

GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT AND POSTGRADUATE STUDY OUTCOMES FOR CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

SRHE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

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A DEFINITIONAL NOTE TO START...

- Care-experienced students are those who spent time in state care as children, usually as the result of neglect or abuse
- Those in care at 16 (and meeting certain other definitions) are often described as 'care leavers' – subset of the wider care-experienced group
- Care-experienced people have significantly poorer educational and life outcomes than the general population, on average
- Care-experienced students can declare their status on the UCAS form or later at university

CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

- Lack of good data about higher education (Harrison, 2017, in press)
- Participation rates around 6% at 18, 12% by 23 and maybe 25% across the lifecourse
- Significantly less likely to participate and more likely to withdraw
- Patterns persist once school attainment and demographic background taken into account
- Other studies into students' experiences (e.g. O'Neill *et al.*, 2019; Ellis and Johnston, 2019)



CURRENT STUDY

- Commissioned by the Unite Foundation
- Mixed methods study into higher education outcomes for care-experienced and estranged students
- Focus groups and interviews with 41 students, case study visits to six universities, student panel and analysis of national data
- Final report in January 2020



NATIONAL GRADUATE DATA

- Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey
- Data on those graduating in 2016/17 – snapshot around six months after graduation
- Focus here on 171,680 graduates, including 1,010 (0.6%) care-experienced graduates:
 - UK ‘home’ only – no EU or international students
 - UCAS entrants only – to provide data on care
 - Full-time only – no PT students (as little data on care)
 - Degree level – no sub-degree or postgraduate



CARE-EXPERIENCED GRADUATE PROFILE

		Care-experienced	Other graduates
Age on entry	Under 21	27.5%	41.5%
	25 and over	22.7%	9.2%
Disability	Disabled	24.7%	14.2%
	Not known to be disabled	75.3%	85.8%
Nationality	UK national	83.7%	91.8%
	Other national	16.3%	8.2%
University type	Russell Group university	10.3%	22.5%
	Other university	89.7%	77.5%
Degree class	First / Upper Second	70.1%	79.8%
	Lower Second / Third / Pass	28.5%	18.3%

HEADLINE OUTCOMES (I)

Working only

Care-experienced
60.9%

Other graduates
66.6%

Studying only

Care-experienced
20.7%

Other graduates
18.7%

Work + study mix

Care-experienced
7.2%

Other graduates
5.9%

Unemployed

Care-experienced
5.5%

Other graduates
4.4%

Other activities

Care-experienced
5.7%

Other graduates
4.4%

HEADLINE OUTCOMES (2)

- Close echoes in patterns between care-experienced and other graduates
- Older graduates, non-UK nationals and (some) disabled people less likely to be in work, but consequently more likely to be studying
- Non-UK nationals more likely to be unemployed, plus graduates with lower degree classes and from universities outside the Russell Group
- Income levels identical between care-experienced and other graduates
- Care-experienced graduates less likely to be working in 'professional' roles – 70.7% of those working full-time compared to 77.0%

POSITIVE GRADUATE OUTCOMES (I)

**‘Positive
graduate
outcome’**

=

**‘Professional’
job role**

or

**Postgraduate/
professional
study**

- 70.1% of care-experienced graduates, compared to 72.3% of other graduates – non-significant difference ($p = 0.134$)
- Strong relationship with degree class, university type, age and nationality

POSITIVE GRADUATE OUTCOMES (2)

Whole sample less 'other activity' (n=164019)	B	St. Error	P	Odds ratio
Care-experienced (ref = not care-experienced)	.040	.073	.583	1.041
Russell Group university (ref = other university)	.259	.016	<.001	1.295
Degree class (ref = first)				
- Upper second	-.519	.015	<.001	.595
- Lower second	-.983	.018	<.001	.374
- Third or pass	-1.509	.037	<.001	.221
- Unclassified (i.e. degree doesn't award classifications)	-.047	.056	.402	.954
Non-UK national (ref = UK national)	-.143	.023	<.001	.867
Disabled (ref = not known to be disabled)				
- Yes and received disabled students' allowance	-.002	.021	.919	.998
- Yes, but did not receive disabled students' allowance	-.055	.023	.017	.947

Other control variables: subject, entry qualifications, sandwich years, sex, ethnicity, UK country, accommodation and age on entry

POSITIVE GRADUATE OUTCOMES (3)

- Regression model for just care-experienced graduates shows similar patterns as for whole population
- However, only two statistically significant predictors of positive outcomes:
 - Having first or upper second class degree
 - Being aged 25 or over



MOTIVATIONS FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY

- Experiencing a period of welcomed stability was cited as a motivation for entering higher education initially (at undergraduate level)...
‘Being in foster care, the best deal that you can get like support wise is going to university... You know like you can get your accommodation paid for and stuff like that... It gave me that kind of security as well, you know, for a couple of years’ (Male, Social Work postgraduate)
- Those currently studying postgraduate qualifications (n=3) did so as it was necessary for entry to their desired career (social work, legal practice)

MOTIVATIONS FOR CAREER CHOICES

- Strong altruistic motivations were present for students wanting to enter professions in the health and education sector (n=7):

‘That was important for me to be able to help other people and to sort of prevent anything that happened to me happen to anyone else’ (Female, Psychology)

‘When I was younger I never really had a good upbringing ... the only people that I really remember seeing were the paramedics and they were the ones that would come out and they'd make you feel safe and secure ... you can be that safe person for someone’ (Female, Paramedics pre-entry)

- For others, an interest in the subject was cited as the main reason for informing their chosen subject area, and future career path

EMPLOYABILITY AND KEEPING 'OPTIONS OPEN'

- Some students mentioned that their current focus was on getting as much work experience as possible while in higher education (through placements or employment) to keep their 'options open' and to increase their employability more generally
- Internships and graduate schemes were mentioned by some, but these were considered as one of multiple options:
 - 'I'm just sort of keeping my options open. I'm just trying to create as much work as I can to increase my chances in the future'* (Male, Engineering undergraduate)

CONCLUSIONS

- Outcomes similar to general population – even a little better
- Transformative nature of higher education for care-experienced students
- Strong ‘survivor effect’ – withdrawal rates significantly higher
- Issues with DLHE data – lots of randomness at six months after graduation
- Broader analysis shows need for:
 - Continued mental health support – can affect ability to think into the future
 - Bursaries for postgraduate study and focused financial support to build employability
 - Accommodation transition support – avoiding homelessness on graduation

REFERENCES

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