

CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: HOW THEY GET THERE AND HOW THEY GET ON

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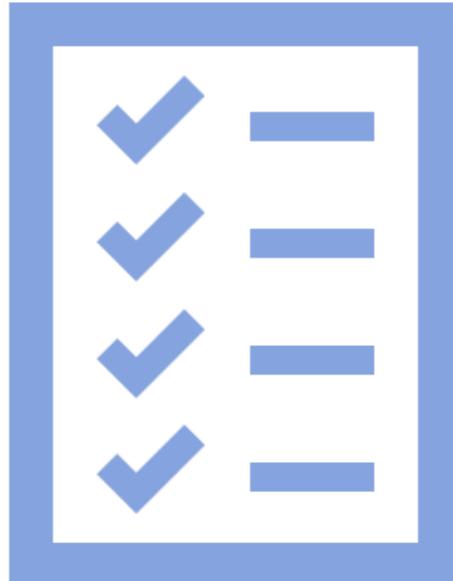
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A DEFINITIONAL NOTE TO START

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- **CARE LEAVERS** – those meeting the DfE definition of being in care on their 16th birthday, having spent more than three months in care since 14
- **CARE-EXPERIENCED** – a wider definition of those who have spent time in care at some point during their childhood, but who may not be care leavers due to reunification, adoption or other routes out of care
- The data in this study is mixture of the two...

SOURCES OF DATA

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- The DfE's annual 'SSDA903' dataset derived from what local authorities know about their (young) care leavers
- The 2016/17 HESA dataset derived from what universities know about care-experienced students, based on self-declaration
- The 2017 'Moving On Up' study:
 - Linked NPD and HESA data, tracking the whole cohort of young people turning 16 in 2007/08 (650,220), with a marker for care leavers (6,470)
 - An online survey of 212 current care-experienced students
- Some passing reference to other ongoing projects



SOME BASIC FACTS AND FIGURES

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- 7,120 English care-experienced students in UK universities – 0.79% of the overall student body
- About 40% are care leavers
- 59% women, 20% not UK nationals and 11% part-time – all higher than general student body
- 25% of full-time care-experienced students are disabled, 38% of part-time – twice general student body
- Full-time older than peers (17% aged over 25, compared to 8%), part-time similar profile



NOTES OF CAUTION

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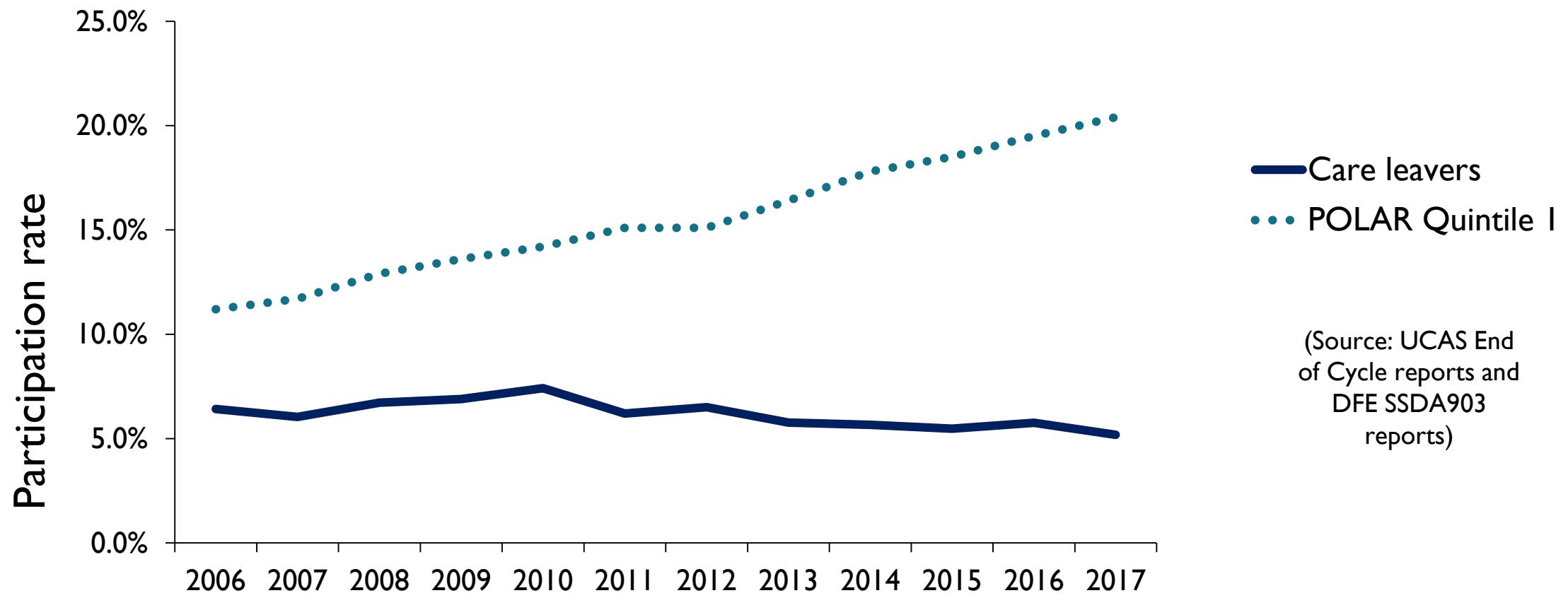
- Based on self-declaration and university recording:
 - False negatives and false positives
 - University interpretation and recording
 - Data missing for non-UCAS entrants – maybe 25%
 - Data missing for HE in further education colleges
- Real figure probably closer to 10,000 care-experienced students in HE



HOW DOES THIS COMPARE?

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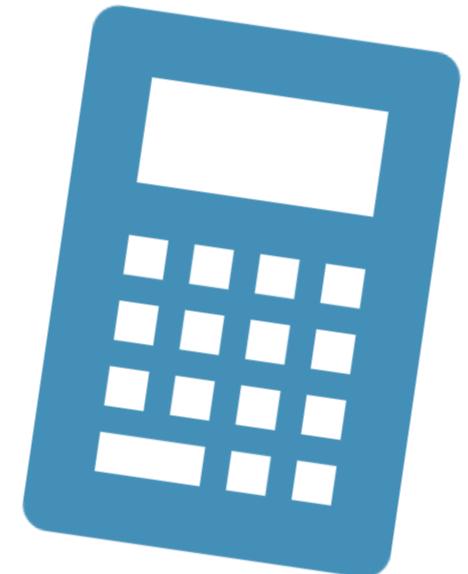
IS IT REALLY THAT BAD...!?

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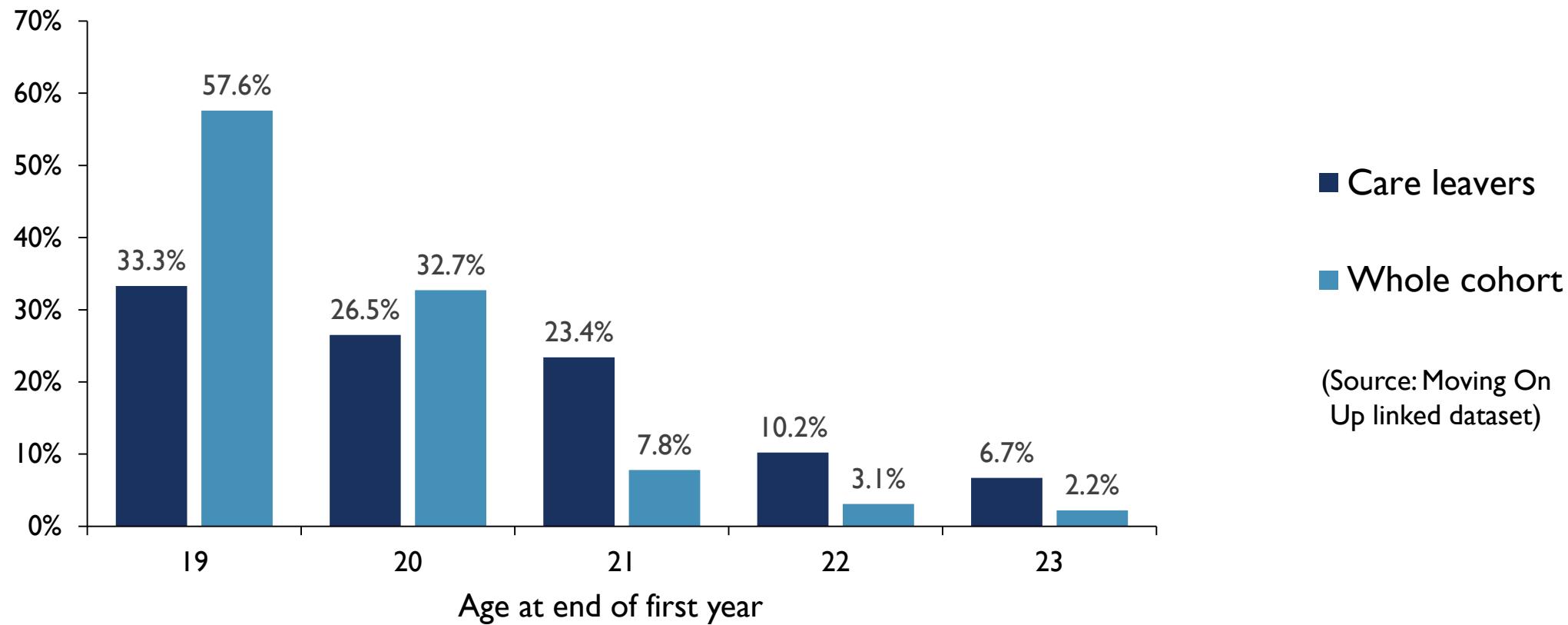
- Probably not...
- SSDA903 figures appear to undercount:
 - Those entering HE, but withdrawing early
 - Those doing sub-degree courses
 - Those with spring/summer birthdays
- Significantly skewed by recent increase in UASC
- Doesn't address wider care-experienced group or care leavers who go later



GOING LATER

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WHY DO THEY GO LATER?

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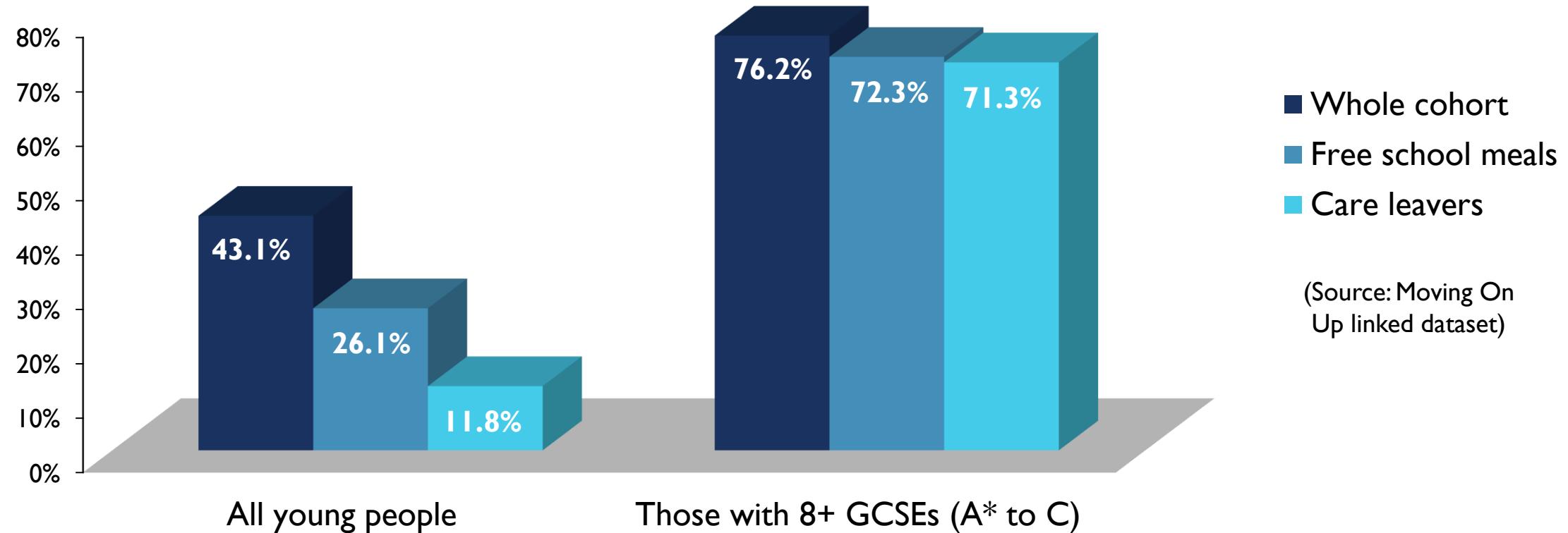
- Very low attainment, on average, at 16 – only 18% getting five ‘good’ GCSEs compared to 59% of general population
- High instances of special educational needs – three times as likely overall and nine times as likely to have a ‘statement’
 - Mental health issues, specific learning difficulties (potentially undiagnosed) and long-term illnesses
- Other concerns around stigma, family disruption, financial support, accommodation and so on



HEADLINE PARTICIPATION RATES

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CARE, SEN AND ATTAINMENT

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	Care leavers		Whole cohort	
	Entered HE	No HE	Entered HE	No HE
No special educational needs				
- 5+ GCSEs at A* to C (inc. English and maths)	61.4	38.6	69.0	31.0
- 5+ GCSEs at A* to C (exc. English and/or maths)	29.6	70.4	41.1	58.9
- 1+ GCSEs at A* to G	7.9	92.1	13.0	87.0
- No passes	4.4	95.6	13.7	86.3
Special educational needs				
- 5+ GCSEs at A* to C (inc. English and maths)	51.5	48.5	61.5	38.5
- 5+ GCSEs at A* to C (exc. English and/or maths)	22.9	77.1	26.9	73.1
- 1+ GCSEs at A* to G	5.5	94.5	7.8	92.2
- No passes	2.4	97.6	3.5	96.5

PATHWAYS THROUGH HE

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Entering HE

Care leavers
were 11% less
likely to enter
university than
other young
people, all else
being equal

Leaving HE

Care leavers
were 38%
more likely to
leave university
and not return,
all else being
equal

Succeeding in HE

Care leavers
were just as
likely to receive
a first or upper
second class
degree, all else
being equal

PREDICTORS FOR SUCCESS

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- Many significant predictors for HE success in the general study body:
 - Entry qualifications, special educational needs, gender, ethnicity, household disadvantage and area disadvantage
- Care leavers follow the same basic patterns
- Disadvantage mainly enacted through the same dimensions as for other young people
- Similar reasons for leaving as others



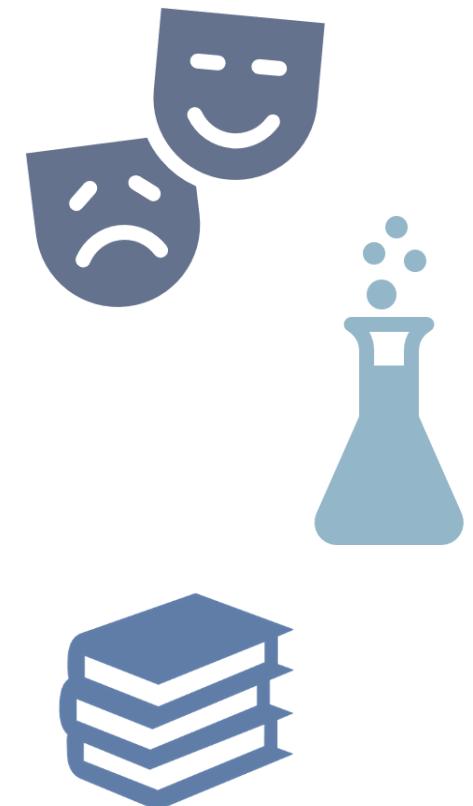
ALTERNATIVE ROUTES

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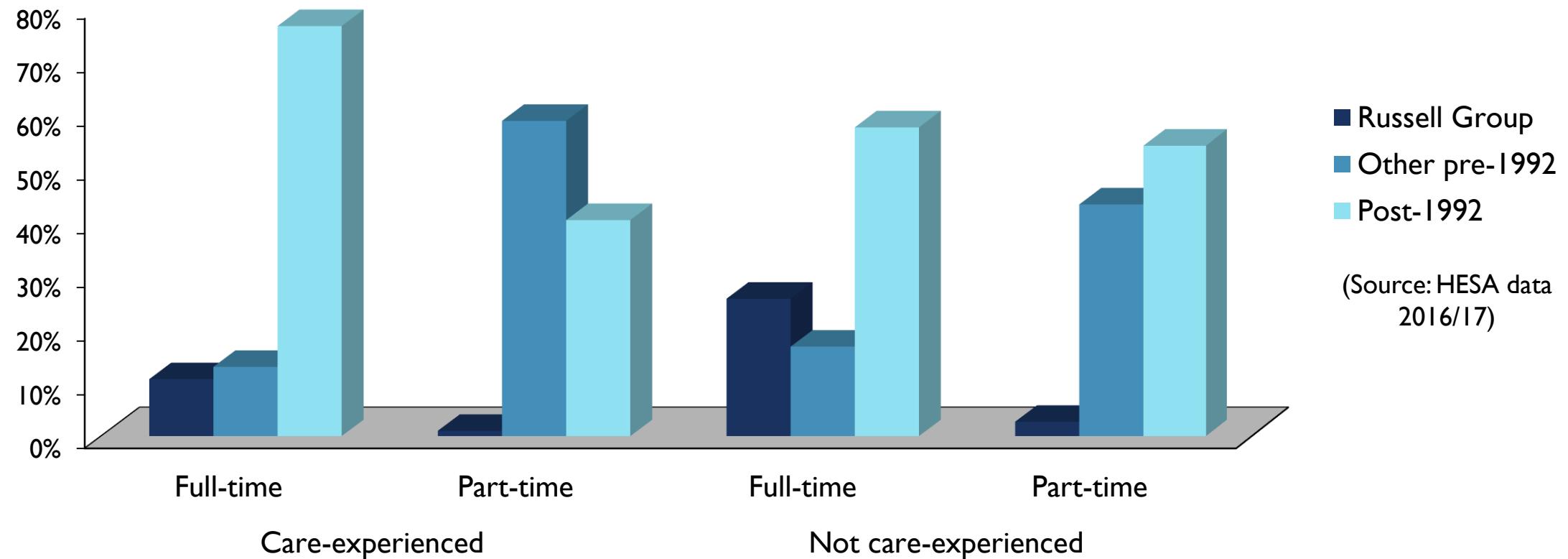
- Care-experienced students significantly more likely to enter with qualifications other than A Levels
 - 15% of full-time students use an Access to HE course or qualifications below Level 3 (i.e. work experience) – three times the average
 - More common still (35%) among part-time students
- Care leavers more likely to have restarts, course changes and periods of dormancy during HE



WHAT TYPE OF HE?

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CHOICES ABOUT TYPE OF HE

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- Even once taking into account entry qualifications, care-experienced students were substantially less likely to attend a Russell Group university:
 - 18% of those with A Levels entered Russell Group universities, compared to 32% of the general student body with A Levels
 - To what extent is this driven by 'choice', compared to admissions processes or practical considerations?



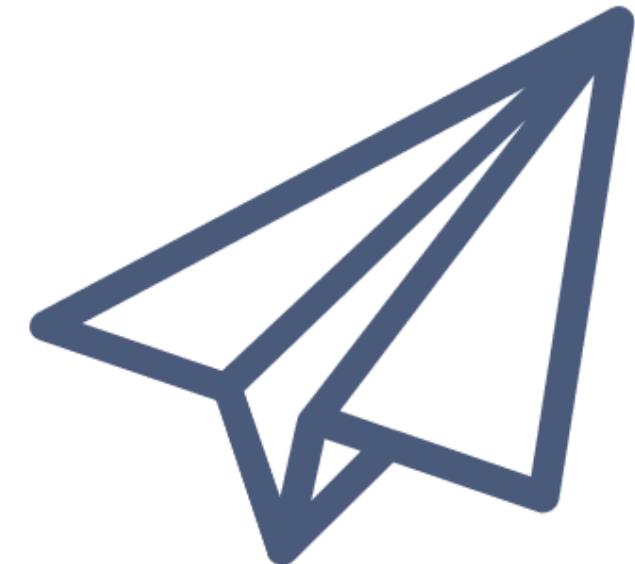
ONLINE SURVEY

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- Online questionnaire – responses from 212 care-experienced students currently in university in England
- Was the biggest survey of care-experienced students then undertaken in the UK...
- Questionnaire focused on:
 - Transition into university
 - Experiences as a student
 - Issues and difficulties
- Rich and moving stories, built into broad themes



TRANSITIONS: GOOD AND BAD

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My local authority was excellent in the transition. I was well informed of everything they would pay and supported with a letter stating that I was a care leaver throughout.

The local authority was very disorganised and wasn't very informative on what care leavers get when they go [to] university, [it] was just stressful and very disorganised.

I think the university just needs to be more organised and make sure that staff reply to your emails more often. You often feel quite alone when trying to resolve issues to do with the course.



MANAGED TRANSITIONS

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- Availability of up-to-date information about university
- Support with attending summer schools and open days
- Liaison between local authority, university and foster carers
- Paperwork for financial support, bursaries and accommodation
- Practical help with moving away (or staying put)



COMMUNITY AND CARE LEGACY

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I haven't made any friends and I feel isolated in my classes. I am waiting to see how I do in my exams first. I wish someone had advised me where to live. Living at home is the worst decision ever.

It is difficult for me to tell friends in Uni about my circumstances, so I felt it is better to tell them that I am an international student.

For over two years I lived in the noisiest part of the city, in a halls that was constantly partying. If I was less experienced and less stable in my [addiction] recovery I would have been in real danger.



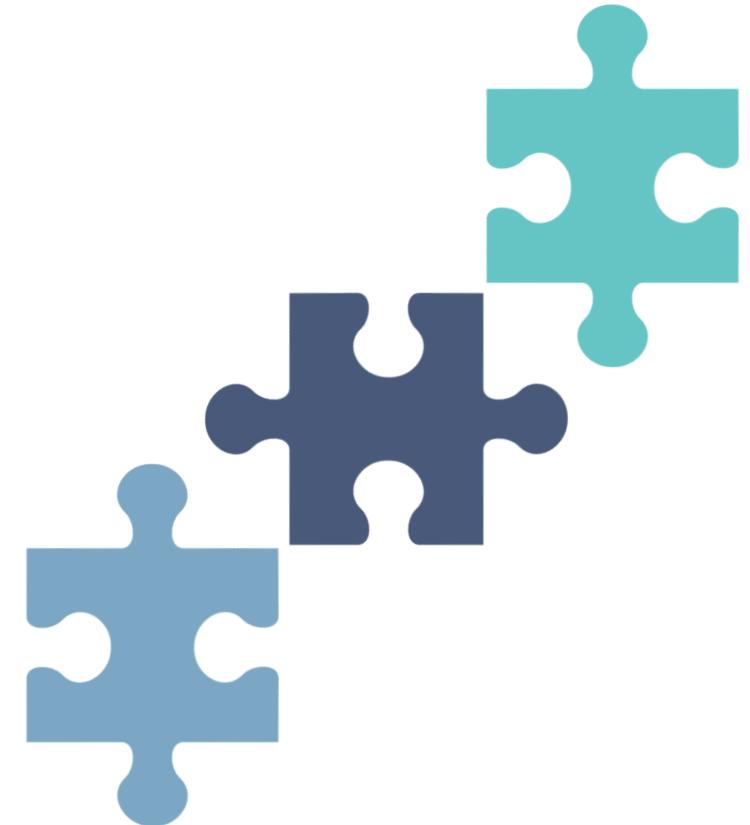
FITTING IN AND GETTING ON

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- Consider the young person's 'strategy' for their new environment – visibility of care experience
- Appropriate accommodation options – life of the party or quiet and stable?
- Potential isolation of living-at-home students
- Opportunities to meet other care-experienced students – mentoring, buddying etc.
- Relationships with key academic staff



STRUGGLE AND RESILIENCE

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I didn't attend school regularly and not at all from the age of 13. I did one year's access course to get on to my degree, so I feel my academic abilities are limited.

Because sometimes I don't feel good enough and I feel lonely and struggle with mental health, and I have no money and I feel like my life will not go anywhere anyway.

I found that not having a GP surgery specifically for students with mental health issues or a health professional on site has been difficult, as I really struggle with post-traumatic stress.



THRIVING AT UNIVERSITY

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- Fragile academic identities – managing gaps and setbacks
- Negotiating disability support – potentially the biggest single risk factor
- Continuity of mental health support – access to specialist therapeutic services
- Assistance with childcare – financial and practical
- Financial management and independent living
- Celebrating success!



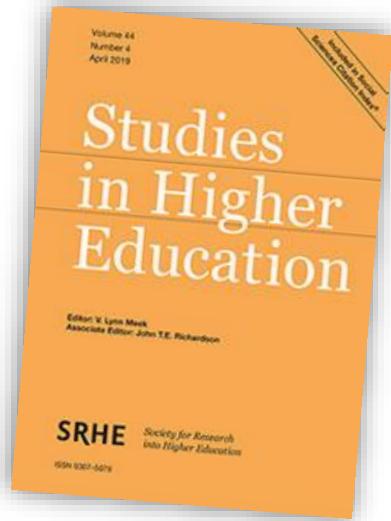
■ Six takeaway points:

- Importance of special educational needs and attainment at 16 in defining participation patterns
- Care-experienced students go later and are less likely to use traditional pathways and access 'elite' higher education
- Unhelpfulness of the unmovable 6% figure
- Care-experienced students are much more likely to withdraw from higher education, all else being equal
- Importance of managed transition for success
- Legacy of childhood trauma and other disability issues impact heavily on higher education outcomes

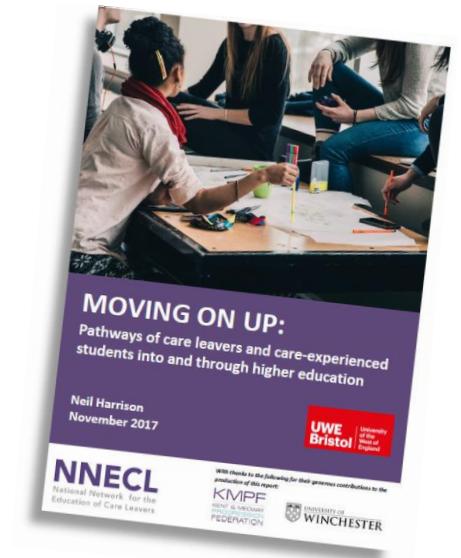
MORE INFORMATION

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- Harrison, N. (in press) Patterns of participation in higher education for care-experienced students in England: why has there not been more progress? Awaiting publication in *Studies in Higher Education*
- www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2019.1582014
- Harrison, N. (2017) *Moving On Up: Pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education*. Winchester: National Network for the Education of Care Leavers.
- www.nnecl.org/resources/moving-on-up-report?topic=guides-and-toolkits



NEXT STEPS – ONGOING PROJECTS

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- **CELCIS (University of Strathclyde)** – online survey of 413 care-experienced students in Scotland
- **Nuffield Foundation** – care leavers' transition into the labour market in England, including identifying entry into further and higher education (with University of York)
- **Unite Foundation** – focus on graduate outcomes for care-experienced students, including postgraduate study and graduate employment (with Sheffield Hallam University)

