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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

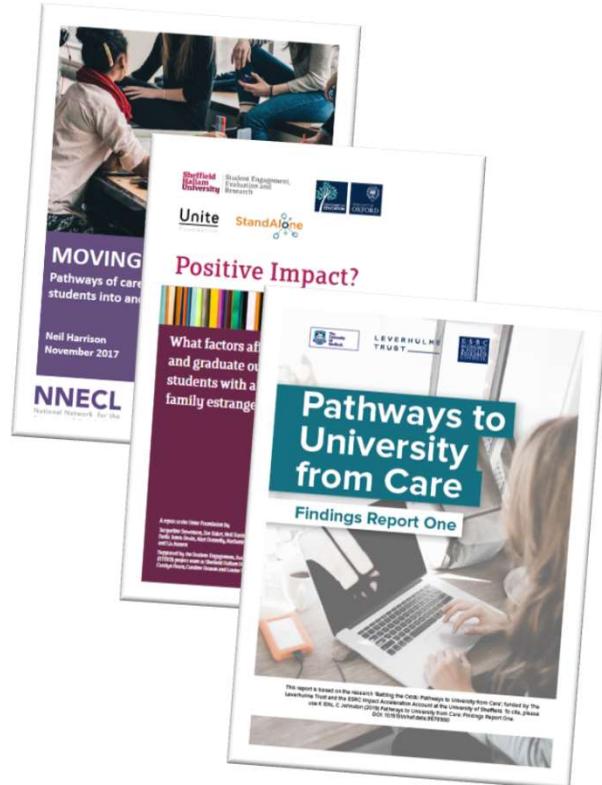


# Some quick definitions

- 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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?



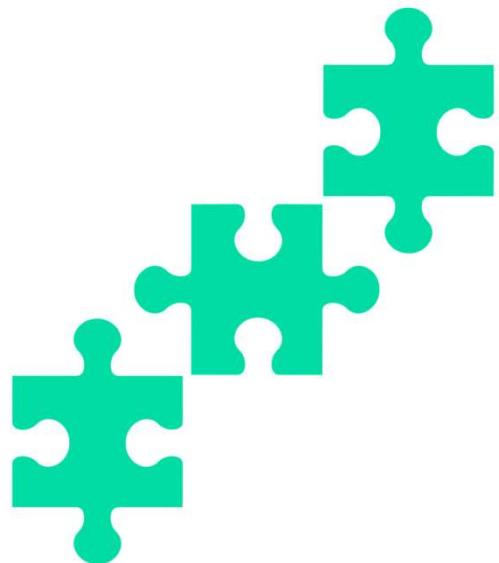
- Care leavers are nearly twice as likely to leave in their first year as other students – about 13%
- Overall, about 1.38 times more likely to withdraw early compared to otherwise similar students
- Reasons for withdrawal similar to other students – ‘academic’ reasons are the most common reported
- 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



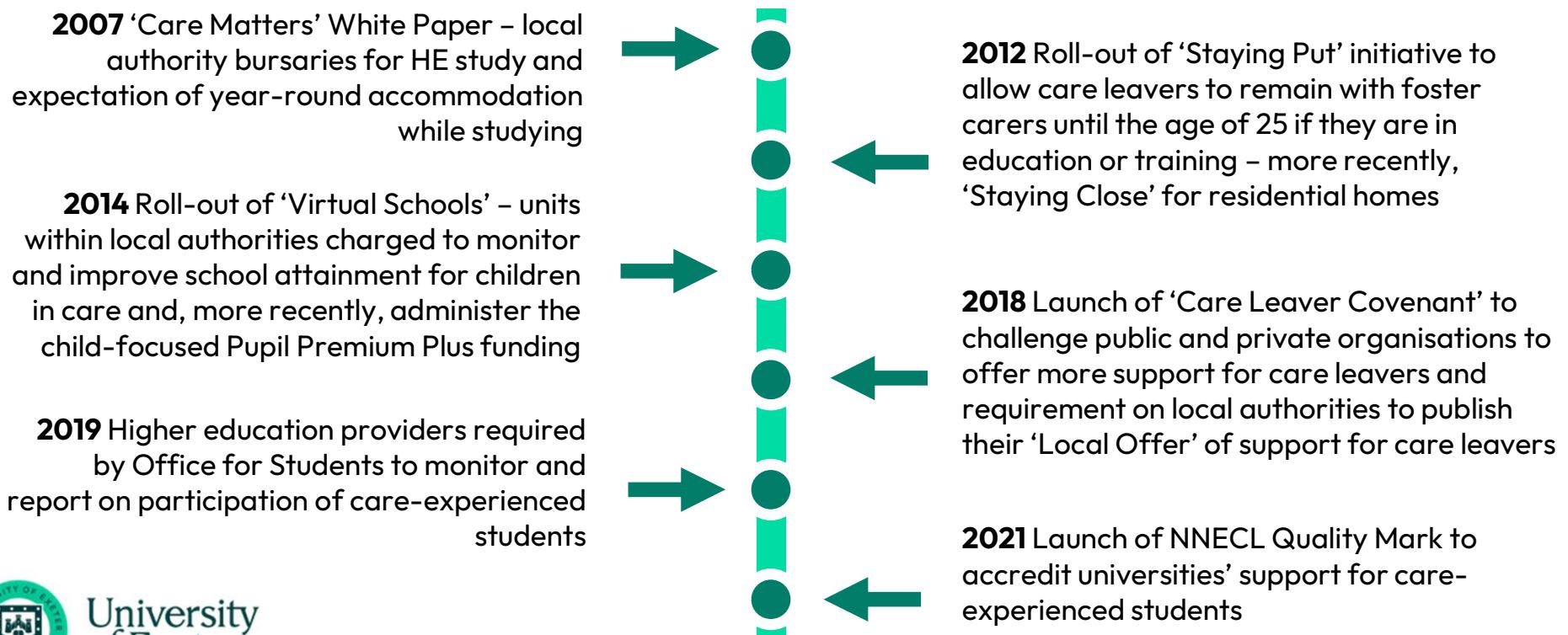
- Anxieties about new community and fears about stigma and/or ignorance
- Need to consider the 'strategy' for their new environment – visibility (or not) of care experience
- Importance of relationships with key academic staff – lack of awareness of care-related issues
- Desire to avoid constant retelling 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



# 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



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[www.nnecl.org/pages/195-nnecl-quality-mark](http://www.nnecl.org/pages/195-nnecl-quality-mark)

# NNECL

*working together to empower  
care experienced learners*

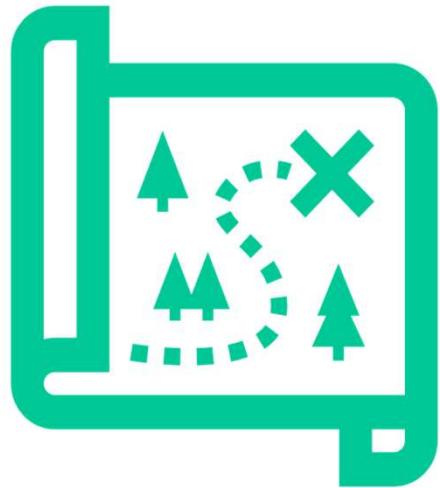
Edge Hill University  
Kingston University  
Liverpool John Moores University  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Oxford Brookes University  
Royal Central School of  
Speech and Drama  
Sheffield Hallam University  
University of Bolton  
University of Bradford  
University of Exeter  
University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

# 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



# 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)

## 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%

# 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.drzoebaker.co.uk/current-projects](http://www.drzoebaker.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

- Baker, Z., N. Harrison, J. Stevenson and P. Wakeling (2022) Patterns of postgraduate transitions amongst care-experienced graduates in the United Kingdom, *Cambridge Journal of Education* 52(3), 349-368.
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