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Support for care- experienced students to access and participate in higher education

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What do we mean by 'care'?

- Around 2% of young people will be 'in care' at some point in their lives
- Usually due to neglect, maltreatment or other trauma in the birth family
- Around 100,000 children in care in the UK at any given time – managed by local authorities
- Includes foster care, kinship care and residential care – from one day to 18 years



Some quick definitions

- Session mainly based on England – key differences across the UK
- **Care-experienced students** are those who spent any time in care
- **Care leavers** are those who were in care for at least three months after 14, including their 16th birthday – a formal status
- Care leavers have access to extensive ‘leaving care’ support from their local authority – personal adviser, funding, accommodation support and more
- Care-experienced students do not receive this support

A busy time for research

- ***Moving on up: pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education*** – Neil Harrison (2017)
- ***Pathways to university from care: findings report one*** – Katie Ellis and Claire Johnston (2019)
- ***‘Being a student with care experience is very daunting’: findings from a survey of care experienced students in Scottish colleges and universities*** – Linda O’Neill *et al.* (2019)
- ***Getting it right for care leavers in higher education*** – Hanan Hauari *et al.* (2019)
- ***Positive impact? What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for university students with a background of care or family estrangement?*** – Jacqueline Stevenson *et al.* (2020)



Who are care-experienced students?

Around 7,000 care-experienced students in higher education in England

Just 13% of care leavers participate in higher education by the age of 19 – improving slowly

Compares with 43% in the general population – one of the most under-represented groups

Over half of care-experienced full-time students are aged over 20 when they start

Estimated that 25-30% of care-experienced adults will access higher education at some point

Sources: Harrison (2017, 2020) and Department for Education (2020)



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What happens to them?



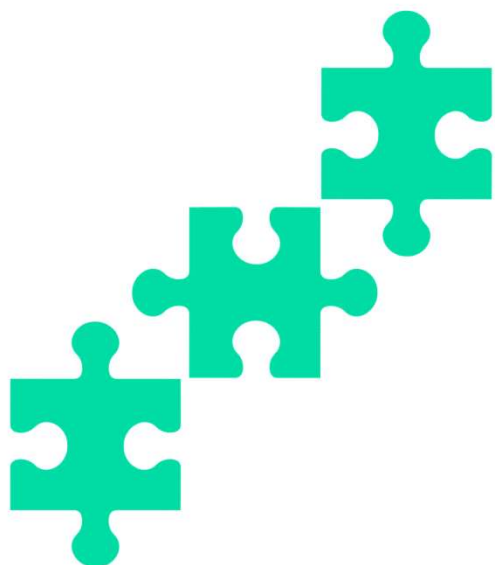
- Care leavers are nearly twice as likely to leave in their first year as other students – about 13%
- Overall, about 1.38 times more likely to withdraw early compared to otherwise similar students
- Reasons for withdrawal similar to other students – ‘academic’ reasons are the most common reported
- If care leavers complete their degree, they are just as likely to get first or upper second as other students with similar entry qualifications

Importance of transitions

- Wrong/changing/old information about support
- Need for liaison between local authority, university and foster carers – managed transition
- Difficulties getting paperwork for financial support, accommodation and/or immigration
- Inappropriate accommodation offers
- Practical help with moving away (or staying put)
- A warm welcome on arrival!



Fitting in and getting on



- Anxieties about new community and fears about stigma and/or ignorance
- Need to consider the ‘strategy’ for their new environment – visibility (or not) of care experience
- Importance of relationships with key academic staff – lack of awareness of care-related issues
- Desire to avoid constant retelling of care story
- Isolation for some living-at-home students – with foster carers or in pre-university home

Thriving at university

- Managing knowledge gaps and setbacks
- Continuity of mental health support – access to specialist therapeutic services
- Difficulties negotiating disability support
- Assistance with childcare – financial and practical
- Financial management and independent living
- Importance of ‘single point of contact’ – advocate and guide in higher education bureaucracy

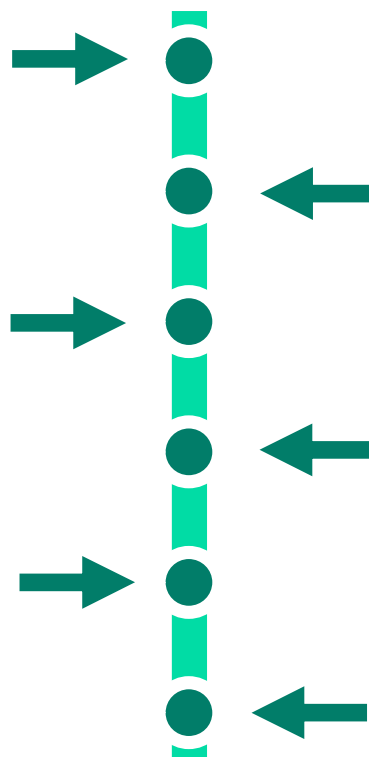


15 years of policy development

2007 'Care Matters' White Paper – local authority bursaries for HE study and expectation of year-round accommodation while studying

2014 Roll-out of 'Virtual Schools' – units within local authorities charged to monitor and improve school attainment for children in care and, more recently, administer the child-focused Pupil Premium Plus funding

2019 Higher education providers required by Office for Students to monitor and report on participation of care-experienced students



2012 Roll-out of 'Staying Put' initiative to allow care leavers to remain with foster carers until the age of 25 if they are in education or training – more recently, 'Staying Close' for residential homes

2018 Launch of 'Care Leaver Covenant' to challenge public and private organisations to offer more support for care leavers and requirement on local authorities to publish their 'Local Offer' of support for care leavers

2021 Launch of NNECL Quality Mark to accredit universities' support for care-experienced students

NNECL Quality Mark

- Developmental accreditation process for support for care-experienced students
- Focus on current delivery, future plans and voice of students
- ‘Whole university’ approach, from admission to graduate outcomes
- Launched in June 2021 – fifteen universities accredited so far

NNECL

*working together to empower
care experienced learners*

Edge Hill University
Kingston University
Liverpool John Moores University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Oxford Brookes University
Royal Central School of
Speech and Drama
Sheffield Hallam University
University of Bolton
University of Bradford
University of Exeter
University of Law
University of Lincoln
University of Manchester
University of Nottingham
University of Salford



www.nnecl.org/pages/195-nnecl-quality-mark

Care Leaver Covenant

- National government scheme to encourage businesses and organisations to ‘go the extra mile’
- To sign up, universities devise their own promises about what they will do to help care leavers
- Not just student support – might be access to work, apprenticeships or arts/sports facilities
- Growing number of universities now helping their own students and other local care leavers



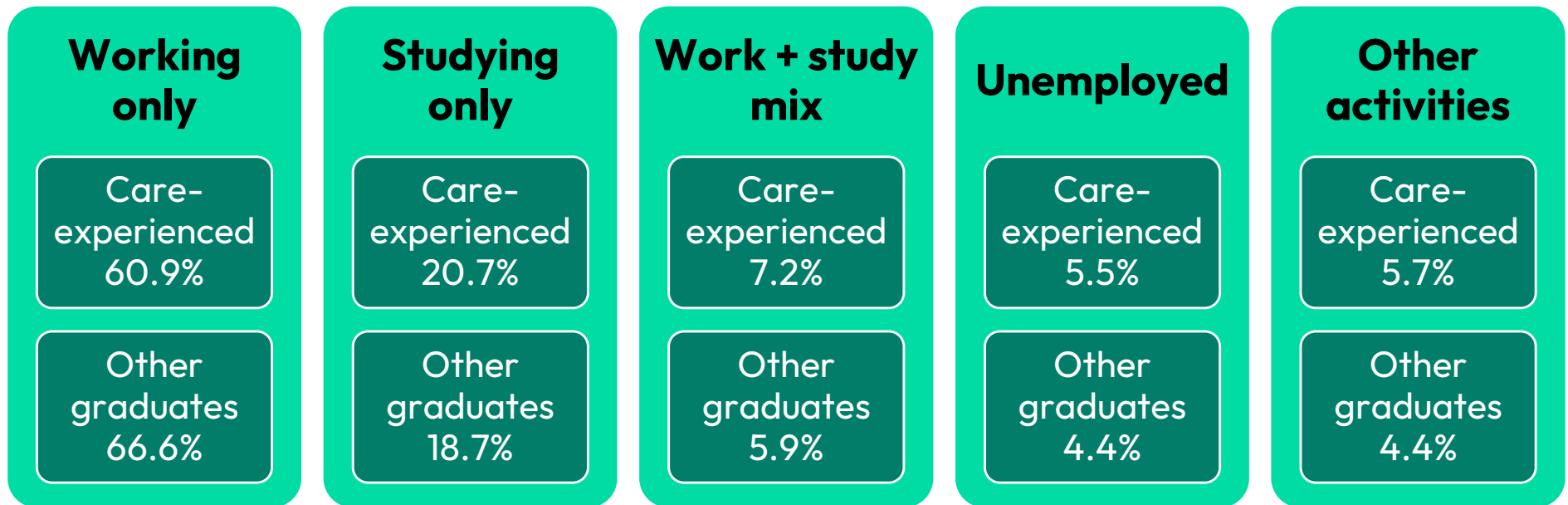
mycovenant.org.uk

Where do we go next?



- Emerging focus on what happens at the end of degree – access to postgraduate study or graduate employment
- Not sufficient to provide support during undergraduate study – care-experienced students also need help with their next transition
- Care-experienced students particularly keen to pursue postgraduate study (Baker *et al.*, 2022) – many in social sciences

Graduate outcomes (2017 cohort)



Researching needs and emerging practices

- *Care-Experienced Graduates' Decision-Making, Choices and Destinations* project led by Dr Zoe Baker at University of York – tracking 23 final year students
- Find out more: www.drzobaker.co.uk/current-projects
- Universities already developing new practices:
 - Undergraduate 'exit' bursaries – funding for travel and clothes for interviews
 - Focused careers coaching or mentoring
 - Targeted postgraduate bursaries to support living costs
 - Free/subsidised accommodation in the summer after graduation

What we don't know...

1. Anything much about care-experienced students (a) in further education colleges, (b) on part-time programmes, or (c) over the age of 23
2. What interventions (pre- or post-16) by schools or universities are most effective in changing higher education trajectories or improving transitions
3. How 'second chance' pathways into higher education should be best configured for care-experienced learners
4. What happens to care-experienced graduates more than six months after graduation – e.g. outcomes from postgraduate study or progression in work
5. Whether different types of care (e.g. foster vs. residential) influence higher education outcomes, with respect to access, success and graduate outcomes

References

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