at college.

'There is one thing actually, they stop your PEP money when you go into Year 12 so there's not funding and stuff so if you do need tutoring, I've applied for the school bursary and cause I'm in care you're automatically in the top bracket for it or something so yeah I've had to apply for that instead.'

Young person, 17

Other respondents cited examples of good practice, including one-to-one sessions and a dedicated worker, as well as making sure that people were up-to-date with their work.

'I get one-to-ones if I need it, erm there's er a specific person, staff member assigned to me. So every couple of months we meet up to talk about what's gone well, what's not gone well, what I need to improve on, and what the college needs to improve on to help me.'

Young person, 18

Disruption to learning

Throughout our interviews, young people talked about the disruption to learning they had faced as a result of being in care and the impact this had, including on their decisions to go to university.

The majority of young people recounted placement changes that resulted in changes of school. For example:

'I have had four changes of school, secondary school that is - I have only ever been to one primary school. It is really difficult every time I have to change and it still is but I always just get through it. Catching up on school is hard because they are all learning different things, different sections and I miss bits because I haven't been in the same school and making friends is difficult and like talking to new people is just difficult anyway.'

Young person, 15

One young person told us how they were moved from a long-term foster placement in the middle of their GCSEs and how this affected their studies.

'At the time of my GCSEs, I moved out of my long-term foster placement to another foster placement...I had been in it eight years...it was right in the middle of it... I could have done a lot better, I got one B and four Cs. I was down to get really good grades but because I had all that going on literally as I was doing my GCSEs, I didn't have time to revise or do anything really.'

Young person, 21

84 Buttle UK, Assessing the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education, 2013, http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.buttle.org.uk/Our_QM_docs/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf

Another young person felt that a move undermined their ability to obtain the GCSE grades they needed for their chosen sixth-form, which prompted a move to another college.

'They moved me here, I wanted to go to another sixth-form that was known for their academic excellence but they didn't accept me because of my grades so I was disappointed so I had to go to the college that I go to now... I explained to them everything - I said to them you know, I am in care, I have had a bit of a move and so I didn't get the best grades but I am hard working. I sent them an email and asked them to at least meet me but they said no we are not accepting those grades.'

Young person, 17

Some respondents felt that missing class time undermined their education.

'I have missed a lot of school. I missed most of primary school, most of secondary school and I am still missing loads...my behaviour started to become really bad because I didn't understand anything in school. I didn't learn anything because I didn't understand the first bit so I kind of just, instead of learning through everything I kind of just went over the top of everything. So I feel like I don't know anything.'

Young person, 15

One respondent highlighted the importance of minimising disruption and their experience suggested that moves should take place, as far as practicable, during school holidays.

'All the times when I moved places it was always during the holiday, so by the time I didn't miss out on any school. It makes it a lot easier. So then you appreciate the little things.'

Young person, 17

Many respondents suggested that more stable placements and better attendance would help them improve their educational attainment.

'More permanent solutions. Fewer moves, that sort of thing. Because for me, I've been with my carer for four years and that's really helped me. That's only four years. Can you imagine if someone has been in care longer, say like since being 6, and they have had the same carer, imagine how much good that could do that person.....the fewer moves there are, the less disruption there is to schooling and when it gets to things like uni they have a parent to rely on.'

Young person, 20

'Primary school. I wish I had [attended]...I wish, when I had gone into care teachers had been focused on getting me to do my work and staying on task so I could do better and achieve better. That's something I really do wish like they do more to help kids in care stay on task, to do the work, to turn up to school because I feel that's where it all goes wrong and why a lot of people don't go to uni....it does have a lot to do with support in schools.'

Young person, 17

The importance of supportive carers

Our interviews highlighted the importance of supportive foster carers in promoting educational attainment.

'The quality of where you live makes such a big difference. That's where you go home to rest your head. That's where you are for most of your life so of course it is going to affect school'

Young person, 17

Respondents provided examples of effective support. This ranged from helping with revision, to sending a simple text to ask how a young person had got on with their exams.

'I was with my current carer for the last few months of school and when she knew I had exams she would text saying how did it go and I found that really sweet. My own mum wouldn't do that. She wanted me to do well.'

Young person, 20

'I think because my mum didn't really pay attention to school and stuff then my carer was always asking if I got my homework done and if I got my revision done.'

Young person, 19

Young people also told us about the positive influence carers had on their decision to go to university. For some foster carers, this was attributed to the fact that their birth children or previous foster children went to university.

'My carer definitely wanted me to go. Her previous foster child had been to university as well so I think she could see the benefits of her going to university so she was like you could do this as well.'

Young person, 19

Research demonstrates that birth parents' attitudes to education can also shape care leavers' approaches to university.⁸⁵ Our interviews supported this position.

'My nan, she was a big part of my life. She kind of pushed me as well to be the best I can be. She would always tell me that I can be whatever I want to be, I just need to work hard for it because no one else is going to do it for me. She kind of inspired because she went to uni I think when she was 50 to study English lit, which is where I got my love of English and reading. If she can achieve that at 50, what can I achieve at my age?'

Young person, 18

When respondents to The ComRes survey we commissioned were asked who was helping them to get to university, 49% cited their parents, foster carers and extended family members.

85 Driscoll, J., Supporting care leavers to fulfil their education aspirations: Resilience, relationships and resistance to help, Children and Society, Volume 27 (2013)

Personal motivation and resilience

Motivation and resilience played a significant role in driving decisions to go to university.

'I feel like it's the only thing I've ever seen that's my route out of care. Like you always feel like you are fighting the system in some way and I feel like education is going to be my only way out...to do something good with my life, to be successful, to get a degree.'

Young person, 17

University and getting a degree were strongly associated with being seen as successful in life, and having a 'good future'.

'In order to be more successful, university is a good option for that.'

Young person, 15

Support with getting to university

A significant minority of survey respondents (44%) said that more information needs to be made available to them, and better help put in place to support more care leavers and guide them into university.

In our interviews, the respondents told us they think information should be made available at an earlier stage, and this should come from schools, local authorities and universities. According to them, such information should include information on financial support that is available from both the local authority and the university, as well as support with accommodation.

'But I feel in a way that unis need to more and schools. Like schools definitely need to provide that support a lot more. I haven't heard my school mention once about living situations and stuff like that and how that will come into account in uni. They've just been like yeah you should all apply even if you don't want to go to uni. Like some people might not have the confidence to voice that and say I am in a difficult situation and I might not know where the hell I am living can you support me in finding out this information about whether there's accommodation available, if there is funding, if there are scholarships available for me. I feel like unis have started to do that a bit more but I feel like schools need to put it out there a lot more.'

Young person, 17

'If they got all the young people in care, like 16 and 17 in one room and talked to them about university and what help you get at different universities. When I was doing the applications and stuff, I wasn't actually told what I get as a care leaver. I had to find it out myself.'

Young person, 19

One young person missed out on university support as they were not aware of its existence.

'I was an ambassador at a conference for kids in care going to uni and I only found out last year in June that they are supposed to provide you with all this stuff, like vouchers to buy stuff for your flat and bedding and give you money and whatever else, but I never knew that until I went to this thing last year...I get the care leavers bursary through the uni....now all these people are getting vouchers for new stuff when they move in and I never got anything.'

Young person, 21

Dr Neil Harrison's Moving on up report⁸⁶ has identified a common feeling amongst young people that their local authorities were generally unsupportive of their desire to enter higher education.⁸⁷ In our survey, many respondents cited local authority support when asked who was supporting them to go to university. However, our interviews suggested that some social workers provided little support when it came to university, and were unable to provide help with UCAS applications. This disparity in findings indicates that support may vary in different local authorities.

'No they don't help you at all really...so like you know you have to do your UCAS application and you have to do your interviews for uni, they don't do any of that. They don't help you with any of it.'

Young person, 21

There also appeared to be some confusion regarding pathway planning.

'You're supposed to start your pathway plan at 16 but there are many people...that don't even know what a pathway plan is.'

Young person, 24

What do you think could be done to support young people in care to go to university?

In our survey, we asked young people in care what they believed could be done to support young people in care going on to university. Responses included:

- More support provided in school and colleges;
- More information about university made available to guardians and carers;
- Open days specifically for young people in care;
- Better financial support at university and providing information on this support, including bursaries and scholarships;
- A support group or online forum where young people can share their experiences and get advice from one another;
- Awareness programmes about university.

86 Harrison, N., Moving on up: pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education, 2017

87 Ibid.

Concerns about finance and accommodation

Going to university can be a significant financial burden for any young person. The National Audit Office estimates that the average debt on graduation for a student who started a three-year degree in 2017 is £50,000.⁸⁸ For a young person who has been in care and who does not have the typical support network that other students can rely on, these financial costs might appear even more daunting.

Finance was a major concern for many of our interviewees.

'We don't have people we can just ask for help from when the money runs out. They say we are just like other kids, but we are not just like other kids.'

Young person, 17

As corporate parents, local authorities are obliged to provide care leavers who are at university with a £2,000 bursary. The By Degrees research notes that the university experiences of students who have been in care are influenced by how much financial support they receive from their local authorities.⁸⁹ Research from Buttle UK has found that there is substantial variation in terms of the financial support that is available from local authorities.⁹⁰ One young person told us of their fears that their local authority was going to cut the support they provide.

'So basically in my borough they need to make cuts and the way they are planning to make those savings is by cutting the accommodation for kids in care which I just think is really bad and really wrong.'

Young person, 17

Financial support also extends to helping with practical arrangements such as student finance and there were concerns that these young people would have to do this alone without support.

'I feel like if the number [of care leavers going to university] continues to decrease then kids are going to be too scared to go to uni knowing that they are going to have to do student finance all on their own...it's not like us kids in care have parents who can help them fill in student forms and help them with finance.'

Young person, 17

As well as worrying about how they are going to live, young people also worry about where they are going to live at university, especially out of term time.

'Also, in the summer holidays what are kids meant to do? That would put me off going to uni because where am I going to go during the summer holidays?'

Young person, 17

Once having left care, many young people go on to live independently. Care leavers who had their own homes were worried that if they chose to go university, they would lose this.

'The only difference in being a care leaver is that I have moved out and I have lived in my home for six years so it's just not as easy to up and leave...say if I were to...move into student accommodation then I would lose my home. If uni doesn't work out then I don't have a home to go to and I refuse to go into a homeless unit. So it's just not that easy. I guess that's the only difference being a care leaver is like if all fails there is no back up. They can't just move back in with their parents'

Young person, 24

88 The National Audit Office, The Higher Education Market, December 2017, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/The-higher-education-market.pdf>

89 Jackson, S., Ajayi, S., Quigley, M, Going from university to care, 2005

90 Buttle UK, Assessing the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education, 2013, http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.buttle.org.uk/Our_QM_docs/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf



“The only difference in being a care leaver is that I have moved out and I have lived in my home for six years so it’s just not as easy to up and leave...say if I were to...move into student accommodation then I would lose my home. If uni doesn’t work out then I don’t have a home to go to and I refuse to go into a homeless unit. So it’s just not that easy. I guess that’s the only difference being a care leaver is like if all fails there is no back up. They can’t just move back in with their parents”

Young person, 19

Chapter 6 - What universities are doing to support care leavers

There is significant variability in the number of known care leavers who attend different public universities in England. As the official data relies on young people self-identifying as care leavers, the true number of care leavers at each university is not known - but the impression we have is one of variance.

There is also considerable variety in the targets and activities that universities have in place to support looked-after children and care leavers. Access and Participation Plans have the potential to boost access for these individuals - but if said plans are to do so, they must be concentrated more consistently on this cohort, and they must be better informed to reflect activities that we know are likely to work best.

The lack of a consistent definition

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the White Paper 'Higher Education: a new framework' have highlighted the need for more robust and coordinated data collection in the higher education sector. The government has subsequently established the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) to collect, analyse and disseminate performance data for higher educational institutions in the UK.

Since the 2013-14 academic year, the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) has adopted a 'care leaver' marker, which requires higher education institutions to report the number of care leavers who attend their institutions. However, the methods which universities employ to identify care leavers are not prescribed and their definitions of care leavers are inconsistent. Two of the main definitions include:

- **Care leaver (16+) (England only)** includes all students who can be reasonably verified as being in care on or after their 16th birthdays. According to HESA, verification could include talking to students personally, corresponding with them by email, or assessing their eligibility for financial support. Whichever method they use, providers must have reason above and beyond the information provided on students' UCAS forms to believe they are care leavers.
- **UCAS's** definition of a care leaver, which includes anyone who has self-declared as being in care for 3 months or more.

But some institutions also use other definitions.

Consequently, we lack a reliable measure of participation across the board.

The UCAS Tick Box

When young care leavers complete their applications for university through UCAS, there is an option for them to tick a box to say they have been in care. UCAS notes that, if this box is ticked, admissions staff are able to consider achievements and potential in context, and that universities can let care leavers know what additional support they can access. Many universities depend on young people ticking this box to know how many care leavers they have at their institution.

This method of identification relies on care leavers to self-identify as such, which is potentially problematic for a number of reasons. First, some individuals may not want to be defined as a care leaver, and many instead want to shed this label. Second, some of the care leavers we spoke to suggested that there is scope for miscommunication - either because individuals may not know that the option to tick the box exists or because they are uncertain of the consequences of ticking the box. Third, the question 'have you been in care?' is not fully explained in the application, which may lead to misunderstanding of the category.

Greater Manchester Looked-After Children's Forum

The Greater Manchester Looked-After Children's Forum (GMLACF) was formed in 2011 with a primary focus on supporting the educational progression of Care Leavers (CLs) and Looked-After Children (LAC). It has 71 individual members; from HE providers, FE colleges and virtual school staff, to leaving care teams, careers advisers and a number of charities/third-sector organisations.

The forum meetings take place once a term and are attended by an equal mix of HEI, local authority, and third-sector organisations. The forum not only allows the opportunity for sharing information, experience and knowledge, but also for the planning of collaborative activities, such as the annual Care Leaver Awards.

By improving communication between HEIs and others who offer services to LAC/CLs, the GMLACF has had a positive impact upon numerous young people and professionals across Greater Manchester, including:

- Increased take up of HE outreach activities;
- Increased involvement of HEIs in local authority-led activity;
- Increased take up of support for CLs while at university, due to local authority knowledge of support;
- Increased HE progression rates reported across GM local authorities.

The forum has fostered an increasingly collaborative approach between LAs and HEIs, which has ensured that information about university is provided to aspiring care leavers and their supporters prior to the submission of HE applications.

Working collectively has helped to ensure that the necessary support is in place for learners to succeed in HE. For example, partner universities are being informed of their institution's student applications earlier on in the process; indeed, through the strong relationships that have been developed between the HEI named contact and leaving care managers/personal advisers, students are now receiving greater support when they arrive at university.

The GMLACF has increased the number of opportunities for staff to share both information and expertise; from keeping HEI colleagues up-to-date with national and local policy changes that may affect their work with CLs, to helping ensure that local authorities and other colleagues understand developments in the HE sector and the support on offer, which may affect their young people.

The forum has provided opportunities for collaborators to get involved in various projects, including focusing on homelessness, research and increasing apprenticeship participation across CLs; said forum also resulted in a young person becoming a keynote speaker at the 2016 NNECL conference.

Notwithstanding the limitations outlined above, the most reliable and complete data we were able to access on the participation of care leavers was held by HESA. We made a data request in October 2018 to obtain the information HESA held on the number of care leavers attending each higher educational institution in England. The data we obtained revealed a number of trends.

How many care leavers go to university

As Figure 11 demonstrates, the number of care leavers identified as having started university has risen slightly in recent years, but remains very modest.

Figure 11: The number of care leavers in their first year of study, by academic year (2013-2017)

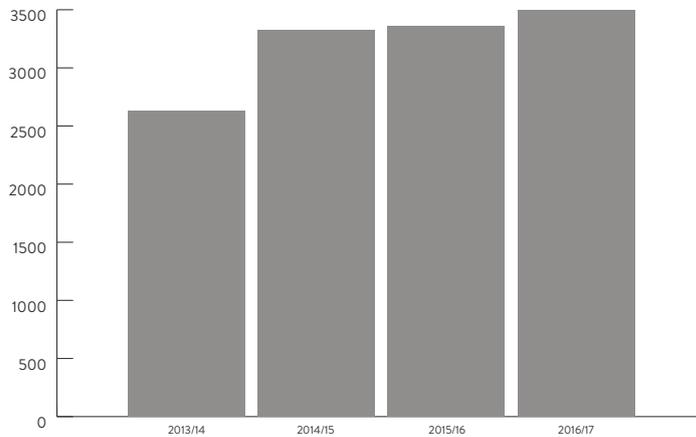
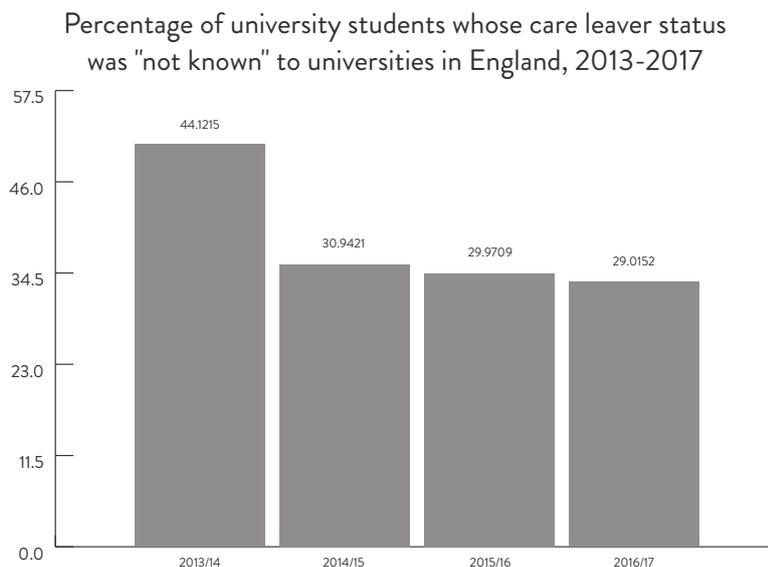


Figure 12 shows that universities are getting better at identifying individuals with care leaver status. The proportion of students in their first year of study whose care leaver status was unknown to universities has decreased by 15.1% since the 2013/14 academic year. However, progress has stalled over the past three academic years and universities still do not know that almost a third of newly-enrolled care leavers are indeed care leavers, which means that some individuals might be missing out on important support.

Ultimately, it may not be practical for universities to identify all care leavers. Some may, for various reasons, simply not want to disclose the fact that they are care leavers. But it is also possible that lack of disclosure/identification is, in some cases, driven by stigma or insufficient information flow about the support that is available for care leavers.

Figure 12: The proportion of students in their first year of study whose care leave status was unknown, by academic year



The age at which care leavers are entering higher education

Figure 13 shows that, since 2013/14, the number of care leavers entering university aged 18-20 has grown each year. In addition, the rate at which care leavers enter university aged 18-20 has also increased, from 4.3% to 5.9% of all university entrants.

Figure 13: Number and rate of care leavers entering university aged 18-20 (2013-2017)

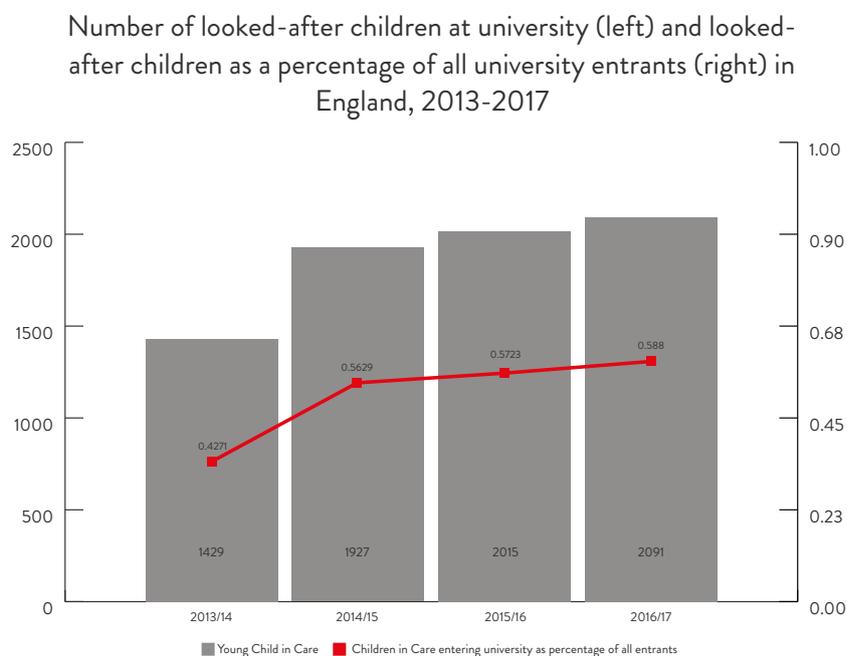
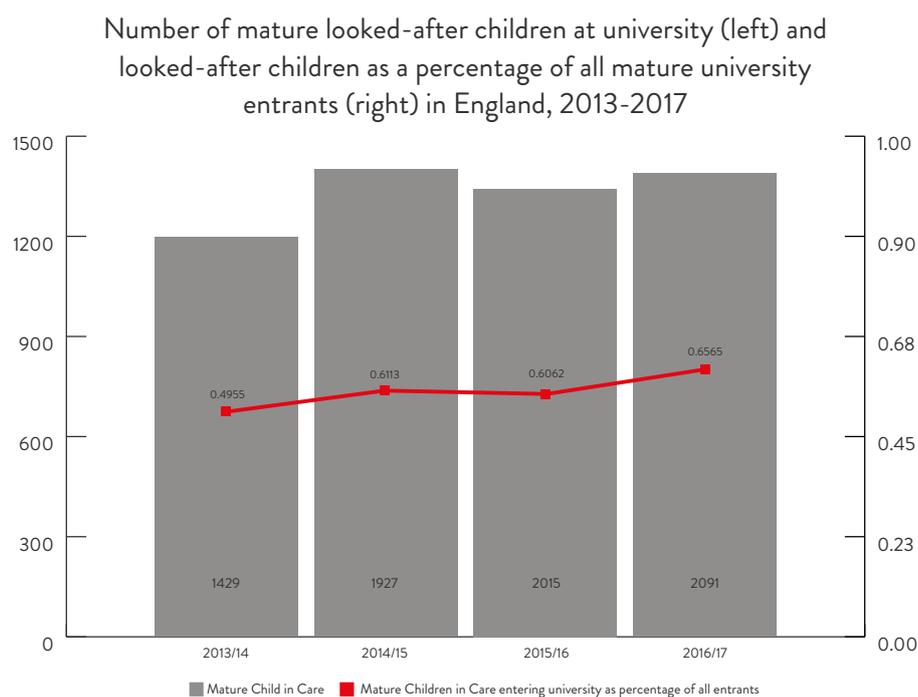


Figure 14 shows, however, that care leavers are more likely than their peers to enter higher education at a later stage in life. The rate at which they enter at a mature age is 10% higher than the rate at which they join in their younger years.

Figure 14: Rate of entry of children in care to higher education at mature age point



The number of care leavers in their first year of study at each university in England

In this section we outline the number of known care leavers attending 102 English universities between 2014-15 and 2016-17 (see Appendix X for the full list and rationale). There are, of course, limitations to this data - there are, for example, many complex factors that affect whether looked-after children apply to certain universities in the first place. But it is clear from this data that there is substantial variation in the number of care leavers who attend different universities, which warrants a closer look at whether all universities are working as effectively as they can to address the barriers that exist for care leavers, and the examples of good practice that exist.

Figure 15 highlights that the average proportion of participation for care leavers across all universities has slowly risen each year (although the picture is more mixed for Russell Group universities). For all universities across all three years, we can see a substantial level of variation in the range of participation.

Figure 15: The average percentage and range of care leavers at all universities and Russell Group universities for the years 2014/15-2016/17

Academic year	Average percentage of care leavers	Range of care leavers at university	Average percentage of care leavers at Russell Group universities	Range of care leavers at Russell Group universities
2016/17	.63%	.05 - 3.08%	.23%	.05 - .80%
2015/16	.60%	0 - 2.48%	.28%	0 - 1.13%
2014/15	.59%	0 - 1.97%	.24%	0 - 0.66%

We outline below a historic breakdown of these numbers by institutions that have the highest, and lowest, rates of participation for care leavers.

Academic year 2016/17

Table 9: Universities with the highest proportion of care leavers entering into their first year of study 2016/17

University	Percentage of care leavers
The University of the Arts London	3.08%
Anglia Ruskin University	1.89%
The University of West London	1.84%
The University of Central Lancashire	1.76%
Southampton Solent University	1.74%

Table 10: Universities with the lowest proportion of care leavers entering into their first year of study 2016/17

University	Percentage of care leavers
The University of Oxford	0.05%
Loughborough University	0.06%
The University of Warwick	0.07%
London School of Economics and Political Science	0.08%
University College London	0.12%



“Not being as smart as others who go there...because I haven’t been to school a lot so that and people going to university might like be well smart and I’m not going to know anything.”

Young person, 19

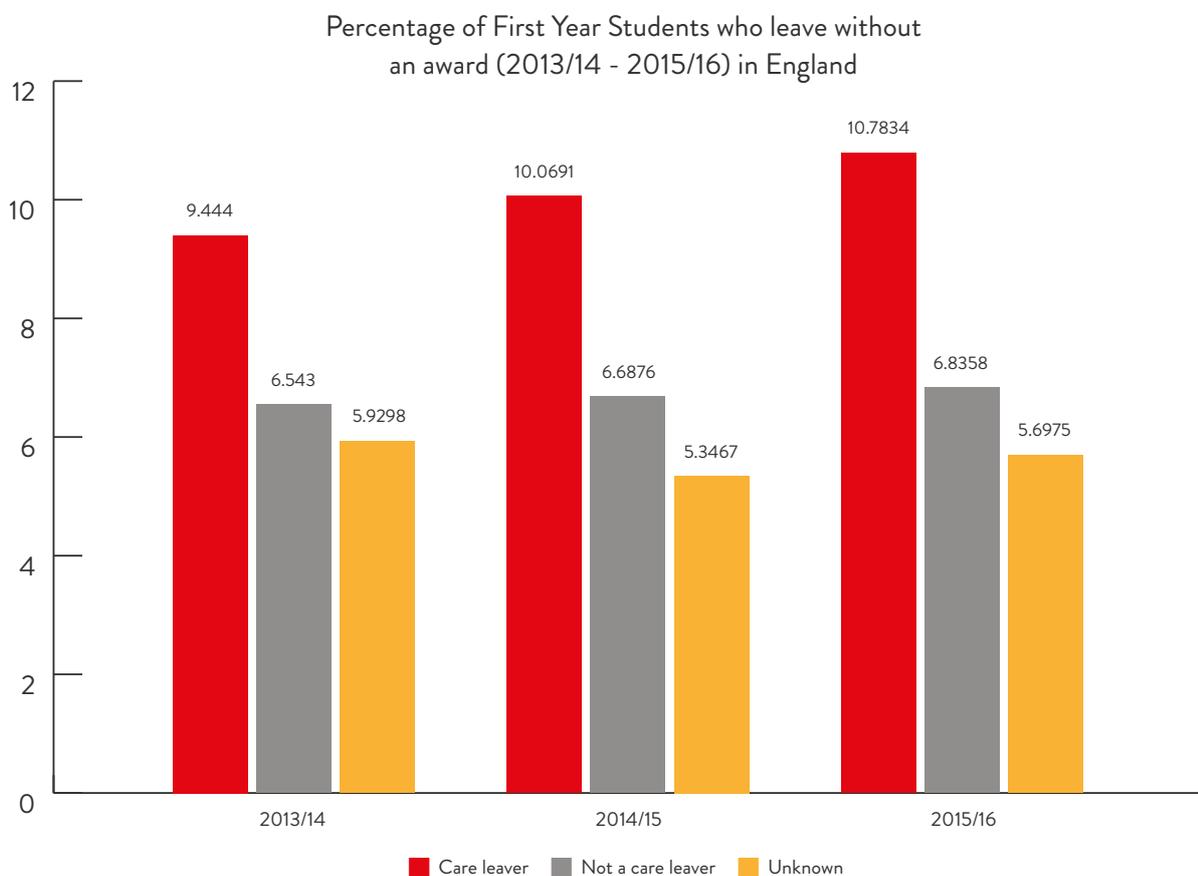
Retention rates

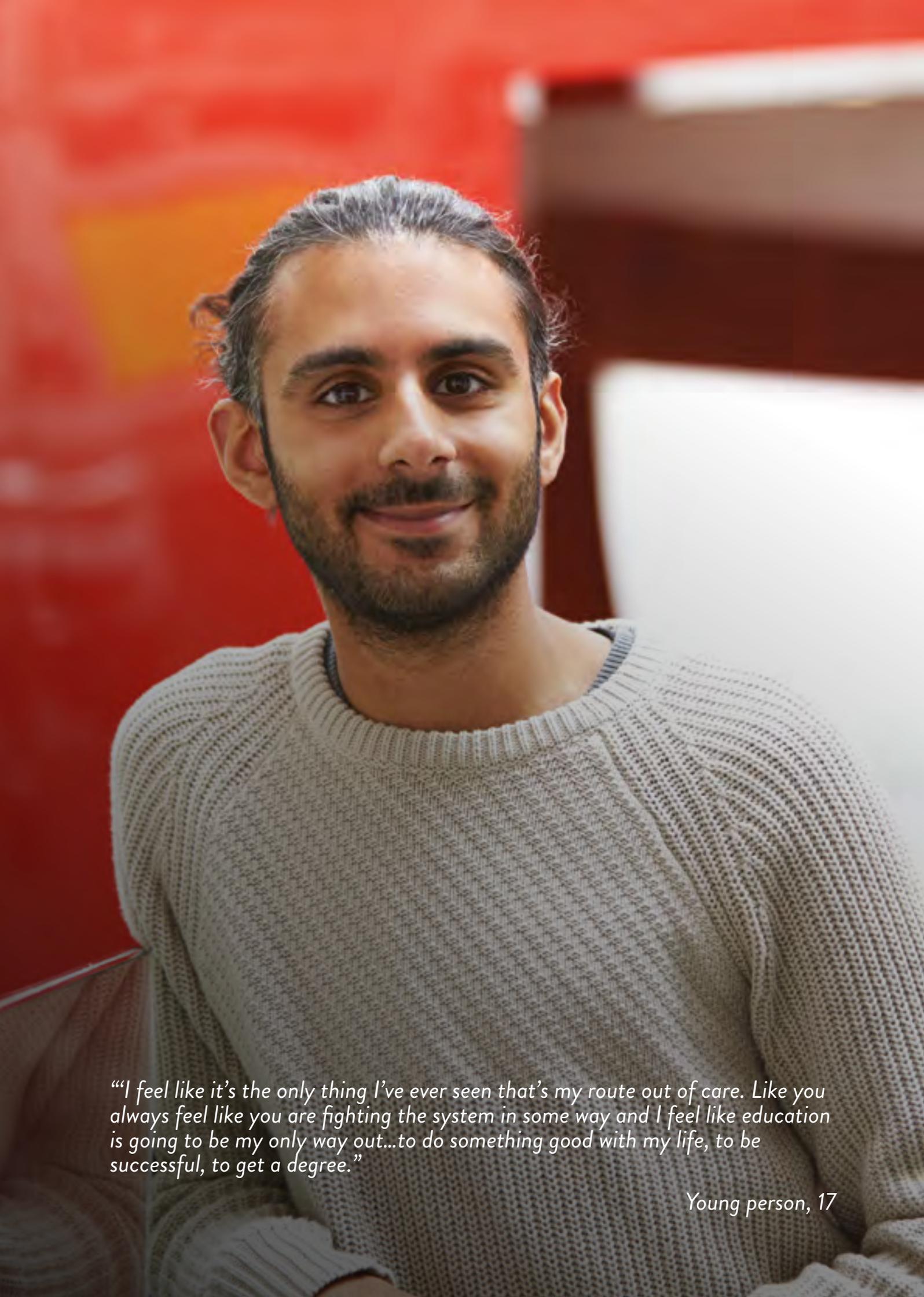
Attracting care leavers to university is just one part of the challenge that exists. Care leavers are also at greater risk than non-care leavers of leaving university without an award.

As Figure 24 highlights, between 2013 and 2016, the proportion of non-care leavers who left higher education with no award varied from 6.5% to 6.8%, while a higher proportion of care leavers left higher education each year without an award - this rate increased from 9.4% in 2013/14 to 10.8% in 2015/16.

Figure 24: The percentage of care leavers, students who were not care leavers, and unknown leaving higher education without an award (2013/14-2015/16)

Clearly, care leavers continue to face challenges once they enroll. An analysis of the factors that drive this is beyond the scope of the present policy paper. However, it is evident that universities will also need to direct some of their resources to ensuring that care leavers are able to complete their studies.





“I feel like it’s the only thing I’ve ever seen that’s my route out of care. Like you always feel like you are fighting the system in some way and I feel like education is going to be my only way out...to do something good with my life, to be successful, to get a degree.”

Young person, 17

4.2 What English universities are doing to support looked-after children and care leavers

Mixed results, with plenty left to do

All higher education institutions which charge more than the basic tuition fee of £6,000 must demonstrate how they are helping to widen participation for specific underrepresented groups, including care leavers. They do this through Access and Participation Plans. The Office for Students (OFS), the independent regulator for higher education in England, publishes strategic guidance to help inform these plans and oversees their implementation.⁹¹ The OFS has a statutory duty to have regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity in higher education.⁹²

The OFS has published official guidance in relation to the 2018/19 plans, which sets out the underrepresented groups that universities should focus on. Care leavers are currently recognised in this guidance as an underrepresented group, and we should therefore expect to see a focus on this cohort in universities' 2018/19 Access and Participation plans.

We analysed the 2018/19 Access and Participation plans of 102 universities in England to find out how many of these institutions specifically focus on looked-after children or care leavers. We found that:

- Overall, 90% of the plans included looked-after children or care leavers in some way;
- 84% of Russell Group universities referenced looked-after children and care leavers in their plans;
- 64% of the plans included a reference to targeted activity for looked-after children before they enter university - these activities included, but were not limited to, pre-university programmes, open days, virtual schools, mentoring, support groups and events on campus;
- 66% of universities provided some form of financial support for care leavers in addition to the higher education bursary provided by local authorities (the most common form of support was a bursary of around £1,000 per year);
- 36% of the plans included programmes for younger children in care who were identified as being at high risk of not applying to university without specific support and guidance - these were mainly pre-university programmes designed to demystify university life; and
- 29% of the plans included specific activities to support care leavers while at university.

Our analysis demonstrates that, while universities are recognising their commitments to care leavers, much more could be done to improve the volume and consistency of support available to them.

We also supplemented this analysis with a number of Freedom of Information requests to learn more about the data individual institutions held on care leavers (please see Appendices for further details).

The Freedom of Information request asked:

How many care leavers according to your institutions definition of a care leaver (for example, the Department for Education define a care leaver as “[a]ll children who had been looked after for at least 13 weeks which began after they reached the age of 14 and ended after they reached the age of 16”), started an undergraduate degree course at your university in the academic year 2017/18?

91 https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/Anmedia/1093/ofs2018_03.pdf

92 https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1093/ofs2018_03.pdf

Response rate:

- 75 universities responded to the FOI within the legal time frame.
- 2 universities responded to the request after the legal time frame.
- 3 universities responded to the FOI but were unable to provide a precise number of care leavers who had enrolled on an undergraduate degree course at their university (in each case, fewer than 5 care leavers enrolled in 2017/18 and providing exact numbers would risk privacy breaches).
- 9 universities declined to respond on the grounds that the data requested was readily available from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA).
- The remaining universities declined to respond for other reasons (see below for examples).

Although many universities appear to take a robust approach to capturing reliable data, this does not appear to be true in all cases, and some universities should take a more proactive approach. For example, one university declined to answer the FOI on the following grounds:

The university relies on students notifying us when they register as to whether they are a care leaver, but there is no obligation for them to do so. As a result of this we cannot provide you with accurate data as per your request as information is not held.

And while most universities who responded to our FOI told us that they employ the HESA definition of a care leaver, several universities stated that they collect this information from UCAS where a student self identifies as a care leaver. One university responded, saying that:

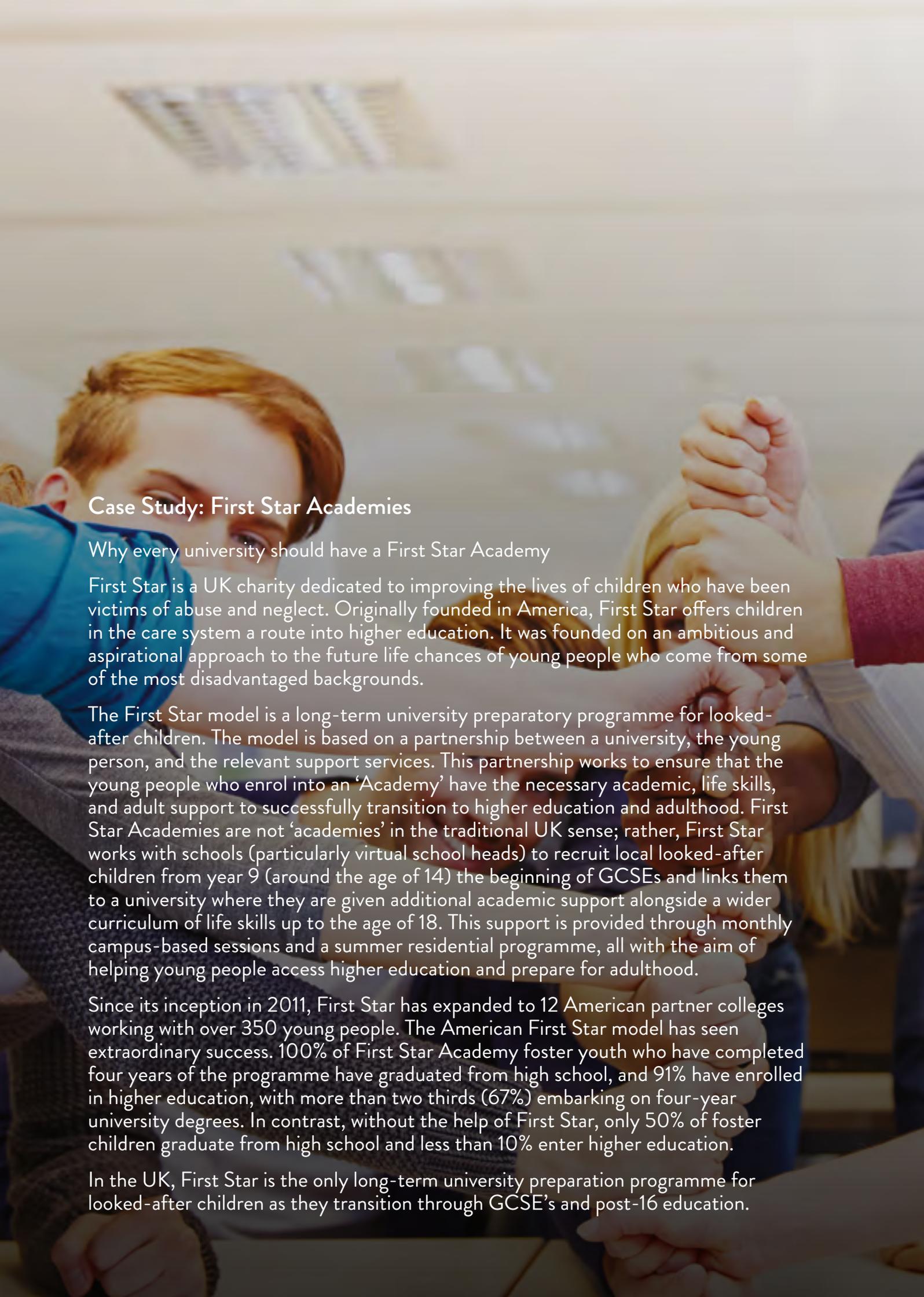
The university is only able to confirm a student as meeting the official definition of a care leaver where they have applied for our Care Leaver Bursary.

Recommendation:

The Minister for Children and the Office for Students should strongly encourage all higher education institutions to include looked-after children as a priority group within Access and Participation plans. This should be extended to cover specific activity and targets related to this group.

Examples of universities that are leading the way

Some universities are leading the way when it comes to supporting looked-after children and care leavers in beating the odds and achieving their potential. Their proactivity and imagination are reminders that we can do much more to support these vulnerable individuals, and we must learn from them.



Case Study: First Star Academies

Why every university should have a First Star Academy

First Star is a UK charity dedicated to improving the lives of children who have been victims of abuse and neglect. Originally founded in America, First Star offers children in the care system a route into higher education. It was founded on an ambitious and aspirational approach to the future life chances of young people who come from some of the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

The First Star model is a long-term university preparatory programme for looked-after children. The model is based on a partnership between a university, the young person, and the relevant support services. This partnership works to ensure that the young people who enrol into an 'Academy' have the necessary academic, life skills, and adult support to successfully transition to higher education and adulthood. First Star Academies are not 'academies' in the traditional UK sense; rather, First Star works with schools (particularly virtual school heads) to recruit local looked-after children from year 9 (around the age of 14) the beginning of GCSEs and links them to a university where they are given additional academic support alongside a wider curriculum of life skills up to the age of 18. This support is provided through monthly campus-based sessions and a summer residential programme, all with the aim of helping young people access higher education and prepare for adulthood.

Since its inception in 2011, First Star has expanded to 12 American partner colleges working with over 350 young people. The American First Star model has seen extraordinary success. 100% of First Star Academy foster youth who have completed four years of the programme have graduated from high school, and 91% have enrolled in higher education, with more than two thirds (67%) embarking on four-year university degrees. In contrast, without the help of First Star, only 50% of foster children graduate from high school and less than 10% enter higher education.

In the UK, First Star is the only long-term university preparation programme for looked-after children as they transition through GCSE's and post-16 education.

A photograph of three young people, two men and one woman, smiling and hugging each other. The woman in the center has curly blonde hair and is wearing a white top. The man on the right has short brown hair and is wearing a pink shirt. The man on the left has short brown hair and is wearing a blue shirt. They are all smiling broadly and appear to be in a happy, supportive environment.

Academy students join the programme in the summer that they progress from year 9 to year 10 and continue through four years of compulsory education to university or further education, apprenticeships and training. Through each Academy session (including four summer residential academies) students are supported by university staff and students and undertake a programme of academic development and coaching in life skills suitable for their age and to help them progress through school and beyond.

The First Star programme exposes students to a different way of life and encourages a sense of belonging in higher education. Academies are divided between monthly Saturday sessions and four-week residential schools during the summer holidays where students take academic classes in core subjects and develop life skills in preparation for adulthood.

First Star students choose to join the programme and commit four weeks of their summer vacation to the residential academy every year for four years, as well as monthly top up sessions on campus. Each Academy runs for four years - ensuring each cohort experiences the complete programme. Once a student enters the First Star programme they remain part of First Star even if their care circumstances change.

There is no 'cherry picking' of the brightest and best, broadly First Star students come from the middle 50% of ability. Selection is made through conversations with the young person in question to make sure they are willing to commit, as well as with teachers, Virtual School Heads, carers and social workers to make sure that a young person would benefit from a First Star Academy.

The first 'Academy' in the UK has been launched at St Mary's University Twickenham, which serves 30 students from the London boroughs and surrounding local authorities. Further academies are planned across the country with the long term aim of seeing First Star Academies rolled out across the country.

www.firststaruk.org

Case study: University of Brighton

The University of Brighton works closely with East Sussex Virtual School, the University of Sussex, foster carers, social workers, personal advisers and schools to ensure that young people in care have the information they need to make informed choices about attending university.

For example, every six weeks, the Outreach Officer at the university attends a meeting with the Virtual School Head and local colleges to identify young people from care backgrounds who want to go into higher education. The Outreach Officer then provides bespoke advice and guidance to these young people and offers support with applications and course options.

The university also offers advice and guidance to foster carers, social workers and personal advisers to help them navigate higher education for the young people they work with/who are placed with them. The Outreach Officer at the university is the main point of contact for these professionals.

The university also takes steps to ensure it considers the life context of the care leavers who have applied for a course there. When the university receives an initially unsuccessful application from a student flagged as a care leaver, the Widening Participation manager will subsequently review the application, along with the applicant's personal circumstances, before a final decision is made.

The university also provides two-day university taster sessions for children in care in Years 7, 8 and 9. It offers a student shadowing programme, which gives children in care the chance to attend a lecture with a student and discuss student life. It also offers care packages to care leavers who start a course at the university, which includes items such as bedding and utensils.

Case Study: Teesside University

Teesside University working to encourage

Teesside University is committed to supporting care-experienced young people to progress to higher education and as a result of prioritising this work has seen a 73% increase in the number of care leavers enrolling at the university since 2013. These students receive dedicated support from a care leavers' adviser who can advise students and offer advice on finance, accommodation and welfare as well as our care leavers' bursary.

But our support for care leavers starts long before they arrive at the University. In 2013 the first 'Raising aspirations for young people in care' conference was launched at the University bringing together professionals and key influencers, including local authority teams, foster carers, virtual schools, designated teachers and more. This conference is the flagship initiative of many activities the University delivers to address the key barriers facing care leavers. Workshops have included attachment, resilience, mental health and preparing care leavers for life after care.

This year, we will be hosting the seventh annual conference, featuring keynote speaker Lisa Cherry, a care leaver herself, whose research focuses on improving outcomes for young people. Alongside this, we continue to deliver targeted activities throughout the year for looked after children and care leavers of varying ages, designed to inform young people of the choices available to them and the bursaries and support available to them. We are pleased to see our work having an impact, and are committed to growing the numbers of care leavers enrolling at Teesside further.

Case Study: KU Cares at Kingston University

Kingston University has a long tradition of supporting students from underrepresented groups and guiding them into and through higher education. Its outreach programme with schools, colleges, virtual schools, local authorities, pupil referral units, and community groups engages thousands of individuals each year.

A comprehensive transition and induction programme helps prepare students from all backgrounds for university life, while its award-winning inclusive curriculum framework equips students with the academic, social, and personal skills required to prosper in global and diverse environments. Students learn within an environment of encouragement and support and are encouraged to access extra- and co-curricular activities designed to enhance their personal and professional development.

KU Cares has been developed to complement the university's inclusive ethos and provides support, advice and guidance for applicants and current students who are care-experienced, estranged from their families, have caring responsibilities for a relative or are asylum seekers/forced migrants in receipt of a Sanctuary Scholarship.

KU Cares grew out of the university's Compact Scheme, which supported just four care leaver students in 2006. Kingston was one of the first universities to gain a Buttle UK Quality Mark and in 2012 was awarded exemplary status. The number of students supported through KU Cares has grown each year, and there are currently over 200 students enrolled on the programme (120 are either care-experienced or still within the care system).

Its provision of support has also expanded over the years to include advice and guidance for applicants, bursaries and financial support, advocacy, access to work experience placements, signposting to extra-curricular opportunities and a full graduation package that includes complimentary gown hire, photography, graduation tickets and a graduation bursary. KU Cares also provides training for staff across the institution to ensure that there is an understanding of the barriers and multifaceted issues that students from these backgrounds can face.

Kingston's success stems from a strong and consistent commitment from its Senior Leadership Team, which includes the allocation of resources through the university's Access and Participation Plan. Support for care leavers and other vulnerable groups has remained a priority for Kingston for more than 10 years. Kingston was one of the first universities to create a dedicated role to support care-experienced students and, thanks to a considerable donation from an external benefactor, it now has two designated members of staff to support the growing number of students within KU Cares. The team are experts in the field who are continuously developing provisions and actively participate in networks with local authorities and other third-sector organisations.

As a result of support provided through KU Cares, 100% of care leaver/estranged students held current status during the 2017/18 academic year and the continuation rate for care leaver students was above that of the wider UG student population.

Case Study: Four Lancashire-based universities and Lancashire County Council

Lancashire County Council has been spearheading a partnership between four universities in Lancashire, including Lancaster University, the University of Cumbria, Edge Hill University and the University of Central Lancashire to engage young people in care and care leavers with higher education.

The council recognised that more support was needed for care leavers who wanted to go into higher education and developed its 'Local Care Leaver Offer'.

The council and partner universities are piloting a programme targeted at young people in Years 9-11 which aims to plant the seed of going to university early on and raise awareness of the support that exists to help them realise this outcome. To date, an initial 'Taster Day' has been delivered at Lancaster University, which includes interactive workshops themed around transitional support for care leavers, student finance, university life and building academic resilience. Young people also had the opportunity to talk to care-experienced Student Ambassadors, take a campus tour, and meet staff members from Student Based Services (SBS).

A further programme of university visits is now in the planning stages. Once complete, this will give young people an insight into the diversity of HE provision available in Lancashire, the wealth of university courses on offer, and the different types of learning environments - from universities situated in the city (such as the University of Central Lancashire) to campus settings (e.g. Lancaster University, the University of Cumbria and Edge Hill University). The idea is that young people are then able to make informed decisions about their next steps.

This partnership is also offering CPD support to professionals. Indeed, it held an Empowering Practitioners Conference for Social Workers, Personal Advisers and Foster Carers. The conference focused on the different pathways into higher education and provided up-to-date information on student finance, applying to university and student support services.

Over the next year, the partnership will aim to deliver further activity to test different collaborative approaches. This will include looking at the support to individuals in Years 12-13 to help them reach their chosen destination and offer continued support for professionals.



“If they got all the young people in care, like 16 and 17 in one room and talked to them about university and what help you get at different universities. When I was doing the applications and stuff, I wasn’t actually told what I get as a care leaver. I had to find it out myself.”

Young person, 19

Case Study: University of Warwick, Coventry University and Coventry City Council

Coventry Children's Services works very closely with two local universities to try to improve access to higher education for looked-after children and care leavers.

Coventry Virtual School works with Warwickshire Virtual School, the University of Warwick and Coventry University to deliver University Go! - a programme for looked-after children who achieve good results in their Year 6 SATs and looked-after children who have been identified as having the potential to go on to higher education. This programme helps to inform young people, along with their carers, social workers and teachers, that they have the potential to attend higher education when they leave school, and to provide them with the knowledge and understanding of the many different routes into higher education. The aim is for the young person to stay on the programme through Years 7, 8 and 9, during which they will access a variety of trips, visits and activities to build confidence and raise their aspirations.

Recognising that care leavers do not always follow traditional routes to university, Coventry Children's Services also tracks young people with university potential to ensure they are able to access and come back into education in different ways. In addition, the achievements of care leavers are celebrated at an annual care leaver's conference and various celebration events.

In addition, young people and members of staff have worked together to provide answers to the some of the questions care leavers have raised about university, to reduce concerns and to show that university is accessible and the support that is on offer. A series of short films were produced, which can be shared on websites so that care leavers considering university can click on a question relevant to them, giving them a short snippet which presents the answers. Over five years of recent evaluation, the number of care leavers in Coventry who have gone to university has risen from 5 to around 40.

Case Study: South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnership and Swansea University

The Diamond Project - A package of interventions. The City and County of Swansea awarded a 'High 5' Group Achievement Award, recognising young people's dedication to overcoming barriers to education. Interventions take place across the full academic year and have included full-day workshops at the Swansea University Singleton and Bay campuses and Gower College. Activities are based on the interests of the young people attending and have run for the last four academic years. Participants have also worked with the university media team, including to create their own news broadcasts, produce the university newspaper and work at the radio station. The final part of the project is a one-night, two-day residential.

After-school clubs - ongoing intervention (age 13-17 years old) - The Reaching Wider partnership and Swansea University host over 30 after-school sessions a year. These sessions which are almost weekly during the academic term focus on HE options, finance, and employability skills, stress management, university societies and wellbeing. The sessions always end with time for the young people to prepare a simple meal for each other and then to spend time together eating and chatting. The sessions encourage a sense of identity, strength and belonging, as well as raising academic aspiration and awareness. This programme builds upon the three previous years of activities that the young people have attended. The sessions are held at Swansea University with the Looked After Children Education Support (LACES) Team and work as a collaboration with Reaching Wider.

Swansea University:

Primary Days - ongoing intervention (age 9-11years old) - primary groups of care-experienced young people in Years 5 and 6 from NPT in collaboration with LACES visit Reaching Wider to undertake day workshops at either Swansea University Bay or Singleton campus.

16 + intervention - Whole-day events tailored to the interests of the young people attending. Start times and agenda altered slightly compared to those of other days in order to give a later start time and thus overcome barriers that may prevent young people who are NEET from attending, such as different sleep patterns/ waking up later in the morning than if they were at school/college.

One-to-one Bespoke Visits - Bespoke packages of support organised for care-experienced young people on a one-to-one basis. This has involved activities such as attending subject specific lectures, meeting department staff and admissions tutors, mentoring from current university students studying the specific subject, university tours, money advice from the university advice team, meeting the care leaver contact for the university, disability advice from university staff, organising and providing free childcare for their children when coming to the university for their one-to-one bespoke visits.

Work experience - bespoke work experience placements arranged for care-experienced young people in Years 10 and 11. Placements have included within the Reaching Wider team and within academic departments at the university. Activities have included representing Reaching Wider at a Voices from Care event, learning administrative skills, researching skulls and skeletons and medical skills.

Residential experiences - residential experiences on Swansea University Bay or Singleton campus for care-experienced young people who have attended Reaching Wider events throughout the academic year. The young people stay with Reaching Wider staff and Student Leaders in student accommodation on campus and take part in themed activities.

Young Person mentoring project - care-experienced young people mentoring other young people within the bigger group of care-experienced young people.

Care-experienced student role models/mentors - current students studying at the university who are care-experienced and who work for Reaching Wider to support the delivery of activities attended by care experienced young people.

Higher Education themed fun activity booklets - for young people aged from 10 years +. Produced 2-3 times per year and distributed at Reaching Wider Care-Experienced events, through LACES Teams and through training sessions for professionals and foster carers.

Supporting young people into University - ongoing support for care-experienced young people as they transition through the Reaching Wider projects into FE and HE including help with applying for student finance, accommodation support etc.

Supporting the young people while at Swansea University by continuing to be a constant adult in their university experience. Contact maintained by text, phone, email and the occasional coffee to ensure that the transition process runs smoothly and to support them if incidents arise where they need signposting to other support services within the university in order to aid retention and not drop out of their studies.

Partnership working - Strong partnership working is at the heart of the Reaching Wider programme for care-experienced young people. It involves identifying trusted adults in the young people's lives and working with them to provide a safe and trusted environment for the young people to learn about the opportunities available to them through FE and HE. Partnership working is at the core of every session and intervention delivered to the young people.

Regular training sessions for social workers and foster carers delivered by Reaching Wider through the Local Authority training teams, foster carer events through the fostering network and social services team meetings on opportunities available with Reaching Wider, within Further Education & Higher Education.

Supporting Young People from outside geographical area - working with Social Workers and other professionals to support care-experienced young people from outside the South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnership area, but who are coming to study at Swansea University or UWTSD in order to support their transition into university, including organising university visit sessions, support with Student Finance and bursaries and applying for suitable accommodation.

The Fostering Network collaboration - getting young people's voice across. The fostering network attend SWW Reaching Wider Partnership events to work with the young people to get their views on issues that affect them and which are then written up into the Fostering Network Magazine 'Thrive'.

Case Study: University of the West of England – UWE Cares

The University of the West of England provides a package of support for care leavers and care experienced students through UWE Cares.

Academic and pastoral support: UWE Cares provides a designated point of contact for queries and concerns, from application all the way through to graduation. They provide weekly drop-ins – a chance to talk through any problems you may have and identify areas where you need support. This helps to co-ordinate support across the university to help access academic help and access to university services.

UWE Cares runs a dedicated Students' Union UWE Cares Society which organises social events throughout the year so you can meet with other students in similar situations. These include transition, welcome and graduation events.

Careers and mentoring: Each care experienced student is offered a named Careers and Employability Coach, who will work with students directly to help them reach their potential. UWE Cares provides access to a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Mentor at the beginning of the university experience. A PAL Mentor will help young people develop skills, confidence and future employability.

Accommodation: UWE provides a 365-day accommodation guarantee for eligible students. If a young person is eligible for the guarantee, UWE will pay or waive the deposit for UWE Bristol accommodation or Unite Students accommodation.

If you're a care leaver or estranged from your family, there is also the possibility of applying for the UNITE accommodation scholarship to cover the cost of your accommodation. Successful applicants have their housing costs covered for three years while studying at UWE.

UWE Cares Bursary: The UWE Cares Bursary is a £2000 non-repayable bursary in year one of academic study and then a £1000 non-repayable bursary in subsequent years. It also includes a £500 non-repayable graduation bursary to help with post-graduation life.



“We don’t have people we can just ask for help from when the money runs out. They say we are just like other kids, but we are not just like other kids.”

Young person, 17

Chapter 7: A ‘Gold Standard’ for universities

There is, as we have demonstrated, variation in the number of known care leavers who attend different public universities in England. There is also considerable variety in the targets and activities that universities have in place to support looked-after children and care leavers.

Access and Participation Plans have the potential to boost access for these individuals. But to do so, they must be focused more consistently on this cohort across all universities, and they must be better informed to reflect activities that we know are likely to work best.

Deciding to go to university should never be a decision between a good course and a solid package of support - both should be bound together in one coherent offer.

To make sure this happens more often, we need a model of good practice - a ‘Gold Standard’. This mark of quality should be awarded only to universities that can demonstrate they have engaged meaningfully and productively with looked-after children and care leavers to help boost their chances of enrolling at university and completing a course.

This ‘Gold Standard’ will build on the work carried out by Buttle UK and their own Quality Mark. This mark focused minds on care leavers’ needs in higher education. Before the Buttle Mark was introduced, only one university had a comprehensive policy on care leavers, and yet 56% of higher education institutions subsequently sought and obtained the Quality Mark.⁹³ Unfortunately, the Quality Mark is no longer in existence, but when it was in use it encouraged universities to improve their offers for some of the most vulnerable children in society.

We must reignite that dynamism. We have consulted a range of stakeholders to obtain their views on what a new model of good practice should include. We have also consulted separately with a group of young care leavers, some of whom are already at university and some of whom are deciding whether or not they should go, to find out what they think needs to be included. We wanted to find out what ‘good’ looks like in relation to engagement and support.

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) intends to make the ‘Gold Standard’ an integral part of its membership. Once the key practices have been agreed, the NNECL will be working with a quality expert to translate the minimum requirements into an accreditation process that can be used to award a Quality Mark to universities, colleges and local authorities.

⁹³ http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.buttle.org.uk/Our_QM_docs/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf

Developing a Gold Standard

The ‘Gold Standard’ would ideally sit within the DfE Care Leavers Covenant framework, and we suggest that the DfE investigate how a second wave of engagement around the Care Leavers Covenant could include the ‘Gold Standard’.

The CSJ would encourage the Department to endorse and support a ‘Gold Standard’ delivered by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNCEL). This support should be extended to grant funding the administrative costs associated with a national roll out of the ‘Gold Standard’ and official endorsement.

The Gold Standard:

For universities to achieve the ‘gold standard’ they must demonstrate the following standards are being met:

- 1. A wider understanding of a student from a care background:** Support should not be conditional on a strict definition of what a care leaver is, and instead should recognise research showing that they will often be older students and part time learners. A Gold Standard should reflect the diversity of the care leaver student population and applicants with care experience.
- 2. Data collection:** Universities should carry out a census of how many care leavers they have at their institutions, they must demonstrate a proactive approach to identifying and supporting care leavers. They must not rely on students self-declaring through UCAS.

What did young people tell us?

There needs to be a more sophisticated way for young people to present as care leavers. Some young people are reluctant to be continually defined as care leavers at university - these individuals want to shed the label of care and see university as an opportunity to redefine themselves.

- 3. Financial support including accommodation:** Universities must be able to demonstrate that their financial bursaries schemes made available to care leavers are fit for purpose. They should consult with young people about the most appropriate time for bursaries to be paid as well as working towards identifying any key gaps in financial support. In addition to financial bursaries, a Gold Standard institution should be able to demonstrate that they are providing advice and support to care leavers and care experienced people on how to budget and manage their finances.

Universities must offer all care leavers a 365-student accommodation guarantee. However, the accommodation must be suitable to their needs. Universities should be able to demonstrate that they are working to make continual improvements to their 365-accommodation offer ensuring that it is suitable for individuals on a case-by-case basis. Further consideration should be given to the additional needs that care leavers might have such as support moving into and out of university accommodation.

What did young people tell us?

All universities should offer financial bursaries to care leavers to provide support with the cost of living and expenses associated with courses. Bursaries should be paid at regular intervals so that funds are continually topped up and care leavers are not left short.

Universities must offer 365-days-a-year accommodation and should provide scholarships to cover the cost of rent. Young people also valued support in finding appropriate accommodation, and emphasised the importance of a stable accommodation.

4. **Contextual admissions:** Universities should take into account a young person's status as a care leaver when considering their application. Additional information about the young person should be obtained. Higher education providers should ensure no care experienced applicant is rejected without extensive investigation into their application and senior oversight.

Case Study: King's College London

King's College London provides special admissions consideration for care-experienced students. Students who disclose that they have spent time in care when applying through UCAS are automatically flagged. This prevents their application from being unsuccessful until both the Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions and the Associate Director of Widening Participation have reviewed the application. This can mean that students:

- Whose predicted grades are marginally lower than those required for the course are given offers;
- Are given offers to alternative courses at King's, linked to their subject preferences; or
- Who fail to meet their conditional offers are more likely to have their places confirmed.

5. **Widening participation:** University access and participation must include a specific reference to care leavers. Furthermore, the agreements should include:

- Targeted outcomes for care leavers
- Target activity for encouraging looked after children to consider applying for a higher education course
- Details of specific support offered to care leavers whilst they are at university
- Details of educational and aspiration programmes for younger children in care, this intervention should start as early as possible
- A 'Gold Standard' institution should seek to appoint a named person whose role has a focus on the care leaver agenda (or similar such as estranged young people), this role should ideally be full time and the staff member must have specific expertise.

What did young people tell us?

The support that is available needs to be specific and detailed.

Young people said that they would like to be able to contact a designated individual for support. These specialists should reach out and build trusting relationships, and they should make colleagues aware that care leavers are care leavers.

6. **Youth engagement:** Universities should be able to demonstrate that they are asking for and using feedback on their care leaver offer from care leavers themselves in all the work that they do for this group.

Universities must be able to demonstrate that they are making every effort to ensure that looked after children and care leavers are made aware of all the support that they offer and provide to this group.

- 7. Partnership working:** Universities should work with schools, further educational colleges and local authority care and leaving care teams to ensure that there is joined up support for looked after children and care leavers in their local areas.

A 'Gold Standard' institution will work proactively with partners to improve communication and information sharing to enhance the higher education experience of care leavers and those with experience of care.

- 8. Raising aspiration:** Universities, through their Access and Participation Plans, must demonstrate a commitment to raising educational aspiration for looked after children whilst they are still at school. They should engage in community outreach work and be able to provide evaluation of their activities, one way of demonstrating impact could be through monitoring and analysis of HEAT data.

What did young people tell us?

Outreach work should start early and should be targeted at schools and sixth-forms/colleges. Ideas included annual events for schools and colleges, talks at schools, and setting up a point of contact within colleges/sixth-forms to provide information on university.

- 9. Evaluation:** Universities must be evaluating support and engagement that they have with care leavers and care experienced young people. Recognition for the gold standard will only be made possible if a university can provide evidence that what they are doing is working.
- 10. Staff awareness training:** Universities must provide awareness training to staff who are likely to encounter care leavers. It is vital that all staff with direct contact with care leavers understand the potential trauma that these young people might have experienced and receive continuous professional development on this subject.

To achieve the 'Gold Standard', universities must demonstrate that they have carried out some or all of the following practices. Some practices are mandatory - these are the minimum requirements that universities must adhere to if they are to be considered for the Quality Mark.

Support with Student Finance

Completing forms for student finance can be a complex task. Student Finance England is taking steps to ensure that professionals working with young people on student finance applications have the right information to support them with these tasks.

The Student Loans Company Funding Information Team provides information sessions for staff at universities across the country on student finance. These sessions can include specific information on care leavers and are available as part of staff training. Local authorities have also accessed this resource to support social workers in providing good quality information and guidance for care leavers who are considering university.

Student Finance England also has a website for practitioners, which includes free resources on student finance (<https://www.practitioners.sl.co.uk>). These resources include information on how students get paid, how to make applications, and how finance is repaid.

A Minister's award for outstanding practice

Universities that can demonstrate they have met the criteria set out in the 'Gold Standard' should be granted a sum of funding by the DfE to help them sustain and develop their packages of support.

Case Study: Go Higher West Yorkshire

Go Higher West Yorkshire is a regional partnership of higher education providers, including six colleges and six universities. The partnership provides a single point of contact for information on participating higher education providers, to help with access and preparation for studying. The partnership also provides specific information for care leavers on the support that the HE providers can offer.

To demonstrate its commitment to care leavers, the partnership has signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant. As part of this process, the partnership identified the existing ways in which it was supporting care leavers, and further ways in which individual partner institutions could support this group.

Its support covers key stages in the student journey - from initial work on raising aspirations, to help with applying to university and avoiding dropping out. The graphic below highlights the different support which each HE provider offers to care leavers.

SUPPORT OFFERED BY THE PROVIDERS	Bradford College	University of Bradford	Calderdale College	University of Huddersfield	Kirklees College	University of Leeds	Leeds Arts University	Leeds Beckett University	Leeds College of Building	Leeds City College	Leeds Trinity University	Wakefield College
GETTING TO HIGHER EDUCATION												
Dedicated care leaver web page	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓		
Experiences on campus		✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Application support	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contextual admissions*	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	✓
SUCCEEDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION												
Wellbeing support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Named contact person for care leaver students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year round accommodation	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Support with the transition and higher education		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Additional Financial Support	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training to help staff understand care leavers	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		
SUCCEEDING AFTER HIGHER EDUCATION												
Employment support	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

A close-up, profile view of two young women sitting side-by-side. The woman on the left has long, curly blonde hair and is wearing a blue top. The woman on the right has long, straight dark hair and is wearing a colorful patterned top. Both are smiling warmly and looking towards the right. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with other people.

“I feel like if the number [of care leavers going to university] continues to decrease then kids are going to be too scared to go to uni knowing that they are going to have to do student finance all on their own...it’s not like us kids in care have parents who can help them fill in student forms and help them with finance.”

Young person, 17

Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Attainment 8 - Attainment 8 measures the average achievement of pupils in up to 8 qualifications including English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), maths (double weighted), three further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications, including EBacc subjects, or any other non-GCSE qualification on the DfE-approved list.

Care leaver - A young person who left the care of a local authority at the age of 16, 17 or 18 and who was looked after for a total period of 13 weeks after reaching the age of 14, including at least one day while he/she was 16 or 17.

Children in Need - A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health or development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without access to support services; or a child who is disabled.

Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan - An EHC plan applies to children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available to them through special educational needs support. EHC plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support required to meet those needs.

Further education - Education in addition to that received at secondary school.

Higher education - An optional stage of formal learning that typically occurs after completion of secondary education. It covers all taught education above A-levels and equivalent.

Key Stage 4 - During Key Stage 4 most pupils work towards national qualifications, usually GCSEs. The compulsory national curriculum subjects are the 'core' and 'foundation' subjects.

Looked-after child - A child placed in the care of a local authority by a court order or accommodated by a local authority under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. This category also includes young people detained in a remand centre or other custodial institutions, or in a hospital.

Personal Educational Plan (PEP) - A PEP is a statutory document that focuses on the educational achievement, progress and needs of individual looked-after children. It forms part of the young person's care plan.

Progress 8 - Progress 8 aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4. It compares pupils' Attainment 8 scores with the average Attainment 8 score of pupils nationally who had a similar starting point; this is calculated using assessment results from the end of primary school.

Pupil Premium - Funding provided to schools for each pupil registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point during the last six years. It is currently paid at a rate of £1,320 for pupils in Reception-Year 6 and £935 for pupils in Year 7-11.1

Pupil Premium Plus - Additional funding, on top of the Pupil Premium rate, for schools to support and help raise the educational attainment and progress of children in care.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - Special educational needs and disabilities can affect a child or young person's ability to learn. These additional needs and disabilities can affect their behaviour, reading and writing, ability to understand concepts, concentration levels, and physical ability.

Staying Put - 'Staying put' arrangements enable care leavers to remain with their former foster carers after they turn 18.

Virtual schools - The virtual school is an additional resource which exists to support and challenge all those involved in the education of children in care.

Virtual School Heads (VSHs) - VSHs are in charge of promoting the educational achievement of all the children looked after by the local authority they work for. They are responsible for managing Pupil Premium Plus funding, and for allocating these funds to schools and alternative provision settings.

Appendix B: Numbers for Good methodology

The approach was consistent with the analysis which Coles et al. (2010) used in their original University of York research in 2002 commissioned by the Audit Commission in relation to young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), updated in 2010, and quoted in the National Audit Office report on Children in Care (2014). Our analysis therefore gives a snapshot of the likely costs throughout a person's life.

Methodology

When investigating the impact of children and young people's episode(s) of being in the care of local authorities in England, we considered the current costs of care for 2016/17, the near-term costs of care leavers as of 2017, and the medium- to longer-term public finance costs of being care-experienced discounted back to a 2017 cost. Our public finance cost framework approach did not consider 'resource costs' i.e. loss to the individual, family and economy.

The approach was consistent with the analysis which Coles et al. (2010) used in their original University of York research in 2002 commissioned by the Audit Commission in relation to young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), updated in 2010, and quoted in the National Audit Office report on Children in Care (2014). Our analysis therefore gives a snapshot of the likely costs throughout a person's life.

Whenever possible, the cohort size, impact and unit cost were calculated on an 'excess' basis with only the difference between looked-after children and their peers being used in calculations. For example, when taking into consideration expenditure on the Pupil Premium Plus grant, only the difference between Pupil Premium Plus and Pupil Premium was included in the cost impact of being in care.

Cohorts

We took various measures to ensure that the estimates produced by our report were a reasonable reflection of group sizes for looked-after children, care leavers and relevant care-experienced cohorts in England.

A significant part of the cohort analysis was related to young people aged 16-21 who are in care or care-experienced and thus the analysis was impacted by Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) numbers. For example, DfE (2018) statistics show that UASC represent over 20% of looked-after children aged 16 or over. Consequently, as far as practical, the cost analysis was split between UASC and non-UASC children and young people, and we attempted to reflect some key differences, such as the proportion who leave the UK post-18 years old and the preponderance of male UASC (DfE statistics show over 90% are male); as such, we removed public finance costs related to aspects such as teenage pregnancy.

Age groups

As most available datasets for a near-term cohort of LACs consider groups across the 16-24 age group care leavers, we used this age group when considering near-term costs of care leavers. Our medium-term cost assumptions were based on a working life of 35 years (25-60 years old) for full employment and 20 years for underemployment (those with lower education qualifications). Longer-term cost assumptions were for pensioners 65+ until death.

Unit costs

A variety of measures were employed to ensure that our estimates were a reasonable reflection of related costs for looked-after children, care leavers and relevant care-experienced cohorts in England. The cost information was taken from a range of published sources such as the New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database and a cross section of literature. Where cost information was not readily available in the public domain, we made analytical assumptions to give updates on recognised costs in some cases, used valid costs from other research, and provided robust estimates from this mix of sources where no directly comparable figures were identified. Where more recent cost data was not readily available, we inflated older price assumptions to 2017 levels (using middle of the target band inflation rate of 2%).

Data quality

To establish the number of children in each group and/or unit costs, we used official statistics where possible. If no accurate data sources were available, we utilised literature or made analytical assumptions. We believe most of these estimates work under conservative assumptions, and thus omit some 'hard to measure' sub-groups, meaning they should be viewed as underestimating the true cost.

Stocks & Flows

A reoccurring issue in our analysis was limited information on the number of children and young people in a particular group. We aimed to establish the number of children in each vulnerability group as a snapshot; for example on 31st March 2017, the flows in and out of the care during the year and the number who had been part of that cohort at some stage during the year. However, for some groups we only had information on the number of children entering or leaving the group during the reporting period, or just a stock snapshot. Consequently, where relevant and possible, we produced estimates of the stock or flow through triangulation with other data.

Time period

The data and statistics used to estimate the cost of care in this report came from a wide range of sources. Each data source has different publication dates and a number have different reporting periods. Where possible, we used data for the 2016/17 financial year, as this was the last full year for which some of the datasets were available at the time of analysis. Future costs were discounted back to a 2017 basis for the sake of consistency.

Analysis

Current cost of care

The NAO report on Children in Care (2014) states an annual cost of foster and residential care placements of £2.5m. Though this is the majority of the placement cost, it is by no means the direct cost to public finance of children being in the care of local authorities. The Children's Commissioner study (2018) into the expenditure on children declares an annual spend of around £4bn on looked-after children. Our analysis of the DfE S251 outturn data, Holmes et al.'s (2008) Loughborough cost model work and DfE information on Pupil Premium expenditure shows that the direct expenditure in 2017 was £3.8bn for the 102,590 children and young people (DfE, 2018) who experienced the care system in that year.

The difference between this report and the Children's Commissioner study and the full costs detailed in the DfE S251 outturn is largely due to our allocation of local authority Care Leaver services to the 'near-term' cost of care leavers.

Of the £3.8bn cost, around £151m can be attributed to UASC based upon the directly attributed UASC costs in the DfE S251 outturn and the estimate of Home Office funding of UASC placements in the ADCS (2017) special thematic report on UASC. However, it is to be noted that the ADCS report also makes the case that the gross cost of UASC to local authorities could be up to £6.76m per 100 UASC and therefore give a current cost as high as £300m per annum.

The NAO report on 'Children in need of help or protection' (2016) identifies the cost of local authority social work services to be at least £1.8bn per annum. Holmes et al. (2008) identify that the social work and related costs for supporting looked-after children's placement in care is typically 5% of the placement costs and so, for 2017, this would represent £200m of the £1.8bn social work costs in England. This report has included the £200m estimated based upon Holmes et al. (2008).

The amount included in this report for Pupil Premium Plus is not the full grant. The report is concerned with the cost impact of being in care and as the majority of the CYP who receive Pupil Premium Plus would most likely meet the criteria for Pupil Premium if they were not in care, only the difference between these two has been included in the cost calculation.

Near-term cost of care leavers aged 16-24

The cost to public finance of care leavers aged 16-24 years old was calculated to be nearly £2bn per annum based upon 2016/17 data, excluding UASC. The impact of UASC was estimated to be a further £0.3bn.

These costs are in addition to 'current costs of care' and generally do not include any costs related to health services due to the way health data is captured and reported. The main components of these public finance costs were therefore related to: Local Authority Care Leaver services; NEET - direct, underemployment & economically inactive; Criminal Justice System engagement; and youth homelessness.

Local Authority Care Leaver service costs were obtained from the DfE S251 outturn data (2018) and this gave a non-UASC care leaver service cost of £0.3bn per annum.

The impact of being NEET was considered in terms of the cost of benefits paid and the lost tax revenue during the period of being NEET, and whether this was related to and further compounded by specific economic inactivity issues such as teenage parenting. The often ongoing underemployment impact of being NEET for this cohort was also factored in. In combination, these were estimated to result in a public finance cost of £0.99bn per annum, excluding UASC. A lower incidence of NEET individuals as of 2017 was noted versus Coles et al.'s (2010) analysis commissioned by the Audit Commission in relation to young people NEET. This is a positive development and likely can be explained by the introduction of the September Guarantee in 2007 which entitled all 16 and 17-year-olds (and later 18-year-olds in 2013) to an offer of a suitable place in education or training.

NAO reports on the Ministry of Justice and Care Leavers' transition to adulthood (2014), in conjunction with the New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database, allowed estimates of the public finance cost for the overrepresentation of care-experienced young adults engaged with the Criminal Justice System. These CJS costs were estimated to result in a public finance cost of £0.31bn per annum, excluding UASC.

The trends in homelessness (particularly in young people) have been difficult to measure over time due to changes in government data collection practices and policies related to homelessness at the local authority level. Nevertheless, looking at recent changes with housing benefit reforms in 2011 and the concentration of under 25s in private/social housing, it is evident that the number of rooms available to under 25s on low incomes has reduced significantly. According to the Cambridge Centre of Housing Planning and Research, in 2014 1.3m young people aged 16-24 slept rough or in an unsafe place, and just under 300,000 did so on any one night.

Combining the findings of research by Clarke et al. (2015) and Inside Housing (2018) with the Crisis Homelessness Monitor (2017) allowed for an estimate of the cost impact and additional level of homelessness amongst care-experienced youth and young adults. These costs were multifaceted and covered elements ranging from emergency and temporary housing to health services and adult social care. The costs related to the additional and overrepresentation of care-experienced young adults in this cohort were estimated to result in a public finance cost of £0.33bn per annum, excluding UASC.

The combined impact of care leaver service costs, NEET, CJS engagement and homelessness-related public finance costs was estimated at £0.34bn per annum for young adults who had been UASC. These calculations allowed for those UASC who were 18 and over and who left the UK.

Medium- to long-term costs of being care-experienced

When considering the medium- to longer-term costs of care leavers, the University of York study (Coles et al., 2010) provides a robust analysis of various sub-cohorts and the relative public finance costs of their differing life trajectories; indeed, said study has been cited by the NAO in its report on Children in Care (2014). We have therefore built upon this analysis and updated costs and cohort sizes to 2017 levels in the following areas.

Future projections

For all future estimates we have assumed that taxation, benefits and other economic indicators (i.e. GDP as discount rate) are at current levels. These current level assumptions reflect various near-term trends (i.e. Universal Credit, changes in size of sub-groups) that will be discussed further in the findings section. In terms of economic metrics, we have seen the following changes since the University of York study in 2010:

1. Decrease in the discount rate from 3% to 1.5% (GDP rate used).
2. Changes in personal income tax bands and rates.
3. Increase in average earnings.

We have included these changes in our forward projections and will go into further detail on the impact of these trends on costs in the section below.

Benefits

Benefits per child grew significantly (+60%) in the period spanning 2000/01-2009/10. Since then, the benefits figure has fallen back, with an expected real-terms cut of 17% between 2009/10 and 2019/20. This has reversed some, but not all, of the increase over the 2000s. If delivered, this would leave spending in 2019/20 at approximately the same level it was in 2006/07, though still around 33% higher in real terms than it was in 2000/01 (Children's Commissioner report, 2017).

Since 2010, real-terms cuts to benefit rates have reduced levels of benefit spending going to families with children. Reforms implemented since 2015 (e.g. roll-out of universal credit) will, when fully in place, further reduce the incomes of low-income families with children by between 10% and 15% relative to a situation where no reforms are made. Under this assumption, all cost projections we have made in regard to benefits over the medium- to longer-term included a discount of 15%. While this may reduce the cost of benefits to the government for families with children, we do expect there to be a knock-on effect via higher incidence of homelessness or other social issues and have incorporated this into our projections.

Underemployment

Alongside care leavers who have gained employment and those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), we have accounted for a sub-group of care leavers who are 'Underemployed' over the short to medium term. These are LAC who graduated from school with lower educational qualifications and thus have not reached their full potential in terms of earning power (and other non-monetary rewards) over their working lives. For the purposes of this paper we consider lower educational qualifications as being characterised by a failure to gain grades 4 and above in English and maths in KS4. These care leavers will likely spend more time in part-time work or low-paid employment and so we have made adjustments to the 'Employed' group to account for this lower pay. As referenced in the University of York report, we assumed that 17.5% of care leavers will leave school with grade 4 and above in English and maths, compared to 58.9% of all non-care leavers. This excess 45% forms a part of the 'Employed' group and we assume will earn 41.4% of the gross median earnings over their working life (which is also 10 years shorter). These assumptions are again consistent with the Coles et al. (2010) study on NEETs.

Higher underemployment amongst care leavers may also be explained by the trends in public spending on education. Spending on education for 16-18-year-olds rose slowly over the 2000s and was cut per capita more significantly over the 2010s. This means that spending per student in further education will be about the same in real terms in 2019/20 as it was in 1990. 'The high-needs budget, which covers pupils with high levels of special educational needs, represents a small, but growing element of the education budget (£5.5 billion in 2017-18)'.

We estimate the lifetime cost of underemployment for each annual cohort of care leavers to equal £0.55bn.

NEET sub-groups

The outcome groups we have considered for LACs after leaving care are consistent with those outlined in the near-term cost of care leavers section of this report. In addition to these groups, we have added further granularity around some sub-groups of NEETs, i.e. teenage mothers, those with substance abuse issues and individuals engaged with the criminal justice system. The Coles et al. (2010) report accounts for these sub-groups within the NEET group cost analysis to avoid double counting (i.e. the hierarchy of costs approach); however, we argue in this report that certain individuals in said group will experience more than one outcome here (i.e. substance abuse and then mental/physical health issues) and thus there is a multiplier-effect that should be accounted for.

We estimate the lifetime cost of NEET sub-groups for each annual cohort of care leavers to equal £1.09bn.

Criminal Justice System

Based upon the MOJ Offender Management Information Bulletin (2017) and a range of literature evidencing the over-representation of care-experienced people in the criminal justice system, we estimated the typical duration and episodes of engagement of care-experienced adults in the justice system versus their peers. This additional aggregated period in the justice system experienced by care leavers is estimated to result in a lifetime public finance cost (court and imprisonment costs) of £0.63bn for each annual cohort of care leavers.

Homeless

Based upon the Crisis Homelessness Monitor (2018) and literature such as the NAO report on care leavers' transition to adulthood (2015), we estimated the typical duration and episodes of homelessness of care-experienced adults beyond their peers to produce an estimated lifetime public finance cost of £0.19bn for annual cohort of care leavers.

Pensions

Based upon information produced by the Pension Policy Institute we estimated the additional benefit payments anticipated to be paid to those with insufficient pension provision resulting from periods of non and underemployment, and again aimed to consider the difference between care-experienced adults versus their peers. This produced an estimated lifetime public finance cost of £0.57bn for annual cohort of care leavers.

Unaccompanied and separated children

The combined impact of underemployment, NEET, CJS engagement, homelessness and pension-related public finance costs was estimated at £0.5bn per annum for adults who had been UASC. These calculations again allowed for those UASC who were 18 and over and who left the UK.

The combined public finance costs for the medium and long term of £3.53bn is based upon the number of care leavers in 2016/17. However, said costs do not take into account those young people of care leaving age who have experienced episodes of care earlier in their life but who are not technically care leavers. A conservative estimate of this cohort is a further 2,000 young people who will have negative impacts upon their EET trajectories and therefore, on average, pose a greater cost to public finance than their peers. It has not been possible to create a different life cost for this sub-cohort to date from the information available, but if this was similar to care leavers then it would add a further £0.6bn per annum to the above medium- to long-term public finance costs of being care-experienced.

Appendix C: Young people interview schedule

QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS FOR PARTICIPANTS

NOTES AND AIM FOR INTERVIEWER

Section 1 - About you

Please can we start by you telling me a little bit about yourself?

- How old are you?
- What year are you in at school/college/university?
- What's your favourite subject?
- How old were you when you entered care?
- Where are you currently living?

Aim:

Warm up questions to find out more about the participant.

Section 2 - The journey through education

We want to take a look back at your school life and what you enjoyed/didn't enjoy and key people who have helped you along the way. We also want to ask you what was going on in your life at different points.

We can either do this by drawing a timeline of your school life, marking down the schools you have been to, or we can just talk this through. What would you prefer?

Create timeline to visualise journey if helpful - draw a line on a piece of paper and ask them to map out different points on their journey.

Every time there is a change in school, ask them to mark it down in a different colour and put a red/amber/green sticker against it to find out how they felt about the move.

Prompts:

For each school they mark or talk about ask:

- Where were you living at the time?
- Can you remember why you had to change schools?
- Did you like/dislike that school?

Aim:

To find out more about their journey through the education system and to identify any key points that impacted on their decision to go to university.

To learn more about the different impact that residential vs foster placements might have and to learn more about the effect of placement movements while also understanding more about any wider key relationships, e.g. social workers, friends, teachers.

Section 2 - School/college life

Looking back at your timeline/thinking about what we have just spoken about, we spoke about the different schools you have been to. I want us now to think about what you liked/disliked about each school.

If disliked/marked school with red sticker:

- Please can you tell us why you marked this school with a red sticker? Were there any aspects of the school that you didn't particularly like?
- If there was one thing you could change about this time, what would it be?

Ask them to think about people in their life at the time - a teacher/social worker/friend and where they were living and whether these people helped/hindered.

If liked/marked school with green:

- Please can you tell us why you marked this school with a green sticker? Were there any aspects of the school that you particularly liked?

Ask them to think about people in their life at the time - a teacher/social worker/friend and where they were living and whether these people helped/hindered.

Is there anyone else in your life who helps you with school/college/university and gives you good support?

Looking back at your time at school, what changes would you make that would have helped you the most?

Aim:

To find out about the young person's educational experiences.

Think about the answer to these questions in relation to the next set of questions on future aspirations.

Section 3 - The decision to go to university

We know that you are thinking about/have made the decision to go to university.

Can you remember when you decided to go to university?

Can you remember why you have decided to go?

Was it an easy or a hard decision? Why was this?

Do you think people at school were/are important in helping to make this decision? If so, what have they done to help you?

Do you think people at home/where you lived were/are important in helping to make this decision? If so, what have they done to help you?

Was there anybody else or any other factors that we have/haven't spoken about who you think helped you to come to the decision to go to university?

Has anything worried/concerned you about going to university?

Aim:

To find out if anything in particular in the young person's life helped or hindered their decision to go to university.

Aim:

To find out what young people perceive the barriers to be to entering university.

Section 5 - Reflection

Do you think more children in care should go to university? What do you think might help that to happen?

Looking back at your journey, what do you think is the one most important thing that influenced your decision to go to university?

Is there anything that you haven't said so far that is really important to you and that you think influenced your decision?

If you had to give a piece of advice to a young person in care who wanted to go to university, what would it be?

Aim:

To find out what young people think needs changing to make access to university for young people in care easier.

Appendix D: Access to higher education for care leavers - a new 'Gold Standard' Focus group findings - 13th December

Young people's involvement in a Quality Mark

The design of the Quality Mark needs to be informed by young people.

All young people agreed that a bronze, silver and gold system for a university Quality Mark would not work. They believe that having one single mark would be more beneficial. For example, this could be a symbol that universities present on their website to show they offer a good package of support.

Young people need to play a role in the creation of this mark, and to play a further role in deciding which universities are awarded the mark through a young person's decision panel.

Deciding to go to university should not be a binary choice between a university that provides a desired course or a good package of support.

Finance

It is vital that financial support during university covers all expenses. There is a need for consistency across the country, including in relation to local authority bursaries and the amount universities offer.

Key proposals:

- All universities should provide bursaries to young people from care who enrol at their institutions.
- There is a need for a minimum base level of support. These bursaries should be paid at intervals during the term, and not in one lump sum at the beginning/end of term.
- Support should include money to meet travelling costs to and from university.
- Help and support with managing finances.
- A start-up fund when young people first go to university to cover the costs associated with moving into new accommodation and equipment for course.

Accommodation

It is difficult for young people who have set up their own home to then leave and stay in university accommodation. Stability is key.

Key proposals:

- 365 accommodation.
- Rent paid all year round and not just during holidays. Universities to contribute to rent, whether living in own home or in university accommodation.
- Scholarships for the cost of accommodation.
- Support with finding appropriate accommodation.
- Housing benefit to be provided in part to help with accommodation costs.

University support

Building a support network at university and knowing who to turn to for support are both key. The university should be providing this support and networks should be accessible.

Key proposals:

- Emotional support through counselling and health and wellbeing advisers.
- Appointing a designated person to provide support. Important to build a trusting relationship with this person, and for them to reach out to young people.
- Be aware of the different ways people present as care leavers.
- Making personal tutors and lecturer aware that a young person is a care leaver.
- Creating a care leaver society.
- Free entry to groups and clubs.
- PEPS for university.
- Peer support/mentoring schemes run by other care-experienced students.

Outreach

Outreach work needs to begin before a young person makes the decision to go to university. Universities should reach out to young people to let them know about the support available. This needs to happen early in conjunction with schools and colleges/sixth-forms.

Key proposals:

- Setting up contact points at colleges/sixth-forms to provide information on university and to help with applications.
- Annual events at schools and colleges.
- Talks at schools and colleges.
- Members of university care leaver teams at open days.

Communication

Communication about the support that is available should be specifically tailored, and avoid generalisations. Communication needs to reach young people, as well as local authorities, social workers/personal advisers, schools, virtual schools and further education providers.

Key proposals:

- 'A-Z' guide for young people, setting out the support available at university.
- Online site setting out the different support available at each university (and effective communication of this site in the first place - e.g. to social workers).
- Information on UCAS when applying for university. Targeted support for care leavers.
- Support fairs.
- Universities to reach out during school and sixth-form.
- Joint working between local authorities and universities.

Appendix E: Care Leavers by Institution

All universities 2016/17

UNIVERSITIES	PERCENTAGE OF CARE LEAVERS
The University of Oxford	0.05%
Loughborough University	0.06%
The University of Warwick	0.07%
London School of Economics and Political Science	0.08%
University College London	0.12%
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	0.13%
The University of Bristol	0.15%
St George's, University of London	0.17%
The University of Cambridge	0.18%
The University of Birmingham	0.18%
The University of Reading	0.18%
The University of East Anglia	0.18%
The University of Southampton	0.19%
University of Durham	0.20%
The University of Sheffield	0.20%
Aston University	0.22%
The Arts University Bournemouth	0.22%
University of Nottingham	0.22%
The University of Leeds	0.23%
The University of Leicester	0.25%
The University of Surrey	0.25%
King's College London	0.25%
The University of the West of England, Bristol	0.26%
The University of Bath	0.26%
The University of Lancaster	0.26%
The University of Exeter	0.27%
The University of Manchester	0.27%
The University of Wolverhampton	0.27%
The University of Hertfordshire	0.29%
The University of York	0.30%
Leeds Arts University	0.31%
Keele University	0.32%
Queen Mary University of London	0.34%
The University of Liverpool	0.35%
Royal Holloway and Bedford New College	0.35%
Buckinghamshire New University	0.39%

UNIVERSITIES	PERCENTAGE OF CARE LEAVERS
The University of Chester	0.40%
The University of Portsmouth	0.41%
Oxford Brookes University	0.42%
The Royal Academy of Music	0.42%
Leeds Beckett University	0.42%
Guildhall School of Music and Drama	0.43%
Liverpool John Moores University	0.44%
The University of Huddersfield	0.45%
The Nottingham Trent University	0.45%
Birkbeck College	0.46%
Sheffield Hallam University	0.47%
Edge Hill University	0.48%
The University of Worcester	0.48%
Birmingham City University	0.49%
The Open University	0.50%
The University of Brighton	0.51%
The University of Sussex	0.51%
Bournemouth University	0.53%
University for the Creative Arts	0.54%
Bath Spa University	0.54%
The University of Winchester	0.55%
The University of Derby	0.55%
Norwich University of the Arts	0.57%
The University of Cumbria	0.60%
The Manchester Metropolitan University	0.60%
The University of Essex	0.61%
Newman University	0.61%
York St John University	0.62%
The University of Bedfordshire	0.62%
City, University of London	0.63%
Falmouth University	0.63%
The University of Bradford	0.63%
Teesside University	0.63%
The University of Greenwich	0.67%
The University of Westminster	0.68%
Staffordshire University	0.68%

UNIVERSITIES	PERCENTAGE OF CARE LEAVERS
The University of Kent	0.68%
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama	0.69%
The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	0.69%
Brunel University London	0.70%
The University of Plymouth	0.72%
The University of Salford	0.72%
Canterbury Christ Church University	0.73%
The University of Suffolk	0.73%
Roehampton University	0.76%
SOAS University of London	0.76%
Goldsmiths College	0.76%
The University of Hull	0.77%
The University of Lincoln	0.78%
Middlesex University	0.79%
Newcastle University	0.80%
The University of Gloucestershire	0.92%
Leeds Trinity University	0.92%
The University of Bolton	0.97%
De Montfort University	1.02%
London South Bank University	1.04%
Coventry University	1.05%
The University of Northampton	1.06%
Kingston University	1.07%
Plymouth College of Art	1.13%
The University of Northumbria at Newcastle	1.15%
The University of Sunderland	1.21%
Liverpool Hope University	1.26%
University College Birmingham	1.32%
St Mary's University, Twickenham	1.54%
London Metropolitan University	1.58%
The University of East London	1.68%
Southampton Solent University	1.74%
The University of Central Lancashire	1.76%
The University of West London	1.84%
Anglia Ruskin University	1.89%
University of the Arts, London	3.08%



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