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Care leavers' transition into the labour market in England

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January 2023

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Definitional note

The quantitative elements of this study required us to establish definitions that were driven by both the data available to us and our principal focus on care-experienced young people. These definitions are outlined below and explained in more detail in the report itself:

Not in education, employment or training (NEET)	On the relevant date, the young person was either economically inactive (see below) or long-term unemployed (see below). For the purposes of this study, we have *excluded* young people who had ever studied at Level 4 or above (nearly always in the context of higher education) as their employment histories tended to be very complex and potentially misleading (e.g. due to part-time and holiday work). We have therefore attempted to work to a definition that captures those young people with the greatest economic vulnerability.
Economically inactive	Where a young person is neither working nor studying, nor currently seeking entry to the labour market. For the purposes of this study, this term is used to mean young people who are receiving benefits associated with caring responsibilities (usually for a child) and/or a disability or illness that precludes work.
Long-term unemployed	Where a young person is receiving benefits that reflect that they are within the labour market, but that they are unable to secure work. For the purposes of this study, we have *excluded* young people in short-term periods of unemployment (less than three months) to try to account for volatility in their employment status.
In education, employment or training (EET)	This term is used as a mutually exclusive opposite to NEET, as defined above. Following the definitions given above, this *includes* young people in short periods of unemployment and those who had pursued studies at Level 4 or above at any point.

These definitions vary slightly from those used by government departments. Our modelling suggests that these differences have a very limited effect and lead to a slight under-representation of young people in short periods of unemployment relative to other definitions of NEET.

It is also important to note that the quantitative elements of our study are confined to young people who were in schools in England from 11 to 16 to allow us to control for school-based variables. Importantly, with respect to care-experienced young people, this *excludes* unaccompanied asylum seeking children (and other migrant families) who entered England after the age of 11. As such, the population for our study differs substantially from that used in the annual publication of data about care leavers[1].

These differences in definitions and populations are explored in more detail in Section 4.2.4. A degree of caution is therefore needed when comparing the findings of this study with other data available on care-experienced young people.

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children

Executive summary

A. Rationale

Around 10,000 young people in England become 'care leavers' every year, moving into adulthood following a period in local authority care. Most enter care due to maltreatment, but a smaller group are in care due to disability needs that are beyond the capacity of the family to support effectively. According to the most recent figures from the Department for Education, 41% of care leavers aged between 19 and 21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This is considerably higher than among young people in general; 12% of those aged 18 to 24 are NEET. This suggests care leavers face strong challenges in making a positive transition into the labour market.

Relatively little is known about the factors that impact pathways into employment for care leavers. Existing knowledge tends to come from small-scale qualitative studies and those focused on education outcomes. These have suggested that care leavers often face precarious employment conditions in marginal or insecure jobs, magnifying the realities of the prevailing youth labour market. Many of them can find themselves under considerable pressure to take work with limited prospects to meet essential costs in the absence of family safety nets. It is also, however, important to recognise that many care leavers do make positive adult transitions – for example, around 13% currently access higher education by the age of 19.

The purpose of our study was therefore to explore risk and protective factors for care leavers as they enter early adulthood and begin their employment journeys. Studies of young people suggest that deprivation, low qualifications and disability are strongly associated with being NEET, alongside parenthood, offending and mental health issues. Care leavers have a greater likelihood of appearing in all these groups, partly explaining their high propensity to be NEET. However, specific factors associated with care may also be salient, including type and stability of placements and the forms of support offered by the state.

The aim of our study was therefore to provide novel evidence, founded on large scale national datasets and qualitative exploration, to enable policymakers, practitioners and the research community to better understand transitions into early adulthood for care leavers. Given the limited knowledge currently available, especially about entry to the labour market, our findings should support a better informed policy debate and lead to stronger policymaking and practice, both nationally and at the local level.

Bearing in mind the limited data and research in this space to date, the research questions addressed by our study were:

- ***RQ1:*** *What are the key individual, care, and educational predictors of care leavers' participation in education, employment and training?*
- ***RQ2:*** *What are the perceptions of key stakeholders with regards to the barriers and facilitators for care leavers' participation in education, employment and training, and to the role played by children's social care services in these processes?*

B. Methodology

Our study employed a two-strand mixed methods approach, bringing together large-scale quantitative data (including the newly available Longitudinal Educational Outcomes, or LEO, dataset) and in-depth qualitative data, underpinned by a participatory approach involving those with lived experience of the care system. We

maintained a constant conversation between the two strands to ensure that they were informing each other throughout. This enabled us to both engage with overall national patterns of adult transitions for care leavers and to take an in-depth view in five local authority areas, drawing on the experiences and perceptions of young people, social care professionals and education, employment and training (EET) support professionals.

B1. Quantitative strand

The quantitative strand used linked data from six national administrative datasets (including the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset) to build a detailed picture of the cohort of young people born between 1st September 1995 and 31st August 1996 and present in English schools during Key Stages (KS) 2 and 4. It is important to note that this excludes most former unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The cohort comprised 530,440 individuals, of whom 3,850 were care leavers and 28,810 were other young people with experience of the children's social care system.

The central focus of our analysis was on the main activity being pursued by the young people at the age of 20 years and 7 months; this represents the latest age for which we had data for the whole cohort (see Section 4.1). We used records on employment, self-employment, education, training and benefit receipt to allocate each individual to one of seven mutually exclusive outcome groups.

We examined these outcomes in reference to a wide range of social, educational and care-related factors gathered from the six datasets, including gender, ethnicity, special educational needs, deprivation, school attended, educational disruptions, attainment and participation in post-compulsory education, as well as the type and nature of care placements for care leavers.

We then used logistic regression analysis to explore (a) whether care leavers were more or less likely to be NEET than other young people with otherwise similar characteristics, (b) whether care leavers had different patterns of outcomes compared to other young people, and (c) which factors were strongly associated with care leavers being NEET and the other specific outcomes.

B2. Qualitative strand

The qualitative strand explored the situation for care leavers in five local authority areas in England. These were purposively chosen to represent areas with above and below average proportions of NEET care leavers and contrasting demographic profiles by levels of deprivation and concentration of population.

In each local authority area, we interviewed care leavers aged between 18 and 21 about their experiences of transition, with specific reference to the labour market. In total, 28 care leavers participated, comprising eight in stable work, four in precarious work, seven in education and nine who were NEET. In addition, we interviewed or surveyed 41 professionals across the five local authorities, including personal advisers, leaving care team members, virtual school staff and carers. They provided us with their perspectives on the issues surrounding care leavers' transition into the labour market.

We undertook a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to build a rich picture of the barriers and facilitators at work for care leavers. Some of these were shared across all the local authority areas, whereas others were more specific.

C. Key findings

As with any complex and wide-ranging study, we have generated many specific findings

from the data analysed in the two strands and through the interaction between them:

C1. The national picture

Care leavers were considerably more likely than other young people to be NEET at 20 years and 7 months – we used slightly different definitions to those used nationally based on the data available to us. In our dataset, 28.6% of care leavers were NEET on the census date, compared to just 2.4% of the general population. This was a statistically significant difference that persisted even after a wide range of demographic and educational factors were accounted for.

This difference could largely be attributed to care leavers' being significantly *more likely* to be economically inactive, as indicated by receipt of state benefits for disability or caring responsibilities, or long-term unemployed. Conversely, care leavers were significantly *less likely* than the general population to be in work, whether stable or precarious.

Overall, 13.3% of care leavers studied at Level 4+ (nearly always in the context of higher education), compared to 46.2% for the general population. However, their propensity to do so was not statistically different from that predicted by their demographic and educational background.

C2. Impact of pre-16 educational experiences

There was a strong correlation between overall KS4 attainment for care leavers and their propensity to move into post-16 education and training, as well as the type (school or further education) and level of study. These pathways were then very closely related to outcomes at 20 years and 7 months.

In keeping with previous studies, we found compelling evidence that care leavers were more likely to undergo disruption to their schooling, for example, through high levels of absence, exclusions or school moves. For example, 26.0% of care leavers were 'persistent absentees' at some point in KS3/KS4, compared to 9.3% in the general population. The young people we interviewed talked extensively about such disruptions and other negative experiences of school that delayed their learning and reduced their attainment. This impeded their opportunities for work or post-16 education and training.

Aside from the importance of overall KS4 attainment, we noted that 'good' passes in GCSE English and mathematics had a distinct impact on onward pathways. As these are often used as entry criteria for Level 3 study, it is likely that many care leavers were effectively filtered into lower level options. Our interviews also suggested that disaffection with education could delay progress towards employment.

C3. Role of further education

Care leavers made extensive use of further education, with 67.9% engaging at some point up to 20 years and 7 months. In contrast, they were much less likely to continue in school than the general population; for many, this was due to negative experiences of school.

Given the importance of post-16 education in adult outcomes, the support provided to care leavers in further education is key. Our interviews suggested that this is currently variable, with substantial differences between local authorities and between colleges.

Further education also has an important role as a route back into education for those whose lives were disrupted during KS4 – around half of our interviewees felt these disruptions had impacted negatively on their level of attainment.

C4. Special educational needs, mental health and disability

There was a strong statistical link between being economically inactive in early adulthood and being assessed with high levels of special educational needs during KS4, including attending a special school. This held for all young people, but it was particularly marked for care leavers, of whom 62.4% were identified as having a high level of need.

For care leavers, this relationship reflects instances of mental health issues arising from traumatic experiences before, during or after being in care, as well as learning difficulties that may be diagnosed late due to conflation with other difficulties at school. Our interview participants saw a link between their mental health, school disruptions and their ability to thrive educationally, and also discussed how mental health issues were a barrier to securing (and maintaining) employment.

C5. Risk and protective factors for care leavers

Aside from KS4 attainment and special educational needs, our analysis identified a wider collection of risk and protective factors for care leavers. With respect to being NEET at 20 years and 7 months, risk factors included being female and having little or no post-16 education and training. Attaining a Level 3 qualification was a protective factor, as was coming from the Black or Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi communities.

The patterns were complex. For example, female care leavers were more likely than men to be economically inactive (due to disability or caring responsibilities), whereas men had a greater propensity to be active in the labour market, either working or long-term unemployed. Similarly, Black care leavers had a lower likelihood of being economically inactive than other ethnic communities, but they were more likely to be long-term unemployed and less likely to be in stable work. In addition, care leavers in deprived neighbourhoods were less likely to find stable work, while those with a history of school exclusion had a greater propensity to be in precarious work.

C6. Influence of experiences of care

In general, we found little direct relationship between metrics capturing elements of care experience (e.g. length of care or number of placements) and care leavers' outcomes at 20 years and 7 months. This suggests that these factors predominantly exerted their influence indirectly and earlier in time, for example, on attainment at 16 and progression into post-16 education and training. The latter point has been well-documented in previous studies and was reflected in the views of our interview participants.

The type of last placement did show some meaningful statistical relationships. Compared to those in foster care, care leavers who were in a secure unit were significantly more likely to be studying at Level 3 or below on the census date, but less likely to be in precarious work. Being in a children's home, residential unit or (semi-) independent living was associated with being economically inactive, possibly reflecting more complex needs and/or parenthood.

Care leavers whose final placement was in kinship care were more likely to be in stable work. Interview data from care leavers and professionals stressed the importance of family and other social networks for moving into the labour market and adult transitions in general.

C7. The youth labour market

Care leavers are entering a youth labour market that has been severely disrupted by

the global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as long-term structural changes. Our quantitative analysis (which reflects the period before Covid-19) found that 20.7% of care leavers were in precarious work at 20 years and 7 months – the most common outcome after economic inactivity. This was reflected in our interviews with care leavers and professionals (undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic), who reported that job opportunities were limited and often insecure and poorly paid; this is consistent with the findings of other studies of contemporary youth employment.

Many care leavers therefore enter work that is unlikely to provide a sound platform for their long-term emotional and economic wellbeing. While this experience is shared by many young people, care leavers are without the family 'safety nets' that others are able to draw upon, increasing their precarity further. Some care leavers and professionals reported that pay levels for apprenticeships and employment in relation to the cost of maintaining independent or semi-independent living was a strong disincentive to engage with work or work-focused training.

We also heard from care leavers and professionals that there can be practical barriers in accessing youth employment schemes like Kickstart, which have criteria (e.g. on benefit receipt) that inadvertently exclude those care leavers aged 16 and 17 who receive financial support from their local authority. There was strong support from the interviews for local authorities to offer preferential access to employment opportunities as part of their 'corporate parenting' responsibilities. Barriers to achieving this included time, resources and concerns from human resources teams about equal opportunities.

C8. Long-term unemployment

Within our dataset, relatively few (5.7%) care leavers were unemployed for a period of three months or more at 20 years and 7 months, compared to the higher proportion who were economically inactive (38.8%). Efforts to reduce the number of NEET care leavers need to be cognisant of this distinction, with appropriately targeted interventions.

It was difficult to model long-term unemployment within the data available; our regression analysis provided only limited insights. Care leavers in this group tended to have low attainment in English and/or mathematics and limited engagement in further education, but their profile was not markedly dissimilar to care leavers in precarious work. Black and/or male care leavers were significantly more likely to be long-term unemployed than women and those from other ethnic communities; this may suggest a specific marginalisation from the labour market.

C9. What is helping locally?

Some of our case study local authorities provided extended access to the virtual school and a specific worker dedicated to improving access to EET. There were also examples of pre-employment projects and ring-fenced work-related opportunities that young people and professionals reported to be making a difference.

One local authority had created a specific scheme of temporary work opportunities which enabled young people to gain valuable experience and earn money within a supported opportunity. Some young people had engaged with the scheme for several months and some had gone on to in-house apprenticeships. Another local authority offered work 'taster sessions' to care leavers, both in-house and via external employers, to broaden their knowledge of the jobs available. Others had formed links with local projects and organisations (including sports, retail and utility sectors) to offer pre-employment work and apprenticeships

schemes, where care leavers were able to develop self-confidence, time management and organisation skills. These aimed to better prepare them for mainstream apprenticeships or other work-based opportunities.

C10. Other care-experienced and formerly in need groups

In addition to care leavers, we explored outcomes for three comparison groups: (a) those who had been in care after 14, but did not meet the criteria to be care leavers, (b) those who had been in care, but left prior to 14, and (c) those who had been allocated a social worker after the age of 14, but who had not been in care. These groups tended to have broadly similar profiles and outcome patterns to care leavers – e.g. they were all significantly more likely to be NEET than the general population.

The group of 'late' care-experienced young people showed signs of similar or greater educational disruption (e.g. school changes, absence and exclusion) compared to care leavers. This likely reflects their entry into and/or exit from care during KS4. Compared to care leavers, this group had markedly lower KS4 attainment and was less likely to have engaged in post-16 education and training.

D. Summary of recommendations

Our study provides novel evidence about transitions into adulthood for care leavers and other care-experienced young people. Alongside other studies, this gives us confidence to make recommendations, many of which are also consistent with those made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022). Our recommendations are summarised here and presented in full in Section 8.

For national government

1. Policy for care leavers who are NEET should have sufficient focus on those who are economically inactive due to disability or caring responsibilities.

2. There should be more focus on early intervention for care leavers, with adult outcomes mainly forming prior to the age of 16.

3. Young people should have strong routes into (and back into) post-16 education and training, reflecting the educational disruption that they experience during KS3/4.

4. Given the higher risk of being NEET, care-experienced young people should be a priority group for national initiatives designed to support transition into work, accounting for any additional barriers and support needs.

5. National government should provide additional 'top up' funding for care leavers to participate in apprenticeships and other schemes to ensure that they are not financially disadvantaged overall compared to other young people.

6. Young people leaving care between 14 and 16 should be considered as an 'at risk' group with respect to difficult transitions into adulthood.

7. National government should consider broadening the statutory definition of care leavers to include all young people in care after the age of 14, with additional funding to support positive transitions.

For local policymakers, practitioners and employers

Our findings suggest a need for greater awareness and action across key sectors to

address the additional barriers to employment of further study that care-experienced young people can encounter. The following recommendations derive from our conversations with practitioners and young people, focusing on their perceptions of effective practice. The scope of our study did not include undertaking a cost/benefit analysis of these practices and we recognise that they may require the deployment of additional resources:

8. Practitioners should engage children in care in early discussions around careers to activate effective planning and support for those who are more likely to have a protracted journey into employment.

9. Leaving care services should have a dedicated specialist role focusing on EET for care leavers.

10. There should be stronger links with local employers to improve young people's knowledge of the range of opportunities available to them.

11. Targeted pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship support should be provided to prepare young people with the most complex needs to take steps towards work-related opportunities.

12. Education providers and employers should have greater awareness of trauma and other mental health needs for care leavers and other care-experienced young people.

13. Attention should be given to targeted approaches to support transitions for particular groups of care leavers, especially with respect to gender, ethnicity and disability.

14. Local authorities should further engage their corporate parenting responsibilities to provide preferential access to their own work opportunities for care leavers.

For researchers and funders of research

15. More research should be undertaken into the relationship between special educational needs in childhood and disability in adulthood for care leavers, with particular regard to mental health issues.

16. More research should be undertaken into care leavers' use of further education as part of their transition pathway into adulthood.

17. More evidence should be collected about the effectiveness of small-scale local pre-employment and employment programmes targeted at care leavers.

1. Introduction

Our study focused on transitions from care into the labour market for young people who have at some point been looked after within the children's social care system. It employed a two-strand mixed methods approach, with constant conversation between the strands to ensure that the findings from one helped to inform and focus the other.

We have brought together, for the first time in England, quantitative data from linked national administrative datasets to construct a detailed picture for a single cohort of young people. This includes using the newly available Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset – this will be explained in more detail in Section 5. We have been able to explore and compare their demographic characteristics, education and early career pathways. Alongside this, in-depth qualitative data was gathered to explore direct experiences of moving from care to work from the perspectives of care leavers and the carers and professionals who support them. The study was underpinned by a participatory approach, directly involving those with lived experience of the care system as interviewees, young advisers to the study, and as researchers. The latter were involved in identifying key issues, gathering data and interpreting and writing up findings. Such approaches can bring a range of benefits to the research, to participants, and to the researchers themselves (Dixon *et al.*, 2019, Kelly *et al.*, 2016).

Specifically, this report adds to the research literature on transitions to the labour market for care-experienced young people. It uses large-scale linked datasets to explore the interplay of general risk factors with those that are care-specific, with interviews with young people and professionals providing richer detail about barriers, challenges and forms of support. In particular, it considers the additive effect of risk factors on care-experienced young people, how this contributes to their high propensity to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and what interventions might be helpful in either reducing this or better supporting those who are NEET.

1.1 Children's social care

There are currently around 80,000 young people in local authority care in England, representing 0.7% of the total population of children aged under 18 (Department for Education, 2021a). These young people are cared for in a range of settings including foster care, kinship care (with extended family members), residential homes and other settings. The overwhelming majority of young people in care are there as a result of maltreatment or neglect within the birth family, with a smaller group in care due to disability needs that are beyond the capacity of the family to support effectively.

Most young people who spend time in care will return to their birth family or leave care through a permanence route such as adoption or a special guardianship order. The remainder will 'age out' of care into adulthood aged 18. Around 11,000 young people age out of care each year (Department for Education, 2021a); most will receive transition support from the state as 'care leavers', but some miss out due to the timing, duration or nature of their care arrangements. Young people's experience of care can therefore be very diverse. A key binding factor is that the majority will have undergone significant adverse or traumatic experiences before, during or after care and that they will have experienced substantial social and educational disruption.

1.2 Legal and policy context

The overarching legislation that outlines the key duties and responsibilities of local authorities and related agencies with respect to looked after children and care leavers is the Children Act 1989. This has been amended over the past three decades by a series of legislative and practice developments designed to increase consistency and quality of services, with the aim of improving the experiences and outcomes for care-experienced children and young people. Perhaps of greatest relevance here is the Children (Leaving Care Act) 2000, which was the first legislation pertaining specifically to the support of care leavers. This created provisions directly aimed at improving services and individual outcomes, including the introduction of dedicated leaving care staff in each local authority (generally known as 'personal advisers' or PAs), a duty to assess care leavers' needs, keep in touch with them and co-develop individual 'pathway plans' for ongoing support via. The Act also extended local authority financial responsibility for care leavers up to their 18th birthday (with the exception of some young parents and young disabled care leavers who retain access to general welfare benefits prior to age 18). Under this legislation, young people preparing to leave care and care leavers who meet the criteria, are entitled to support with finding and sustaining post-care accommodation, education, employment and training (EET), health and wellbeing, and financial and other advice and assistance to meet their needs. Leaving care support is extended to all those with care leaver status up to the age of 25.

Subsequent legislation and initiatives have aimed to strengthen provision and address the continued gaps and variations in service and progress for young people. This includes strategies to improve in-care and post-care stability and continuity of care through targets to reduce placement breakdown and provision to remain living with foster carers beyond the age of 18 via Staying Put arrangements. Also included within this series of policies and programmes[2] are specific measures to improve the education access, attainment and support of young people in and leaving care:

- Priority school admissions for children in care;
- The creation of designated teacher roles in each school and Virtual School Heads[3] in each area with a duty to oversee and promote the education of children in care and care leavers;
- Implementing personal education plans to monitor the progress and support needs of children in care;
- Access to packages of practical and financial support with education equipment and study costs (e.g. personal education allowance of £500 for children in care and the Higher Education Bursary of £2,000).

This has been enhanced by successive policies that recognise the need to broaden support with EET beyond compulsory education, such as the 2018 introduction of the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Bursary (a single payment of £1,000) and the 2013 Care Leaver Strategy, which aimed to strengthen corporate parenting/cross departmental responsibilities. This was updated in 2016, setting out five[4] key outcome areas for local and national government, such as improving

[2] For example, Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2004), Care Matters: Time for Change (2007), Children and Young Persons Act 2008, 2013 Care Leaver Strategy, Children and Families Act 2014, 2016 Care Leaver Strategy and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
[3] The Virtual School is a statutory service, becoming mandatory in every local authority under the Children and Families Act 2014. This requires local authorities in England to appoint a Virtual School Head to discharge the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care. Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the role of the Virtual School has been extended to include children of school age who have previous experience of care.
[4] The 2016 Care Leaver Strategy sets out five priority outcome areas: 1. Better prepared and supported to live independently; 2. Improved access to EET; 3. Stability and feeling safe and secure; 4. Improved access to health support; 5. Achieving financial stability.

access to EET and achieving financial stability for young people. This in turn paved the way for the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which, amongst other measures, requires each local authority to publish their 'local offer' to care leavers, including in relation to EET support. The Care Leaver Covenant, first introduced via the 2016 Care Leaver Strategy, also encourages educational providers and employers to develop and promote their own support packages and commitments for care leavers.

Underpinning these policies is the expectation that support is provided collectively by local authorities alongside a wide range of services and organisations (traditionally termed the 'corporate parents') that are relevant to the lives and livelihoods of care-experienced young people. Although the general ethos of corporate parenting has been around since the Children Act 1989, and visible in existing cross-department and multi-agency approaches to the care and leaving care populations, it was first defined in legislation in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Act introduces seven corporate parenting principles[5] based on fundamental needs, which the local authority and relevant organisations must have regard to improve overall experiences and progress, as well as setting the foundations for more positive employment outcomes. These principles, together with the strengthening of corporate parenting through the Care Leaver Covenant, bring greater leverage to call on education, training and employment providers to offer targeted support to care-experienced young people.

Finally, since the completion of this research in March 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (MacAlister, 2022) has concluded, making a number of recommendations for the improvement of services for the care and leaving care populations. Some of these recommendations (e.g. early intervention, extended education support and broadening the corporate parenting remit) find particular resonance with the evidence generated through our study.

1.3 Transitions into adulthood

It is increasingly well-understood that care-experienced[6] young people tend to have substantially less positive and more complex transitions into adulthood than the general population, both in the United Kingdom and further afield (e.g. Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard, 2020; Cameron *et al.*, 2018; Mann-Veder and Goyette, 2019; Sacker *et al.*, 2021). Among the challenges faced are the risks of homelessness or poor housing (Briheim-Crookall *et al.*, 2020; Clare *et al.*, 2017; Davison and Burris, 2014), mental health issues (Butterworth *et al.*, 2016; Crous, Montserrat and Balaban, 2021; Dixon, 2008), early parenthood (Purtell, Mendes and Saunders, 2020) and involvement in the criminal justice system (Cusick, Havlicek and Courtney, 2012; Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2017; van Breda, 2020). Stein (2012) argues that care leavers are expected to make a particularly rapid transition into adulthood, generally with limited family involvement, few safety nets and state

[5] The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces seven corporate parenting principles: (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people; (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings; (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners; (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people; (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

[6] Throughout this report, we will use the term 'care-experienced' to mean the group of young people who spent time in care at any point during their childhood. Conversely, we generally use the term 'care leaver' to indicate the smaller group of young people meeting the statutory definition under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and who receive support from the state for their transition into adulthood.

support that often ends abruptly; this is likely to be true for many other care-experienced young people too. For example, evidence consistently shows that care-experienced young people are more likely to take on the responsibilities of independent living simultaneously and much sooner (aged 18) when compared with young people generally who typically remain living in the family home until their mid-twenties (Dixon *et al.*, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2016; Stein, 2012).

Despite these challenges, the majority of care-experienced young people do enter the labour market in early adulthood (Cameron *et al.*, 2018). However, this transition may be particularly vexed due to the realities of the youth labour market (Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard; 2020), such that they often encounter precarious employment conditions in marginal or insecure jobs, with zero-hour or temporary contracts (Dixon, 2016). Göbel *et al.* (2019) note that the immediate concerns of financial security and housing can lead young people into work that is inappropriate or that has limited potential for advancement, with an absence of clear career goals leading to 'drift'. Crucially, Arnau-Sabatés and Gilligan (2020) argue that being part of a workplace can provide important social support and opportunities for informal mentoring, making contributions to care-experience young people's wellbeing beyond the purely economic.

The Department for Education has recently published two research reports exploring post-16 educational outcomes for care-experienced young people (Nelson and Anderson, 2021) and young people who were formerly 'in need' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2022). These draw on the LEO dataset to produce descriptive statistics similar to those presented in Section 3 of this report, although using different definitions and cohorts of young people. They find that both groups have substantially lower levels of educational attainment and less positive employment outcomes, compared to the general population of young people. In particular, they highlight the high proportions who are economically inactive and receiving benefits for disability and/or caring responsibilities.

1.4 The contemporary youth labour market

Space precludes a full exploration of the youth labour market in England, by which we mean up to the age of 21 for this study, but several well-documented trends are relevant to our study. The last 50 years have seen rapid structural change, echoing a shift in employer demands towards high-skill work driven by technological advances (e.g. see Kirchner Sala *et al.*, 2015; Leonard and Wilde, 2019 for recent overviews). This period has also been marked by a decline in the number of manufacturing jobs for young people and an increase in jobs in service industries. The concomitant growth of the post-compulsory education sector has resulted in progressively fewer young people entering the labour market between 16 and 21, with more emphasis on further and (especially) higher education; in the latter case, the participation rate of 18- and 19-year-olds now stands at 43% (Department for Education, 2021b). With fewer employers seeking school-leavers, those young people who do not continue into post-compulsory education are likely to have their opportunities restricted to jobs requiring lower skills and offering less security (Kirchner Sala *et al.*, 2015; Leonard and Wilde, 2019). Indeed, Harrison (2019) argues that higher education is now seen by many young people more as a form of 'insurance' against unemployment or underemployment than as a route to upward social mobility.

With the expansion in post-compulsory education and training, the importance of qualifications to labour market entry and progression has intensified (Kirchner Sala *et al.*, 2015; Leonard and Wilde, 2019). Employers have been increasingly able to recruit young people who have already received significant vocational training, leading to a long-term decline in apprenticeships and other on-the-job training opportunities (Maguire, 2022). The emphasis has shifted away from Level 2

qualifications – typically accumulated in Key Stage 4 – towards Level 3 or Level 4 as labour market entry points. Kirchner Sala *et al.* (2015) summarise the extensive evidence for a close causal relationship between the accumulation of qualifications and positive employment outcomes.

Access to the youth labour market is mediated through social dimensions that include gender, ethnicity and disability. Kirchner Sala *et al.* (2015) note that the role of gender has mutated with the decline in young motherhood, with young women now more likely than men to be involved in post-compulsory education and training. Young men are conversely more likely to be in the labour market, either working or unemployed. However, those young women who are in the labour market have a higher propensity to be in lower skill or precarious work (Leonard and Wilde, 2019). Driven by radical improvements in school attainment in the 2000s and 2010s, nearly all minority ethnic groups now have a higher propensity to engage with post-compulsory education than the White majority group (Harrison, 2017; Kirchner Sala *et al.*, 2015). However, their employment outcomes have not always kept pace, due in part to persistent racial discrimination in the labour market (for an international meta-analysis, see Quillan *et al.*, 2019); it is important to note that there are sharp differences between young people from different ethnic communities (Leonard and Wilde, 2019). Finally, disabled young people have particular challenges in entering the labour market, despite legislation to ensure that they are provided with equal opportunities. Most recently, there has been an increased focus on the role of mental health issues in limiting these opportunities (Holmes, Murphy and Mayhew, 2021).

The contemporary youth labour market is therefore one in which good opportunities for work are increasing scarce. Access is strongly aligned to successful participation in school and mediated through structural inequalities related to gender, ethnicity and disability. We have also seen that the youth labour market has been particularly sensitive to exogenous factors in recent years. The global financial crisis of the late 2000s saw young people disproportionately likely to be unemployed, particularly in areas of high deprivation (Costa and Machin, 2017; Ernst and Young, 2016). The post-crisis recovery was marked by the emergence of the so-called 'gig economy' in the 2010s, with piecework, 'zero hours' and short-term contracts becoming widespread as employers sought flexibility and low staff overheads (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019) – the rise of a new precarious workforce that lacks stability and clear pathways for progression. Perhaps emblematic of this has been the rise of home delivery companies, where (often young) 'staff' are actually self-employed and paid per delivery made. The Covid-19 pandemic has added further to this precarity, especially due to the high concentrations of young people in the retail, entertainment and tourism sectors, leading to another spike in youth unemployment in the early 2020s (Crowley, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2021a).

1.5 Care-experienced young people not in education, employment or training

The most recent government figures for England (Department for Education, 2021a) suggest that 41% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 are NEET. This designation has been used since the 1990s to inform general social policy as a measure of economic inactivity and a long-term risk factor at the individual and societal level. We will come on to question its utility with respect to care-experienced young people, but the proportion of care leavers in this age range is nearly four times higher than in the general population (Office for National Statistics, 2021b); it had a period of modest decline prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, but it has now risen again. No comparable statistics are currently produced on the wider group of care-experienced young people or those who had a social worker when they were a child.

Research among the general population indicates that a collection of individual, family, neighbourhood and school factors all contribute to differences in rates of NEET. These risk factors include having poor school attainment, disability and illness, coming from difficult family situations, deprivation, offending, being female (affected largely through parenthood and caring responsibilities), constrained access to education and early exit from education (Duckworth and Schoon, 2014; Holmes, Murphy and Mayhew, 2021; Thompson, 2021). As many of these factors are disproportionately common among care leavers and other care-experienced young people (Berridge *et al.*, 2020; Sebba *et al.*, 2015), this may begin to explain the higher propensity to be NEET among these groups. Holmes, Murphy and Mayhew (2021) particularly note the recent growth in mental health issues as an explanatory factor in young people being NEET.

In addition, there are likely to be risk factors that are more specific to care-experienced young people. Wade and Dixon (2006) suggest that late entry into care, frequent placement breakdowns and early exit from care, as well as housing instability and insufficient support after leaving care, may pose additional risks with respect to becoming NEET in early adulthood. Similarly, in the US, Okpych and Courtney (2014) and Hook and Courtney (2011) demonstrate that fewer care placements and the extension of care placements beyond age 18 predict a greater likelihood of employment and higher earnings. It is in response to this evidence that UK policy developments over the past decade have sought to strengthen placement stability, extend care (through opportunities to remain with former carers beyond 18 such as Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements) and extend access to leaving care support to the age of 25.

1.6 Care-experienced young people entering the labour market

A key principle in discussions of young people who are NEET is that the categorisation is not synonymous with unemployment, in the sense of being *unable to secure work* (Holmes, Murphy and Mayhew, 2021). In reality, it is a mixed categorisation that also includes those who are unable to work due to disability or extensive caring responsibilities – primarily for children, but potentially also for parents, siblings or a partner. While less relevant in discussions of care-experienced young people, it also includes those choosing to be economically inactive (e.g. due to independent means). This distinction is important in this context, as there is a strong correlation between having experience of care and both disability (especially mental health issues) and young parenthood (Briheim-Crookall *et al.*, 2020; Department for Education, 2021a).

The rates of care leavers being NEET vary widely between local authority areas. In 2021, the figure ranged between 17% and 61% (Department for Education, 2021a), but there is also substantial year-on-year variation within local authorities. Furthermore, the National Audit Office (2015) notes that there are profound differences in the scale of support offered to care leavers by individual local authorities, with an apparently weak relationship with outcomes. This suggests that there may be very specific local factors at work, coupled with the inherent randomness of statistics in the relatively small populations being considered here.

Finally, it is important to stress that, due to the focus on young people with an educational record in England spanning KS2 and KS4, this report effectively excludes care-experienced young people who had been designated as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC). This group now comprises around one-quarter of each cohort of new care leavers (Department for Education, 2021a), with a rapid rise since the mid-2010s. They are also likely to have very specific challenges around language, missed education and trauma; indeed, there is a distinct research literature

focused on the needs of UASCs and care-experienced refugees (e.g. Dixon and Wade, 2007; Gladwell, 2021; Ott and O'Higgins, 2019).

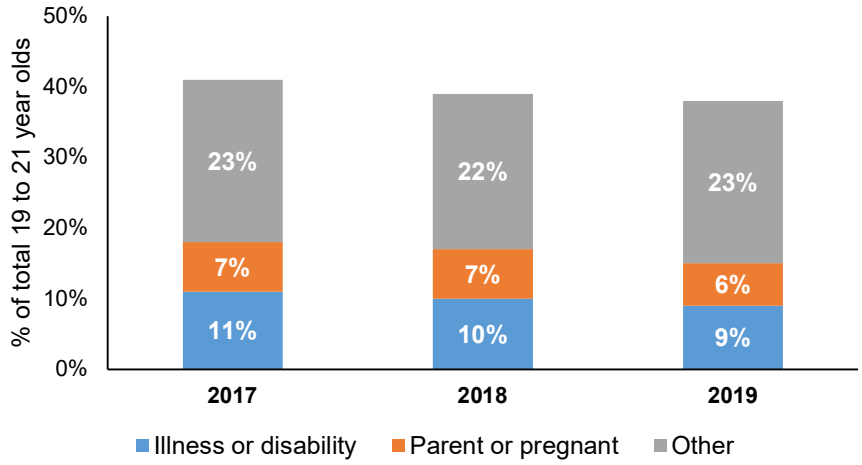
1.7 Education and employment outcomes: insights from the national data

The principal source of publicly-available data on outcomes for care leavers aged 19 to 21 is the 'OC3' data within the wider 'SSDA903' dataset, with aggregated data published annually by the Department for Education (DfE)[7]. These data are collected by local authorities through an annual survey undertaken around the birthday of the care leaver and then collated by the DfE. The results are published at a national level and for individual local authorities (where numbers permit).

The OC3 data explores the care leaver's activity at the time of the survey – i.e. it is a single data point about their activity on that day. While this is understandable in terms of the resources available, it does leave the data open to seasonal and other biases. It also relies on self-report data from individuals that may not be wholly accurate or readily coded. Nevertheless, data coverage is high, with information gleaned from 90% of care leavers; the remainder could not be contacted or declined to participate.

In the 2019/20 dataset, 39% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 were recorded as being NEET. Figure 1.1 shows that this proportion has declined slightly over recent years, as well as illustrating the distinction between three reasons for being NEET: (a) having an illness or disability, (b) being a parent or pregnant, and (c) other. The third of these categories is the largest, and broadly represents those unable to find work or relevant education or training opportunities for reasons other than illness, disability or parenthood. This group has remained largely static around 23%, while the other two groups have fallen slightly (from 18% combined in 2017, to 15% in 2019). The 'other' group includes, amongst others, those prevented from working due to their immigration status – e.g. former UASC whose asylum claim has not yet been resolved – and many within the criminal justice system.

Figure 1.1: Proportion of care leavers aged 19 to 21 recorded as NEET, by reason given

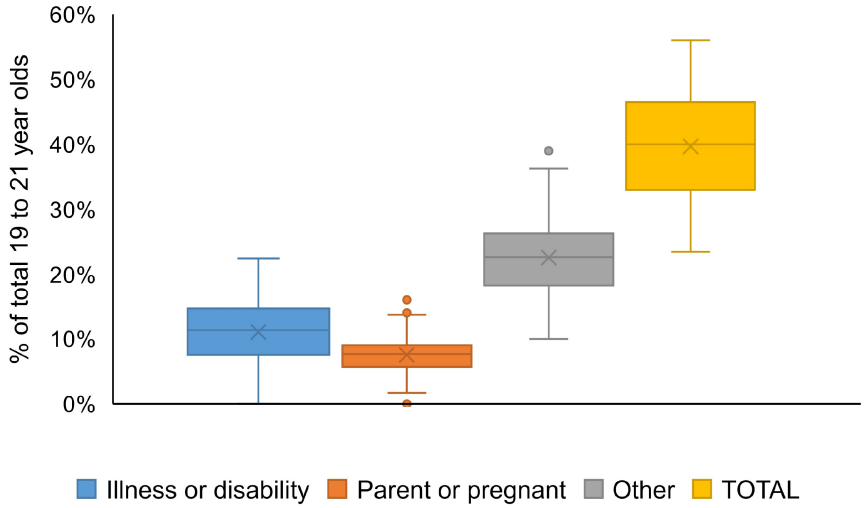


[7] For the latest data, see https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2021.

It is also possible to explore these data at the local authority level and we do so here using the boundaries in use in 2019 – i.e. with 151 English 'upper tier' local authorities[8]. Tables for the OC3 data are published annually, although some figures are suppressed due to low numbers of care leavers and the associated risk of disclosure.

In this section, we have calculated a three-year average of the proportions of NEET care leavers to attempt to account for year-on-year variability arising from the small numbers in some local authorities – 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19. Where not all three years are available due to suppression, we have taken a two-year average or, in a small number of cases, used the single year of available data[9]. There are obvious limitations to this approach, but the removal of local authorities with fewer than three years of available data does not meaningfully alter the findings.

Figure 1.2: Proportion of care leavers aged 19 to 21 recorded as NEET between 2016/17 and 2018/19 at the local authority level, by reason given



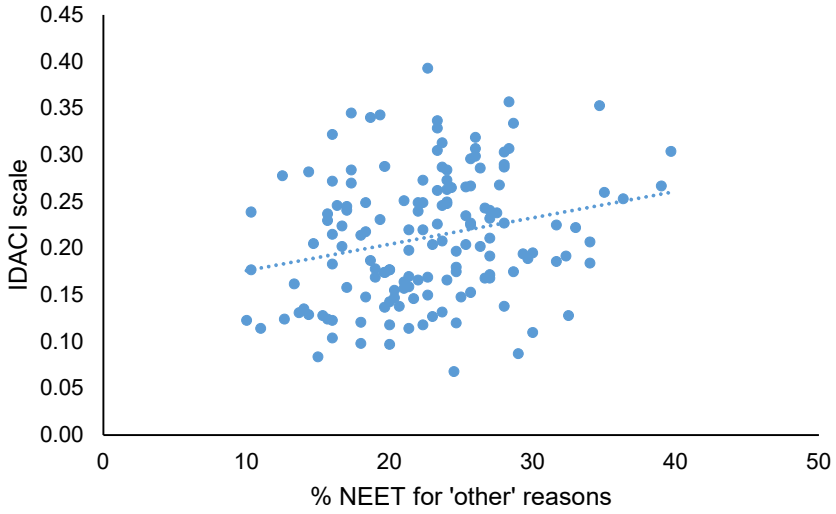
A boxplot (Figure 1.2) demonstrates a high degree of variability among local authorities. The average total proportion of NEET care leavers varies between 23.5% and 56.0%. There is also considerable variation within the individual groups, with, for example, the average proportion who are recorded as NEET due to illness or disability varying between zero and 22.5%; this is particularly surprising as it is unclear why this grouping should show such large disparities between areas.

We now focus in more closely on the 'other' grouping. This is of particular interest as it represents those care leavers who do not have a specific recorded reason for not being in employment, education or training, which might be hypothesised to be particularly affected by local socioeconomic conditions such as deprivation or high rates of unemployment. The average proportion of care leavers in this group between 2016/17 and 2018/19 ranges from 10.0% to 39.3% across different local authority areas. Figure 1.3 plots the proportion of care leavers who were recorded as NEET for 'other' reasons against a commonly-used measure of neighbourhood

[8] There were boundary changes in 2016 and 2020 which made comparisons impossible for a number of local authorities for periods spanning these dates.
[9] Two local authorities with tiny numbers of care leavers (City of London and Scilly Isles) have been removed entirely from the analysis.

deprivation[10]. As can be seen, there is a high degree of dispersion, suggesting a limited relationship of any type between deprivation and the proportion of care leavers who fall into this category. This is supported by the shallow slope of the fit line; care leavers are slightly more likely to be NEET for 'other' reasons in local authorities with higher levels of deprivation, but the correlation is modest.

Figure 1.3: Proportion of care leavers aged 19 to 21 recorded as NEET for 'other' reasons, by the IDACI for each local authority



Similarly, Table 1.1 shows the mean of the proportion of care leavers recorded as NEET for 'other' reasons when compared with the local authority's Ofsted rating for supporting care leavers into adulthood. There is no discernible relationship by Ofsted's assessment of the work of the local authority and the headline employment outcome for care leavers.

Table 1.1: Mean proportion of care leavers aged 19 to 21 recorded as NEET for 'other' reasons, by local authority Ofsted ratings for supporting care leavers

Most recent Ofsted rating	No of local authorities	Mean %
Inadequate	9	20.9%
Requires improvement	69	23.8%
Good	62	22.1%
Outstanding	9	19.9%

These two findings suggest that the proportion of care leavers in the 'other' category is not open to ready explanation – indeed, we explored various other potential demographic, educational and

[10] The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), developed by the Office for National Statistics. Other measures of socioeconomic deprivation at the local authority level were investigated (e.g. the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the headline unemployment rate), but none presented a substantively different picture.

socioeconomic factors and found none to be meaningfully correlated. This analysis fed into our strategy for selecting sites for the qualitative strand of the study (See Section 2). In particular, we were keen to explore the role of localised circumstances and practices that may not be captured by high-level statistics, which themselves may not adequately capture local circumstances or the support provided to care leavers.

1.8 Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this study

As with much contemporary research, the Covid-19 pandemic had diverse and far-reaching impacts on the delivery of this study. These necessitated several revisions to the project plan, including delaying the completion by around 18 months. Some of these impacts were direct (e.g. the illness of the research team or their families), while others were more indirectly felt.

The most profound of these impacts were on the qualitative strand of the study. The pressures of the pandemic period made it very challenging to recruit local authorities to participate. There were often understandable delays in securing a response, with many then declining due to the need for their staff to prioritise front-line and emergency work with young people over participation in research. Even once a local authority had corporately agreed to participate, some individual staff members declined to do so or were unable to assist for some time. The Covid-19 pandemic, again understandably, had a particularly strong impact on the willingness of young people and carers to engage with the study and we were forced to be content with less data from these groups accordingly. The overall result was that we have data from one fewer local authority than planned and that there were generally fewer participants in each.

These unavoidable changes to the qualitative strand of the study also compromised one of the original aims of the study: to contrast what was happening 'on the ground' between local authorities with similar demographic profiles by deprivation and population density, but with substantially different proportions of care leavers who were recorded as being NEET. It was hoped that this might provide insight into effective forms of practice at the local area level. However, with different forms and quantities of data collected from each of the five participating local authorities, we concluded that it was not appropriate to make inter-area comparisons. We have, nevertheless, highlighted forms of practice that appeared to be effective, without drawing inference about the local authority in which they were found.

The data for the quantitative strand of the study were not directly affected as the latest data available to researchers were for the 2016/17 tax year and therefore well before the Covid-19 pandemic period. However, the team within the Department for Education who were providing us with access to the data and undertaking disclosure checks were reallocated onto Covid-related work on several occasions, leading to unavoidable delays with clearing analyses for use by the research team. This made the usual iterative process of developing new analytical categories, refining statistical models and undertaking quality assurance substantially more challenging and time-consuming.

1.9 Research questions and structure of this report

In order to focus our study, especially given the very extensive quantitative data that were potentially available from national datasets, two research questions were adopted:

- ***RQ1:*** *What are the key individual, care, and educational predictors of care leavers' participation in education, employment and training?*

- ***RQ2:*** *What are the perceptions of key stakeholders with regards to the barriers and facilitators for care leavers' participation in education, employment and training, and to the role played by children's social care services in these processes?*

The quantitative and qualitative strands of the study were undertaken at the same time by different sub-groups within the overall research team. However, regular team meetings were held to ensure that each strand's progress informed the other. This process was further strengthened through regular input from policy, practice and academic advisors with expertise in care, leaving care, education and youth employment.

Section 2 describes the methodologies used in the two strands. Sections 3, 4 and 5 cover the quantitative findings, with Sections 6 covering the qualitative findings. Section 7 provides a unified conclusion to the report, drawing together findings from both strands (and previous studies) to answer the two research questions presented above, leading to the recommendations in Section 8.

2. Methodology

This section presents the methodologies for the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study. While the two strands were in constant conversation with each other throughout the research, such that the findings from each strand informed the analysis of the other, they were necessarily undertaken separately. This is, in part, due to differences in the timeframes involved and the specific groups of interest on which they focused.

2.1 Quantitative strand

The quantitative strand of this project was one of nine that formed a national pilot for providing researchers with access to the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset (Department for Education, 2019a). The LEO dataset provides the first large-scale opportunity to examine employment outcomes in adulthood with respect to qualifications accumulated and other experiences in school, further education and higher education. It was originally conceptualised to support the analysis of labour market returns from higher education (e.g. by degree subject or institution), but has more recently been put to other purposes.

Under the pilot programme, we were offered the opportunity for a member of our research team to be seconded into the Department for Education. This afforded them access a non-public online data environment in which an extract from the LEO datasets and other national administrative datasets were made available. This included a fully anonymised identifier for individual ('PupilMatchingRefAnonymous') that could be used to link the LEO dataset to other datasets – see Department for Education (2019b) for details of this linking process.

Due to data security protocols, it was only the seconded member of our research team that had access to the datasets used in this study and to the raw analyses produced from those datasets. In order for the wider research team to have access to analyses, they had to be anonymised through rounding and suppression (see Section 3.3 below) and cleared by staff in LEO Programme team in the Department for Education. This clearance process was initially planned to take less than a week, but this increased substantially during the Covid-19 pandemic due to sickness and the redeployment of staff. this created challenges for the iterative development of definitions for key variables and the specification of statistical models. Once the cleared analyses were returned to the team, they were quality assured as far as was possible without direct access to the data and changes made as appropriate.

2.1.1 Cohort definition

The initial definition of the dataset for this study was the single year cohort of young people born between 1st September 1995 and 31st August 1996. This was limited to include only those present in English schools between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 to allow for a continuous school record and the extraction of relevant factors relating to school experiences and qualifications[11]. The total size of the dataset following cleansing was 530,440 individuals.

[11] Importantly, this effectively excludes unaccompanied asylum seeking children, who are likely to be at particular risk of being not in education, employment or training in young adulthood due to their immigration status and associated legal restrictions on work. It also excludes other young people who may have spent time outside of England, as well as those who entered the UK after the age of 11.

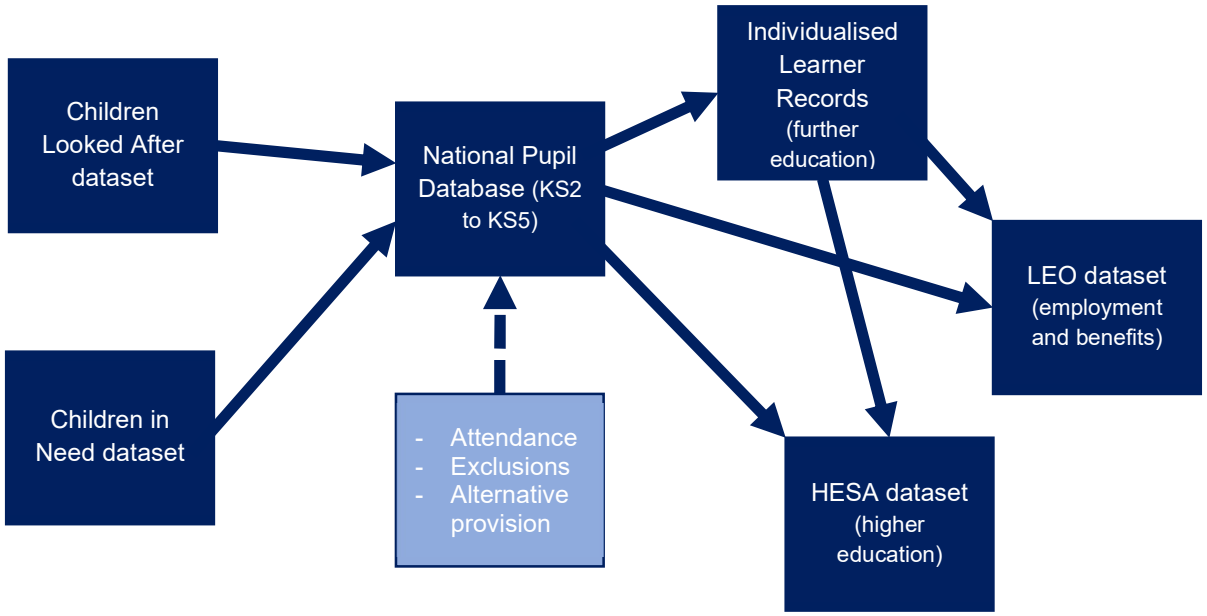
2.1.2 Datasets used

This study drew on data from six national administrative datasets:

- **National Pupil Database** – containing demographic and educational data, including qualification, attendance, exclusions and school changes.
- **Individualised Learner Records** – containing data on enrolment and attainment in further education.
- **Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset** – containing data on employment, self-employment and benefit receipt.
- **Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) dataset** – containing data on enrolments in higher education.
- **Children Looked After dataset** – containing data on placements for children in care, including type, duration and location.
- **Children in Need dataset** – containing data on children who have been allocated a social worker.

The linkages between these datasets (see Figure 2.1) enabled us to build a very detailed account of the young people in the cohort, from the age of 11 through to 20 years and 7 months. The source of the individual variables used in the analysis can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 2.1 Data framework



2.1.3 A note on anonymisation

In preparing this report, the Office for National Statistics guidelines on avoiding accidental disclosure of personal data have been followed. Among other measures, all totals have been rounded up to the nearest 5 individuals and any numbers under 10 have been suppressed. Percentages have generally been rounded up to one decimal place, but to whole numbers where

there has been a risk of disclosure due to small numbers. This approach has led to some minor totalling errors where subgroup counts have been rounded.

2.2 Qualitative methodology

In this section, we turn to the qualitative strand of the research, where we worked directly with local authorities and other stakeholders to gather the views of service users and service providers. We used these data to consider the risk and protective factors associated with post-care employment journeys, drawing on the experiences and perspectives of care leavers and those involved in supporting them.

Interview data was transcribed and uploaded to the Nvivo analysis package, alongside survey data, for first level thematic analysis. For analysis of the young people's data, this process was accompanied by a full read through of transcripts by peer researchers and a manual identification of key themes to assist with developing the coding framework and case studies. Data were further analysed and collapsed into key themes. Additionally, basic descriptive statistics are used to capture the characteristics of those recruited to the research.

2.2.1 Data collection

The original aim was to recruit six local authorities comprising three matched pairs (see Appendix E for information). We aimed to gather data from the following respondents in each local authority:

- Interviews with
  - Six young people aged 18-24 (2 in stable employment, 2 in precarious employment and 2 NEET for 6+ months in the previous year) (n=36)
  - One leaving care manager (n=6)
  - One virtual school representative (n=6)

- Survey or focus group with
  - Leaving care team (at least three personal advisers (PAs)) (n>18)
  - Foster/residential carers (1 of each) (n>12)

In addition to local authority data, we aimed to consult with national organisations involved with supporting young people's access to education and employment.

Despite establishing contact with 12 local authorities, only five were able to participate. Reasons for non-participation included existing commitments (e.g. Ofsted inspections and involvement in other research) and the impact of Covid-19. In three cases, work had already taken place with the local authorities, but they subsequently withdrew due to issues noted above. Overall, 71 respondents contributed qualitative data, 69 from five local authorities and a further two from national organisations. Data gathered from the local authorities included individual interviews with 44 participants, surveys with 24 personal advisors and one carer focus group comprising four carers. There were difficulties with recruiting some respondent groups, with carer responses available from one local authority only. To supplement the data, an additional group of respondents (EET workers) was included. Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of local authority participants for the qualitative strand.

Table 2.1: Participants in the qualitative strand

LA	Young Person	Leaving Care lead	Virtual School	PAs survey	Carers focus group	Other: EET worker	Total LA responses
1	5	2*	1	11	0	1	20
2	5	1	1	3	0	1	11
3	6	1	1	3	0	1	12
4	7*	1	1	2	1	1	13
5	5	2*	0	5	0	1	13
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28	7	4	24	1	5	69

Source: Study data ** An additional interview was carried out with this type of respondent*

2.2.2 Introducing the local authorities

The local authorities were selected on the basis of matching criteria (see Appendix E), which incorporated a range of factors including the proportion of care leavers who were NEET (High and Low). A brief anonymised overview of each local authority is presented here:

- **LA1.** In 2019, 25-30% of 19 to 21-year-old care leavers were NEET. The Ofsted inspection of services report rated the experiences of care leavers as 'good'. A number of positive areas were highlighted such as education being actively promoted and the virtual school being successful in ensuring young people reach their potential. However, an above average number of young people consistently missing school was noted as an area for improvement.

- **LA2.** In 2019, 40-45% of 19 to 21-year-old care leavers were NEET. The latest inspection of children's services rated the experience of care leavers as 'good'. Recent reorganisation means personal advisors spend more time with their care leavers and provide better support. In addition, young people were being supported with driving lessons and given priority bidding for council tenancies. However, young people still require more support from their personal advisors and there was limited opportunity for work experience and apprenticeships.

- **LA3.** In 2019, 35-40% of 19 to 21-year-old care leavers were NEET. In the last Ofsted inspection, the experiences of care leavers were reported as being 'inadequate'. The virtual school was highlighted as performing well, but post-16 engagement rates were low. LA3 was found to have high wait times for mental health services and many young people placed in unsuitable accommodation. Furthermore, fewer than half of children in long-term care had a placement for more than two years, which is disruptive and unsettling.

- **LA4.** In 2019, 45-50% of 19 to 21-year-old care leavers were NEET. LA4 received an inspection of services report by Ofsted where the experience of care leavers was rated as 'good'. It highlighted support with EET and that young people taking up an apprenticeship do not have to pay council tax. Most care leavers are in accommodation that meets their needs. An area for improvement is that care leavers do not have the support they need to access and maintain engagement with EET.

- **LA5.** In 2019, 50-55% of 19 to 21-year-old care leavers were NEET. LA5 received an inspection of services where the experience of care leavers was rated as 'requiring

improvement'. The virtual school has been highlighted as effective due to its high aspirations for the progress and well-being of children in its care. Children in care in LA5 achieve educational outcomes that are in line with children in care nationally. Another positive is that care leavers are exempt from paying council tax.

2.2.3 Introducing the young people who took part in the research

Young people who met the study criteria (aged 18+, care-experienced, in stable or precarious employment or NEET) were identified by local authority leaving care teams. No other characteristics were specified, though we asked for a mix of age and gender. An information leaflet (designed by the study's young people's steering group) and consent form were distributed to young people selected by the leaving care teams. A total of 39 young people were referred to the study, having consented to being contacted by the researchers. Subsequent to attempts to establish contact and set up interviews, 28 young people were successfully interviewed (26 via telephone and two in person). Interviews often took more than one month to arrange, partly due to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of those who did not proceed to interview, some did not respond to contact and some were 'no-shows' at scheduled interview appointments. Up to five attempts at contact were made by the researchers before seeking support from the leaving care team to either assist with contact or to refer another young person.

2.2.4 Demographic characteristics

The majority of care leaver participants were female (71%, n=20)[12]. The mean age for the sample at time of interview was 20 years old and ranged from 18 to 24. Six (21%) young people chose to indicate that they were parents; all of these were young women. The proportion of young parents in the sample, though a likely underestimate as it does not include young fathers, is representative of national data that suggests around one-fifth (22%) of young women leaving care are young mothers (National Audit Office, 2015)[13].

Table 2.2: Characteristics of care leaver participants, by local authority

LA	Gender			Age at interview							Parent at time of interview
	Female	Male	Prefer not to say	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
1	4	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	2
2	3	2	0	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	1
3	5	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	1
4	5	2	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	1	2
5	3	2	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0
Total	20	7	1	3	4	10	3	3	4	1	6

Source: Study data

[12] This likely reflects a greater willingness to participate in the research amongst women, as each local authority approached roughly equal numbers of men and women. This is not representative of the care leaver population (where men slightly predominate), but we have attempted to ensure that male voices are adequately included in the analysis. No specific differences in experiences or views were identified between young men and women.

[13] Research suggests care-experienced young people are at least six times more likely to become young parents than young people more generally (Weston, 2013). National estimates suggest that the under-18 conception rate in England and Wales was 2% in 2014 (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

2.2.5 Care history

All young people had formally left care at the time of interview. With the exception of two young people (7%) who were 'staying put'[14] at the time of interview, all others had moved on from their care placement. The mean age at leaving their final care placement was 17.6 (range: 16 to 19 years) with 28% (n=7) moving on before their 18th birthday.

The mean age at first entry to care was 11.3 years (range: 3 to 17 years), with over two-thirds having entered care aged 10 to 15, representative of national data for the most common age-range for entering care (Department for Education, 2019c). Some young people in the sample may have had several care episodes so it was not possible to calculate the total time in care, however, the age at entry and age at exit showed that the mean length of time they had been known to children's services was six years.

The mean number of care placements experienced by the sample was four (range: 1 to 18). There was a degree of placement instability within the sample, with over half (52%, n=13) reporting four or more placements whilst in care. When the time known to services was considered, two of the seven who had been known to children's services for three years or less and eleven of the eighteen who had been known for more than three years had experienced four or more placements.

The majority (88%, n=21) of the sample had lived in foster placements, and one-third (32%, n=8) of respondents had lived in residential care at some point during their care experience. Two (7%) had also lived in kinship care settings. At the time of interview, most (85%, n=23) young people were living in independent accommodation. This reflects national statistics and existing evidence, which suggests that the most common type of accommodation for care leavers aged 19 and over is independent living in a house or flat (Department of Education 2020; Dixon et al 2020). Two young people (8%) were in supported accommodation, two (8%) were 'staying put' with former carers and one (4%) was living with family.

2.2.6 Employment status

Young people were selected for the study according to their employment status group (i.e. stable employment, precarious employment, or NEET for six months or more in the previous year). As shown in Table 2.3, most (68%, n=19) young people were in employment or education at the time of interview, whilst around one-third (32%, n=9) reported that they were NEET.

In seven cases (25%), however, their circumstances had changed by the time the interviews took place, leading to a change in grouping. For example, two in the NEET group, three in the stable employment group and two in precarious employment were in education by the time of the interview. Furthermore, some young people had recently lost their job or college place due to Covid-19 lockdown or other circumstances, and some had subsequently taken up a college place or entered work.

[14] Staying Put is an arrangement by which care leavers can remain with foster carers beyond the age of 18. Formalised via the Children and Families Act 2014, all local authorities must make this option available to young people leaving care: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above.

Table 2.3: Participants' employment status at time of interview, by local authority

LA	Stable employment group	Precarious employment group	NEET group	Education (additional group)
1	1	1	2	1
2	1	2	1	1
3	3	0	2	1
4	2	0	3	2
5	1	1	1	2
Total	8	4	9	7

Source: study data

2.2.7 Methodological limitations of the qualitative strand

There were several specific challenges and limitations for the qualitative strand of the study, which it is useful to note:

- The study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and this impacted severely on timescales for negotiating access with local authorities, who were understandably having to prioritise the immediate wellbeing of young people over participation in research.
- The pandemic also impacted on the availability of individual staff to participate in the study; this was also negatively affected by Ofsted inspections, key staff turnover, and involvement in other research.
- The prominence of the pandemic saw a shift in focus during interviews from the longer-term/enduring challenges and facilitators to participation in EET towards the immediate challenges of the pandemic and associated lockdowns.
- The impact of the pandemic on EET participation impacted the study sample – e.g. groupings often changed between recruitment into the study and interview.
- The extended timescales for data collection meant that some local authority circumstances had altered between recruitment, interviews and the completion of the report. For example, some planned EET support activities were placed on hold during the pandemic lockdowns and therefore were not captured during interviews. Some of these programmes will have re-commenced since interview and are therefore outside the data collection timeframe.

3. Quantitative findings – cohort profile

3.1 Groups of interest

The linked dataset was subdivided into five mutually-exclusive groups of interest which will be used throughout this report, of which care leavers are the principal group of interest:

1. **Care leavers.** This comprised young people who were in care for a minimum combined period of 13 weeks straddling their 16th birthday and who therefore met the definition of a 'care leaver' under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000[15]. This group was therefore entitled to a package of 'leaving care' support from their Local Authority, including assistance from a personal adviser. This support ended at 21, unless the young person was in education or training, when it could be extended until 25[16]. The size of this group was 3,850 individuals.

2. **Late care-experienced.** This group comprised young people who were in care for significant periods after their 14th birthday, but who did not appear in the 'care leaver' group. This included those (a) those with lengthy periods of care that ended prior to their 16th birthday, usually due to family reunification, (b) those with one or more relatively short periods of care between their 14th and 16th birthday, that combined exceeded 13 weeks, (c) those entering care after their 16th birthday, who remained in care for more than 13 weeks, and (d) those who were in care for any period between their 14th and 16th birthday, left care, and then returned into care after their 16th birthday and remained in care for more than 13 weeks. This group was not generally entitled full leaving care support, but some individuals may have met the criteria as a 'qualifying care leaver'[17]. The size of this group was 1,900 individuals.

3. **Other care-experienced.** This group comprised young people who were previously in care but did not meet either of the above definitions. This included (a) those in care prior to their 14th birthday, but not after, usually due to family reunification, and (b) those in care for less than 13 weeks after their 14th birthday. As comprehensive national records only begin in 2003/04, this effectively includes only those who were in care at some point after the age of 8. This group was not generally entitled full leaving care support, but some individuals may have met the criteria as a 'qualifying care leaver'. The size of this group was 2,650 individuals.

4. **Formerly in need.** This group comprised young people who were designated as being 'in need' from 2009/10 (when comprehensive national records began), but who were not in care at any point after the age of 8. The designation of being 'in need' means that they had been allocated a social worker due to concerns about their welfare, including those with severe disability. The size of this group was 26,160 individuals.

5. **General population.** The group comprised those young people who were not classified in the other four groups – i.e. all young people neither in care after the age of 8, nor designed as in need after the age of 14. Due to the absence of national care records prior to 2003/04, this group will include those young people who were only in care prior to the age of 8, including

[15] For computational reasons, a small number of individuals whose 13 weeks in care were not continuous were excluded from this category and appear in the 'late care-experienced' group.
[16] From 2018 onwards, support from personal adviser was extended to the age of 25 for all care leavers.
[17] See https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/1870-CV-SortedSupported-Guide-new2.pdf for an explanation of the various legal statuses that care-experienced young people may hold.

those adopted from care; while no numbers are available, these will form a tiny minority (less than 1%) of the group as a whole. The size of this group was 495,880 individuals.

3.2 Demographic profile

Table 3.1 below shows the demographic profile of the five groups of interest using the data recorded at KS4. Members of the late care-experienced and formerly in need groups were slightly more likely to be female than the general population. Young people of mixed ethnicity and Black young people were over-represented in all four care and need groups relative to the general population, whereas Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people were less likely to be found in them. English was more likely to be an additional language among the other care-experienced group, but less likely among the other care and need groups – notably so among care leavers.

Table 3.1: Demographic profile as recorded at KS4

	Care leavers	Late care-experienced	Other care-experienced	Formerly in need	General population
Gender:					
Female	48.7%	50.6%	49.2%	55.0%	48.7%
Male	51.3%	49.4%	50.8%	45.0%	51.3%
Ethnicity[18]:					
White British	81.9%	76.1%	73.3%	80.5%	79.7%
Black	4.9%	6.4%	8.3%	4.6%	4.1%
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	2.9%	5.0%	7.5%	5.6%	7.6%
Mixed ethnicity	6.3%	6.9%	5.6%	4.7%	3.4%
Other/unknown	3.9%	5.6%	5.3%	4.6%	5.1%
Language:					
English as primary language	96.0%	91.6%	87.8%	91.7%	89.6%
English as an additional language	4.0%	8.4%	12.2%	8.3%	10.4%
Free school meals:					
Eligible within last six years	46.9%	64.6%	66.3%	61.0%	22.4%
Not eligible within last six years	53.1%	35.4%	33.7%	39.0%	77.6%
Neighbourhood deprivation:					
IDACI score in top quartile	23.5%	39.2%	44.3%	38.7%	23.7%
IDACI score in second quartile	28.2%	27.3%	28.2%	29.3%	24.4%
IDACI score in third quartile	22.9%	17.6%	15.9%	17.5%	22.8%
IDACI score in bottom quartile	25.5%	15.9%	11.6%	14.6%	29.2%

[18] The ethnic groupings used in this report represent a compromise between providing meaningful coverage of diversity and the need to ensure that there are sufficient individuals in each grouping for statistical analysis. We appreciate that significant nuance is lost in this process and that there are likely to be important differences within these categories as well as between them.

Young people in the late care-experienced, other care-experienced and formerly in need groups were substantially more likely to be drawn from areas of economic deprivation (using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) and household with low incomes (using Free School Meals eligibility). The profile for care leavers was more like the general population, which likely reflects that foster carers are less likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods.

3.3 Educational experiences

Table 3.2 below summarises the educational experiences of the five groups of interest.

Table 3.2: KS3 and KS4 educational experiences

	Care leavers	Late care-experienced	Other care-experienced	Formerly in need	General population
Special educational needs (KS4):					
None	27.4%	31.7%	37.6%	48.3%	80.2%
School Action	10.2%	13.9%	17.1%	17.1%	11.9%
School Action Plus or Statement	62.4%	54.5%	45.3%	34.6%	7.9%
School type (KS4):					
Mainstream school	75.9%	77.3%	82.8%	89.5%	99.1%
Special school	24.1%	22.7%	17.2%	10.5%	0.9%
Attendance (KS3/4):					
Ever designated as persistent absentee	26.0%	42.7%	41.2%	38.6%	9.3%
Never designated as persistent absentee	74.0%	57.3%	58.8%	61.4%	90.7%
Exclusion (KS3/4):					
Ever excluded (permanent or fixed term)	39.0%	49.4%	44.4%	34.6%	12.3%
Never excluded (permanent or fixed term)	61.0%	50.6%	55.6%	65.4%	87.7%
Pupil referral unit (KS3/4):					
Ever in a pupil referral unit	1.0%	1.6%	1.0%	0.7%	0.1%
Never in a pupil referral unit	99.0%	98.4%	99.0%	99.3%	99.9%
Alternative provision (KS3/4):					
Ever in alternative provision	2.8%	2.1%	1.3%	0.9%	0.1%
Never in alternative provision	97.2%	97.9%	98.7%	99.1%	99.9%
Changed schools (KS4):					
Yes	8.3%	11.7%	8.7%	6.4%	1.4%
No	91.7%	88.3%	91.3%	93.6%	98.6%
Changed schools mid-year (KS4):					
Yes	14.6%	14.8%	14.3%	11.0%	4.6%
No	85.4%	85.2%	85.7%	89.0%	95.4%

All four care and need groups were substantially more likely to have special educational needs than the general population. This was most marked for the care leaver group, within which 72.6% of young people had an identified need, compared to just 19.8% in the general population; these were predominately in the highest need categories. This was reflected in their attendance in special schools, with nearly one-quarter doing so compared to less than one percent of the general population.

There was a strong association between the care and need groups and educational disruption. Members of all four groups were more likely to have been designated as persistent absentees, to have been excluded and to have attended a Pupil Referral Unit and/or alternative provision at some point in KS3 or KS4. The care leaver group was somewhat less likely to be persistent absentees or to have been excluded than the other care and need groups, potentially reflecting a more stable long-term care environment.

All four care and need groups were also substantially over-represented among those young people who switch schools during KS4 – either between or during school years. For example, care leavers were around six times more likely than the general population to change schools in KS4 and around three times more likely to do so midway through the year. This, in part, will be due to changes in the location of care placements and/or periods of reunification with the young person's birth family.

3.4 Educational outcomes

Table 3.3 summarises the KS2 and KS4 educational outcomes for the five groups of interest[19]. Differences between the four care and need groups and the general population can readily be seen as early as KS2. Attainment for the care and need groups is markedly lower in both English and mathematics with more young people assessed at Level 3 and fewer at Levels 4 and 5. It is also notable that members of the care and need groups were considerably more likely to not have been assessed at KS2. This situation can arise for several reasons, including absence from school or having profound learning difficulties or disabilities that mean that the young person is unable to meaningfully engage with the assessment process. Nearly one-third of care leavers had no KS2 attainment recorded; the proportions are lower for the other care and need groups, but still considerably higher than for the general population.

Similar patterns were found at KS4. Only 20% of care leavers attained five GCSE A* to C grades or equivalent including English and mathematics, compared to 62% among the general population. The lowest attainment at KS4 was among the late care-experienced students, with an average points score of 232 and only 15% attaining five GCSE A* to C grades or equivalent including English and mathematics. This likely reflects the educational and social disruption associated with entering and/or leaving care during KS4, compared to the care leavers and other care-experienced students. The group of young people who were formerly in need had somewhat better outcomes than the three care groups, but still substantially below those for the general population. It is also notable that around two-thirds of the care groups and one-half of the formerly in need group were not able to attain either English or mathematics at A* to C grades; the equivalent proportion in the

[19] It is important to remember here that individual care-experienced young people may or may not have been in care at the time of their KS2 or KS4 attainment – our analysis is inherently historical, looking backwards from their known status entering adulthood. A full exploration of the relationship between the timing of entry into care and school attainment is beyond the scope of this study (but see Sebba *et al.*, 2015).

general population was just one-fifth. These findings for KS4 were broadly consistent with Sebba *et al.* (2015) and Berridge *et al.* (2020).

Table 3.3: KS2 and KS4 outcomes, by groups of interest

	Care leavers	Late care-experienced	Other care-experienced	Formerly in need	General population
KS2 English:					
Level 2	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%	1.3%	0.5%
Level 3	21.9%	22.1%	23.0%	21.3%	12.7%
Level 4	36.2%	38.9%	40.5%	43.6%	48.0%
Level 5	9.7%	10.0%	11.0%	16.0%	34.4%
Other/not known[20]	30.6%	27.7%	24.0%	17.8%	4.4%
KS2 Maths:					
Level 2	1.7%	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	0.8%
Level 3	24.3%	24.6%	25.8%	24.6%	15.6%
Level 4	34.1%	36.5%	38.7%	41.0%	45.7%
Level 5	8.5%	8.8%	10.0%	14.5%	33.4%
Other/not known	31.5%	28.0%	23.8%	18.2%	4.5%
GCSE (and equivalent) thresholds:					
5+ A* to C inc. English and Maths	20%	15%	20%	27%	62%
5+ A* to C exc. English and Maths	25%	20%	24%	27%	24%
5+ A* to G	24%	24%	23%	23%	12%
1+ A* to G	16%	22%	19%	14%	2%
No passes	*	1%	1%	1%	*
None attempted	10%	11%	8%	5%	*
GCSE (and equivalent) points:					
Total points (mean for group)	289	232	280	333	495
KS4 English and Maths:					
A* to C English and Maths	19.9%	15.9%	20.4%	27.9%	62.4%
A* to C English only	7.1%	5.9%	6.9%	8.4%	7.7%
A* to C Maths only	9.3%	7.2%	9.0%	9.5%	9.8%
Neither	63.7%	71.0%	63.7%	54.1%	20.1%

* suppressed due to very low numbers

[20] This grouping includes both young people who missed taking the test (e.g. due to illness), those recording scores below the measurable level and those whose ability was felt to be below the recordable level. They are combined here to ensure that the groups are sufficiently large for analysis.

Table 3.4 explores post-16 participation in education, where the four care and need groups had distinct patterns. They were between two and three times more likely than the general population to not participate in any way. Where they did participate, this was considerably more likely to be through a further education college. For example, 36.5% of care leavers attended school (either alone or in addition to a further education college), compared to 72.0% of the general population.

Table 3.4 also summarises outcomes against the thresholds associated with the National Qualifications Framework[21], where we continue to see strong differences between the groups of interest. Among care leavers, 42.9% had not achieved Level 2 by the age of 21 and 74.3% had not achieved Level 3. As with the KS4 outcomes, the figures were lower still for the late care-experienced group, at 54.1% and 82.8% respectively, compared to 7.2% and 28.1% in the general population. This was consistent with the proportion of the care and need groups who had only accessed further education courses at Level 1 or below; while they were making extensive use of further education, for many this was for functional skills rather than specific vocational pathways.

Table 3.4: Post-16 educational outcomes, by groups of interest

	Care leavers	Late care-experienced	Other care-experienced	Formerly in need	General population
Post-compulsory education:					
School KS5	19.9%	16.1%	17.5%	18.1%	36.8%
FE college	51.3%	55.8%	49.7%	45.9%	21.8%
Both school and FE college[22]	16.6%	11.6%	16.2%	21.6%	35.2%
Neither	12.1%	16.5%	16.6%	14.3%	6.2%
Achieved Level 2:					
At 16 or earlier	49.0%	38.0%	48.3%	59.3%	89.0%
At 17 or 18	6.5%	6.3%	6.3%	6.7%	3.2%
At 19, 20 or 21	1.6%	1.5%	2.0%	1.9%	0.7%
Never	42.9%	54.1%	43.4%	32.0%	7.2%
Achieved Level 3:					
At 18 or earlier	22.6%	14.2%	23.2%	31.7%	68.0%
At 19, 20 or 21	3.1%	3.0%	3.5%	4.1%	3.9%
Never	74.3%	82.8%	73.3%	64.2%	28.1%
Only ever studied at Level 1 or lower:					
Yes	39.3%	47.2%	39.6%	30.9%	10.9%
No	60.7%	52.8%	60.4%	69.1%	89.1%
Ever studied at Level 4+:					
Yes	13.3%	8.8%	13.9%	18.1%	46.2%
No	86.7%	91.2%	86.1%	81.9%	53.8%

[21] See https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels.
[22] This may be concurrently or, more usually, sequentially.

Finally, 46.2% of the general population studied at Level 4 or above before the age of 21, the vast majority of which was in the context of higher education providers. Only 8.8% of the late care-experienced group did so, compared to 13.3% of care leavers, 13.8% of other care-experienced young people and 18.1% of those formerly in need.

3.5 Summary

The descriptive profiles of the groups of interest show a clear set of patterns that are consistent over time. These can be summarised as follows:

- The **care leaver group** had the lowest attainment at KS2 and were the most likely not to have recorded results. They were also the most likely to have been assessed as having special educational needs. However, there were signs of increased stability from KS3 onwards, with a lower propensity for being absent and being excluded than some of the other care and need groups, although around one-quarter did move schools at least once in the two years prior to their GCSE examinations. The average KS4 results for this group were somewhat stronger than for the other two care groups and this trajectory was carried through into the post-16 period. It is important to note, however, that by the age of 21, care leavers were nearly six times less likely to have acquired Level 2 qualifications than the general population and nearly three times less likely to have acquired Level 3 qualifications; clear and pervasive educational inequalities persist into adulthood.

- The **other care-experienced group** of young people who had permanently left care prior to KS4 had a broadly comparable profile to the care leaver group. The group had a lower instance of special educational needs, but a greater likelihood of being absent and/or excluded; however, their KS4 and post-16 outcomes were almost identical to care leavers. Young people in this group were the most likely to come from the most deprived neighbourhoods and households overall.

- The **late care-experienced group** of young people who were in care during KS4, but who did not meet the criteria to be a care leaver, had the least strong educational outcomes overall. Their mean GCSE points score was nearly 20% lower than for care leavers, they were the least likely to attain A* to C grades in English and mathematics, the most likely to not acquire Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications and the least likely to study at Level 4+. This was despite having lower levels of special educational needs than the other two care groups. This suggests that the disruption of entering and/or leaving care during KS4 had a profound impact on outcomes which, in the absence of targeted support, continued to be felt up to 21.

- As might be expected, the **formerly in need group** of young people who had been designated as a 'child in need' at some point during KS4 occupied an intermediate position between the three care groups and the general population. They tended to be drawn from deprived neighbourhoods and households and to have high rates of special educational needs, although these were lower than for the three care groups. The situation was similar for attendance issues and experience of school exclusion, with KS4 outcomes that were notably better than for the three care groups, but still considerably lower than those in the general population.

4. Quantitative findings – outcomes in early adulthood

4.1 Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset

The Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset[23] represents a bringing together of data on education, employment and benefit receipt at the level of the individual. Data is presented in April-to-March tax years, which leaves it out of temporal alignment with the National Pupil Database and Individualised Learner Records, which are based on a September-to-August academic year. To reconcile this situation and make the best use of the available LEO data (up to the 2016/17 tax year), an individualised census point was adopted for the cohort – the 15th day of the month in which the young person reached 20 years and 7 months, representing the latest age at which we had access to data for all young people. This point (henceforth 'census date') was then used as the basis to determine their activity.

The LEO dataset has many strengths, but there are also important weaknesses and lacunae in the data. For example, while it records periods of employment and annualised income, it is neither possible to determine which income relates to which employment period, nor the hours worked to attract the income. In other words, someone working full-time on a low hourly rate and someone working part-time on a high hourly rate would present identically in the dataset. With self-employment, only an annualised income figure is available, with no information about when or how this was earned. These features reflect that the origin of the data is from tax records and that the data have been co-opted into service for examining educational outcomes. Furthermore, no information on income from benefits is recorded.

Another key weakness in the LEO dataset is that the unit of analysis is the individual and it takes no account of family structures. It excludes, for example, unearned income (e.g. gifts and other support from parents), but, more importantly for this study, it does not reflect whether the individual is in a mutually-supportive relationship such as a marriage, civil partnership or other long-term arrangement where income is shared within the family unit. Taking the example of a married couple where one is working full-time and the other is caring for children, the latter would appear as being without income in the LEO dataset if their spouse's income was above the threshold for caring benefits. Similarly, child support payments are not recorded within the LEO dataset.

These caveats notwithstanding – and we will return to others shortly – the LEO dataset does provide scope to categorise young people's activities into broad groupings that reflect their status within the labour market. In order to manage complexity, seven mutually exclusive categories were constructed:

1. **Ever studied at Level 4+.** This category was not based on the individual census date, but reflected whether the individual had ever studied at Level 4 or above at any point up to the 2016/17 academic year. In over 95% of cases, this was in the context of higher education, but it did include a small number of individuals in further education colleges (e.g. foundation degrees or English as a Foreign Language courses). This group was specifically isolated and 'forced' to be mutually exclusive for two reasons. Firstly, they were high educational attainers and therefore considered to be at relatively low risk of being NEET in the long-term – i.e. not a prime focus for this study. Secondly, their employment records tended to be very complex,

[23] See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-to-access-the-longitudinal-education-outcomes-leo-dataset.

reflecting short periods of part-time and holiday work associated with being a student. This group comprised 234,680 individuals.

2. **In stable work.** This category sought to include those individuals who had a reliable and consistent source of income that provided for at least their basic needs. An annual income threshold of £12,000 was adopted, broadly representing full-time work at the national minimum wage for a 20-year-old in the relevant period. The category therefore includes individuals who were in work on the census date with a period of employment of at least three months, whose annual income exceeded £12,000. It also included those who had a self-employment record for the 2016/17 tax year with an annual income of over £12,000. The very small numbers of individuals who reached the income threshold only by combining employment and self-employment income were not included in this category on the basis that this pattern suggests a degree of precarity. This group comprised 108,335 individuals.

3. **In precarious work.** This category sought to capture those individuals who were in (or had recently been in) work, but where the data suggested that their work pattern was unsettled or may not reliably meet their basic needs. This included (a) where their annual income was below the threshold outlined above, (b) where their employment contract on the census date was less than three months, and (c) those in a period of unemployment of less than three months on the census date. Some young people in this category also received state benefits to supplement their income, but the LEO database does not record the level of income received. This group comprised 103,765 individuals.

4. **Economically inactive.** This category captured those young people who were not working on the census date, but who were receiving state benefits that reflected that they were considered unable to work, due to disability and/or caring responsibilities. The benefits used to define this category were *Income Support* and *Employment Support Allowance*. As there is an overlap between disabled people and carers, it was not possible to reliably disaggregate between them based on the records available. This group comprised 25,900 individuals.

5. **Long-term unemployed.** This category contains those young people who were receiving *Jobseeker's Allowance* within a period of unemployment straddling the census date and lasting for more than three months. This group comprised 5,550 individuals.

6. **Studying only.** This category contains those young people who were studying on the census date at Level 3 or below and not recorded as working or receiving benefits. This group comprised 24,510 individuals.

7. **Missing from the dataset.** The final category captured those individuals for whom there was no record in our dataset for the 2016/17 tax year. This is likely to be a heterogeneous group including those living outside the UK, those who are deceased, those with unrecorded income (e.g. from a spouse or parents – see above), some in the criminal justice system and other individuals who were otherwise not working, studying or receiving benefits in the UK at this time. This group comprised 27,690 individuals.

In addition, four subgroups were identified where the young person was studying at Level 3 or below on the census date alongside one of the other activities: stable work, precarious work, economically inactive and long-term unemployed. These were too small to be isolated for separate analysis.

Finally, an aggregated super-categorisation was constructed indicating whether the young person was in education, employment or training (EET). This comprised those who had studied at Level 4+ and those in stable or precarious work, plus those individuals who were economically inactive or long-term unemployed who were also studying. This is somewhat more nuanced than a fixed-point assessment of activity as it allows for more historical information to be taken into account. Conversely, for the remainder of the analysis in this report, we will refer to the remainder of young people (i.e. those economically inactive or long-term unemployed, but not studying) at being NEET. It is important to acknowledge that this definition does not articulate directly with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics, which, for example, would include young people in short-term periods of unemployment or those not working after withdrawing from a Level 4+ course. Furthermore, it is likely that a substantial proportion of the young people missing from the dataset (see above) would also be considered NEET – for example, those who were imprisoned or homeless. However, it is not possible to confidently identify how many with the data available. For these reasons, our calculated figures for NEET are always lower than official figures from the Office for National Statistics or the Department for Education.

Our categorisations are inherently reliant on a degree of simplification and arbitrary assignment (e.g. the three-month threshold for being long-term unemployed). These decisions have been taken with the intention of developing categorisations that are conceptually useful and computationally viable, as well as sufficiently large to be meaningful for multivariate analysis. This latter feature is particularly important with respect to the care and need groups of interest, which are themselves small relative to the general population. We acknowledge, however, that individuals may not always be well represented by the category into which they have been placed. For example, a young person may be just starting a very stable job, but be allocated into the precarious work category as it had not, at the census date, lasted for more than three months. This limitation of the study reflects both the limitations of the LEO dataset and the need to undertake analysis at scale within a very large cohort, where it is impossible to resolve the detail of complex employment records within the resources of this study. Nevertheless, the descriptive statistics that follow strongly suggest a good degree of construct validity, with the categories reflecting the demographic and educational relationships that were anticipated *a priori*.

We begin reporting the findings in Section 4.2 in the form of descriptive statistics, contrasting the outcomes at 20 years and 7 months across the five groups of interest defined in Section 4.1. In Section 4.3, we move on to multivariate analysis to explore the explanatory role of the educational, demographic and care experience variables in our dataset.

4.2 Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months

4.2.1 Descriptive statistics

Appendix B contains an extensive bivariate analysis between the seven outcomes defined in the previous section and the range of demographic and educational variables employed in Section 3 for the whole dataset of 530,440 individuals. In general, more positive outcomes were strongly associated with higher levels of educational attainment and engagement in post-compulsory education, while less positive ones were associated with deprivation, special educational needs and educational disruption.

Specifically, studying at Level 4+ was more common among women and ethnic minority communities, and associated with lower levels of deprivation, an absence of special educational

needs, an undisrupted schooling, high attainment at KS2 and KS4 and post-16 education in school. Being in stable work was more prevalent among men, White British young people and those with mid-range attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4, and post-16 education in a further education college or none. Black and Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people were less likely to be in stable work.

Being in precarious work was associated with the White British and mixed ethnic communities, receipt of free school meals, higher neighbourhood deprivation and special educational needs. Young people with this outcome were more likely to have had a disrupted schooling and low attainment at KS2 and KS4; as with the stable work group, post-16 education was most usually in a further education college or none.

Economic inactivity (due to disability and/or caring) was strongly associated with special educational needs, particularly at the higher levels. Women and young people from the White British and mixed ethnic communities were more likely to be economically inactive, which was also associated with free school meals, neighbourhood deprivation, school disruption, low levels of attainment and post-16 education in a further education college or none. Being in long-term unemployment or studying only had similar patterns and were more prevalent among those who received free school meals, lived in areas with high deprivation, had special educational needs and experienced school disruption, as well as those with low levels of attainment at KS2 and KS4; additionally, more men were studying only.

The group of young people who were missing from the dataset were more likely to be men and the phenomenon was also associated with free school meals, neighbourhood deprivation, special educational needs, school disruption, low levels of attainment and having no post-16 education or solely attending a further education college. For the purposes of this study, this group were analysed as a specific outcome – they were not 'missing' in the sense of there being nothing known about them, but rather that they were known to be absent from the relevant datasets.

4.2.2 Outcomes for groups of interest

Table 4.1 explores the relationship between the four care and need groups defined in Section 4.1 and the outcomes for young people at 20 years and 7 months.

Table 4.1: Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months, by groups of interest

	Ever studied at Level 4+	Stable work	Precarious work	Economically inactive	Long-term unemployed	Studying only	Missing from the dataset
Care leavers	13.3%	8.7%	20.8%	38.8%	5.7%	6.0%	6.7%
Late care-experienced	8.8%	6.5%	19.2%	42.0%	6.2%	7.6%	9.8%
Other care-experienced	13.9%	10.2%	22.9%	29.0%	4.9%	9.0%	10.1%
Formerly in need	18.1%	14.4%	26.0%	22.3%	3.4%	7.0%	8.7%
General population	46.2%	20.9%	19.2%	3.4%	0.8%	4.4%	5.0%

As can be seen, all four care and need groups were substantially less likely to have studied at Level 4+, in proportions that are broadly consistent with the official figures (Department for Education, 2021a). Among those in work, the four care and need groups were markedly less likely to be in stable work and more likely to be in precarious work than the general population.

Perhaps the most notable relationship is between the care and need groups and being economically inactive, as represented by the receipt of relevant benefits. Just 3.4% of the general population are in this category, compared to 38.8% of care leavers. The proportion is somewhat higher among the late care-experienced group (42.0%), but lower among other young people who were care-experienced (29.0%) or formerly in need (26.0%).

A similar pattern is found with respect to being long-term unemployed. Among care leavers, 5.7% were out of work for a period of at least three months on the census date, along with 6.2% of the late care-experienced group; this compared to 0.8% in the general population. The proportion who were long-term unemployed was somewhat lower in the other care-experienced (4.9%) and formerly in need (3.4%) groups, but still very substantially higher than the general population.

Studying only (at Level 3 or below) on the census date was more prevalent among the care and need groups (between 6.0% and 9.0%) than the general population (4.4%). Young people in the care and need groups were also substantially more likely to be missing from the dataset.

It is notable that outcomes for the late care-experienced group were generally less positive than for care leavers, particularly with respect to having studied at Level 4+, being in stable work and being economically inactive. We will return to this finding in Section 7. Conversely, the other care-experienced and formerly in need groups had outcomes that were generally more positive than care leavers, albeit that they were substantially less good than among the general population.

4.2.3 Groups of interest and NEET

Table 4.2 collates the data for young people who were NEET on the census date, excluding those who were missing from the dataset.

Table 4.2: Proportion of NEETs at 20 years and 7 months, by groups of interest

	Excluding Missing (N=469,980)		Excluding Missing and Ever L4+ (N=241,070)	
	Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	In Education, Employment or Training (EET)	Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	In Education, Employment or Training (EET)
Care leavers	28.6%	71.5%	33.3%	66.7%
Late care-experienced	33.5%	66.5%	37.1%	62.9%
Other care-experienced	24.1%	76.0%	28.5%	71.5%
Formerly in need	16.8%	83.2%	21.0%	79.0%
General population	2.4%	97.6%	4.6%	95.4%

As noted in Section 4.1, it is important to remember that the definition of NEET we use differs slightly from that used elsewhere. Within our dataset, the late care-experienced group was the most likely to be NEET (33.5%), followed by the care leavers (28.6%), other care-experienced young people (24.1%) and those formerly in need (16.8%). The equivalent figure for the general population was 2.4%. The second set of columns also excludes those who had ever studied at Level 4+ (in addition to those whose activity on the census date was not recorded) and a similar pattern emerges.

4.2.4 A note on differences with figures published by the Department for Education

As noted in Section 1.7, the Department for Education (DfE) publishes annual figures for the proportion of care leavers who are NEET, based on surveys undertaken by local authorities – often referred to as the 'SSDA903' dataset. Our figures contrast with these figures in several key ways. Firstly, the overall proportion of NEET care leavers is lower in our figures – we have calculated 28.6% to be NEET, compared to 41% for 21-year-olds in the official figures for 2016/17 (Department for Education, 2017). Secondly, our calculations show that the majority of NEET care leavers are economically inactive due to disability and/or caring responsibilities, whereas the official figures show the majority of care leavers as being NEET for 'other' reasons. It is impossible to fully reconcile these differences within the scope of this study, but the reasons are likely to include the following:

- Our dataset explicitly excludes care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied asylum seeking children as we do not have their educational history from KS2 onwards and they therefore cannot be included in the analytical strategy used in this study. As this group are generally legally prevented from working until their asylum claim is resolved, they are disproportionately likely to be NEET in early adulthood and particularly for 'other' reasons. They comprised 20.8% of young people in care aged over 16 in 2016/17 (Department for Education, 2017), so this would have a substantial impact on the SSDA903 figures.
- Similarly, we have excluded other young people who migrated to England after the age of 11 and who might be at greater risk of being NEET due to language needs or other challenges with moving into work or study in adulthood.
- We have treated small numbers of young people who were unemployed for short periods (less than three months) as being within our precarious work category in order to smooth rapid transitions into and out of work or study. These young people would most likely be coded as NEET for 'other' reasons in the SSDA903 figures.
- As noted in Table 4.1, 6.7% of care leavers were missing from our dataset – i.e. they were not recorded as studying, working or receiving benefits in the relevant year. Some of these will likely have been NEET for diverse reasons including imprisonment, homelessness or serious illness, while others may have been working or studying outside the UK. It is likely that local authorities would have survey information on some of these young people and therefore be able to allocate them appropriately in the SSDA903 dataset.
- In order to manage the complexity of records for young people engaging with Level 4+ study, we have assumed that they are never NEET. In reality, a small number may be NEET for periods after finishing or withdrawing from a course or may become economically inactive due to caring responsibilities, disability or illness.
- Conversely, the SSDA903 figures also have a missing group of care leavers who are uncontactable or who decline to be contacted by their local authority – around 10.1% of the

total (Department for Education, 2017). In this instance, the data available to us may see them allocated based on their official records of education, work or benefit receipt.

- The SSDA903 figures are based on survey questions asked of young people, whereas our data are based on official administrative records. The former may be subject to misunderstanding or various forms of bias – e.g. what constitutes a disability or the underlying reasons for a young person not being in work.

In summary, our figures and those produced by from the SSDA903 data are calculated on a different basis, include different young people and have different sets of limitations. They should not, therefore, be treated as directly comparable, although the differences between them may yield some insights.

4.2.5 Relationship with KS4 attainment

In this section, we explore the interrelationship between attainment at KS4, the groups of interest and outcomes at 20 years and 7 months. Table 4.3 presents data for young people who attained fewer than five GCSE passes at A* to C. As can be seen, few have been able to access study at Level 4+, although the proportion in the general population (7.8%) is substantially higher than for the care and need groups (between 2.5% and 3.0%). Similarly, low attaining young people from the general population (23.6%) are considerably more likely to be in stable work compared to the care and need groups (between 4.4% and 10.3%). Conversely, low attaining young people in the care and need groups were more likely to be economically inactive (between 33.6% and 51.3%) or long-term unemployed (between 4.9% and 6.8%) than the general population (10.8% and 2.8%, respectively). There are therefore quite distinct patterns in outcomes even among young people with broadly similar KS4 attainment. This will, in part, be due to young people in the care and need groups having lower attainment even within this category.

Table 4.3: Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months for young people with fewer than five GCSE passes at A to C, by groups of interest (N=119,310)*

	Ever studied at Level 4 or higher	Stable work	Precarious work	Economically inactive	Long-term unemployed	Studying only	Missing from the dataset
Care leavers	2.5%	5.7%	18.7%	51.3%	6.8%	6.7%	8.3%
Late care-experienced	2.5%	4.4%	17.2%	49.7%	6.5%	8.5%	11.2%
Other care-experienced	3.0%	7.6%	22.0%	38.7%	6.4%	9.9%	12.3%
Formerly in need	3.0%	10.3%	27.7%	33.6%	4.9%	8.7%	11.7%
General population	7.8%	23.6%	35.5%	10.8%	2.8%	9.6%	9.9%

Table 4.4 presents similar data for young people attaining five or more GCSEs at A* to C, but excluding English and/or mathematics. Similar patterns are readily visible, with the general population in this attainment band being more likely to have studied at Level 4+ or to have been in stable work, whereas young people in the care and need groups were disproportionately likely to

be in precarious work or economically inactive. However, these patterns are less pronounced than those for the lower attaining group in Table 5.3 above.

Table 4.4: Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months for young people with five or more GCSE passes at A to C excluding English and/or mathematics, by groups of interest (N=92,570)*

	Ever studied at Level 4 or higher	Stable work	Precarious work	Economically inactive	Long-term unemployed	Studying only	Missing from the dataset
Care leavers	17.7%	14.2%	28.0%	22.8%	5.4%	6.5%	5.4%
Late care-experienced	10.1%	9.7%	28.2%	29.0%	7.3%	7.7%	8.1%
Other care-experienced	17.1%	12.8%	31.8%	17.8%	3.8%	10.2%	6.4%
Formerly in need	18.8%	21.2%	31.0%	13.1%	2.2%	6.6%	7.0%
General population	26.5%	29.6%	27.4%	3.6%	0.9%	6.0%	6.0%

Finally, Table 4.5 presents equivalent data for a high attaining group of young people receiving five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including both English and mathematics. Approaching one-half of the young people in the care and need groups had studied at Level 4+ (with the late care-experienced group as a notable outlier), but this was still markedly lower than the nearly two-thirds of the general population. The proportions in stable work were broadly similar, but members of the care and need groups were still more likely to be in precarious work (between 18.6% and 21.9%) and economically inactive (between 6.4% and 17.9%) than those in the general population (11.7% and 1.0%, respectively).

Table 4.5: Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months for young people with five or more GCSE passes at A to C including English and mathematics, by groups of interest (N=318,590)*

	Ever studied at Level 4 or higher	Stable work	Precarious work	Economically inactive	Long-term unemployed	Studying only	Missing from the dataset
Care leavers	44.3%	13.6%	21.9%	11.9%	2.2%	3.3%	2.9%
Late care-experienced	35.9%	13.3%	20.6%	17.9%	4.3%	3.3%	4.7%
Other care-experienced	45.6%	16.0%	18.6%	7.4%	1.3%	5.2%	5.9%
Formerly in need	46.8%	18.1%	19.5%	6.4%	1.3%	3.9%	4.0%
General population	64.0%	17.7%	11.7%	1.0%	0.2%	2.3%	3.1%

This series of analyses demonstrates the importance of KS4 attainment in explaining outcomes at 20 years and 7 months, but also that membership of one of the care and need groups continued to exert an influence even once attainment was held broadly constant. It was notable, for example, that many young people in the care and need groups remained in precarious work despite strong attainment, although very small numbers were in long-term unemployment compared to around one-in-ten of those with low attainment.

4.3 Multivariate analysis: whole dataset

4.3.1 Analytical approach

In this section, we build on the descriptive statistics outlined above through the use of *binary logistic regression*[24]. This is a technique that allows many potential explanatory variables to be integrated into a single statistical model, whereby the individual contribution that each makes to the outcome of interest can be estimated. This enables us to better understand which potential variables are correlated to the outcome and to explore their interrelationships, especially where the variables are themselves correlated to some degree – e.g. for deprivation and educational attainment.

In this section, we will examine eight sets of regression models representing each of the outcomes at 20 years and 7 months outlined above, plus the combined NEET outcome. Within each set, potential explanatory variables are added in conceptual stages broadly representing time periods for the young people in the dataset, leading to five incremental models for each outcome:

- **Model 1**: KS2 attainment in English and mathematics
- **Model 2**: Model 1 + social variables + school experiences in KS3 and KS4 + school profile
- **Model 3**: Model 2 + KS4 attainment
- **Model 4**: Model 3 + post-16 pathways and attainment
- **Model 5**: Model 4 + membership of the care/need groups

Of greatest interest in this instance is Model 5 as this enables us to explore whether the four care and need groups are statistically more or less likely to have a given outcome once all the other social and educational variables are held constant. In other words, it enables us to determine whether the simple relationships between the care and need groups shown in Table 4.1 persist once other features of the young people's lives are taken into account. For example, this analysis allows us to see whether care leavers are more likely to be NEET due to a combination of deprivation, special education needs and KS4 attainment or whether their presence within the care system exerts its own influence on outcomes beyond this.

Models 1 to 4 are presented here largely as a matter of background interest as they demonstrate how the influence of the social and educational variables changes over time as the young person passes through the education system. It is important to remember that in Models 1 to 4, there is no account taken of the young person's experiences in care or in need (where relevant) and that the relationships indicated by the analysis pertain to all young people in the dataset. We will go on to look in more detail at regression models specifically for the care/need groups in a later section.

[24] A multinomial logistic regression was also attempted, but the model failed to resolve itself fully. This was most likely due to the very strong relationships between the explanatory variables and outcomes at 20 years and 7 months.

In this section, we use a significance level of .0005 (0.05%) to reflect the very large dataset with which we are working and the number of variables included in the regression models. This means that the criterion for concluding that there is a statistically significant relationship between the explanatory variable and the outcome is set very high – i.e. there can be a high degree of confidence that the relationship exists. Nagelkerke's pseudo-R^2 is used to estimate the overall explanatory power of the model, with a higher figure representing a stronger statistical model that explains more of the variation in outcomes between young people. Conversely, a lower figure suggests either that there are important ('unobserved') variables missing from the model and/or that the outcome inherently exhibits a high degree of randomness.

Finally, one particular challenge for this study has been the phenomenon of *multicollinearity*. This occurs where independent variables are closely correlated with each other, potentially leading to complex, misleading or hard-to-interpret results. In our analytic approach, we have tried to reach a compromise between the risk of multicollinearity and the desire to tease out conceptually close, but distinct, variables – e.g. post-16 pathways and post-16 qualification levels. Where multicollinearity was present, we created new compound variables from variables that were too closely correlated to be entered into the model separately (e.g. for the age of achieving Level 2 and Level 3). Nevertheless, there are a number of results do not conform to *a priori* expectations and may reflect a degree of multicollinearity or the inherent randomness within a large dataset.

4.3.2 Not in education, employment or training

The first set of regression models can be found in Table C1 (in Appendix C) and relate to the overall outcome of being NEET at 20 years and 7 months, according to the definition given in Section 4.1 above. The figures in the table represent the estimated beta coefficients, with three asterisks denoting those that exert a statistically significant influence on whether a young person is more or less likely to be NEET, all else being equal. We can see, therefore, that there are a diverse range of influences at work, including gender, ethnicity, special educational needs, deprivation (at both the household and neighbourhood level), being a persistent absentee, KS4 attainment and post-16 study pathways. The R^2 statistic of .360 suggests a strong regression model.

Importantly, all four care and need groups have statistically significant relationships with the outcome of being NEET at 20 years and 7 months. The positive coefficients indicate that, in each instance, young people who were in care or in need were more likely to be NEET than a young person in the general population who had otherwise similar characteristics. This relationship was strongest for care leavers (B=1.089) and the late care-experienced group (B=.942), but somewhat less marked for the other care-experienced (B=.646) and formerly in need (B=.490) groups.

In other words, there is strong evidence that young people with experience of being in care or in need were subject additional challenges with respect to entering the labour market, even once a wide range of social and educational variables were taken into account. This effect was statistically higher for those who were still in care after 14, including care leavers.

4.3.3 Ever studied at Level 4+

Table C2 shows the regression models pertaining to whether a young person had ever studied at Level 4+ within the timescale of the dataset. As noted above, this mainly related to entry to higher

education, but also included small numbers of young people studying at this level within the context of further education. Model 5 has a R^2 statistic of .594 which suggests a very strong model; access to education at Level 4+ is closely aligned to the social and educational variables included in the regression.

Perhaps unexpectedly, young people with experience of being in care were *not* statistically less likely to study at Level 4+ than the general population, with coefficients of close to zero in all three cases. In other words, they tended to pursue Level 4+ study at the rates that might be predicted by their other social and educational circumstances; experience of care was not an additional risk factor in this instance. However, the formerly in need group was significantly less likely to study at Level 4+, all else being equal, although the effect size was relatively small (B=-.108). This may reflect previously unrecognised challenges for this group.

4.3.4 Missing from the dataset

As outlined above, there was a group for whom no records of study, work or benefit receipt existed for the census date; the reasons for this are likely to be diverse. Table C3 presents the regression models for membership of this group. Statistically significant variables included being male, being from an ethnic minority community, being a persistent absentee, having a fixed term exclusion and having low attainment at KS4 and after. Care leavers (B=-.564), the late care-experienced group (B=-.356) and the formerly in need group (B=-.130) were all significantly less likely to be 'missing', all else being equal. The R^2 statistic of .123 for Model 5 indicates a relatively weak regression model, suggesting that there were important underpinning factors that were not accounted for by the data available.

In the remainder of this section, young people were removed from the analysis is they (a) were missing from the dataset, or (b) had ever studied at Level 4+. In the former case, this is because nothing is known about their outcomes and they do not form a useful point of comparison for other young people. In the latter case, this group has delayed their entry into the labour market through substantial additional study and they are unlikely to be at high risk of long-term unemployment as a result of these credentials. This enables us to focus more specifically on those young people who are potentially entering the labour market soon after the end of their compulsory schooling and who may be more at risk of being NEET[25].

4.3.5 Stable work

Table C4 presents the regression models for being in stable work at 20 years and 7 months, following the definition given in Section 5.1. Statistically significant variables included being male, being White British, not having special educational needs or English as an additional language, not coming from a deprived neighbourhood or a low income household, not having educational disruption and having above average attainment.

Model 5 indicates that all four care and need groups were significantly less likely to be in stable work than otherwise similar young people in the general population on the census date. The effect size was largest for the late care-experienced group (B=-1.042) and care leavers (B=-.920) and

[25] Analyses were also undertaken *including* these two groups and the results were not substantively different from those presented.

somewhat lower for other care-experienced young people (B=-.557) and those formerly in need (B=-.345). This suggests that these groups have additional challenges in securing stable work. The R^2 statistic of .176 for Model 5 indicates a relatively strong regression model.

4.3.6 Precarious work

Similarly, Table C5 presents the equivalent set of regression models for being in precarious work. Women and young people from ethnic minority communities were significantly more likely to be in precarious work, as well as those from deprived neighbourhoods and low income homes. Precarious work was also associated with school changes and fixed-term exclusion and not attaining 'good' passes in English and/or mathematics.

Once again, young people in all four of the care and need groups were significantly less likely to be in precarious work than those in the general population, all else being equal; this reflects their general propensity to not be in *any* work, rather than a relative advantage in the labour market. The effect sizes in this instance were notably smaller than for stable work, with late care-experienced young people again having the lowest propensity (B=-.646). However, the R^2 statistic of .026 for Model 5 indicates a weak regression model, suggesting that there is a high degree of randomness with respect to which young people find themselves in precarious work and/or that there are important factors not accounted for within our regression models.

4.3.7 Economically inactive

Young people included in the economically inactive grouping were those receiving benefits associated with disability and/or caring responsibilities on the census date. Table C6 presents the regression models for this group, with the R^2 statistic of .354 for Model 5 indicating a strong model. Receipt of these benefits at 20 years and 7 months was strongly associated with being a woman, having special educational needs and/or coming from a deprived neighbourhood or household. It was also more significantly more prevalent among those who had been persistent absentees and those with low attainment at KS4 and beyond.

Importantly, all four care and need groups were significantly more likely to be economically inactive than the general population. The effect size was largest for care leavers (B=1.337) and late care-experienced young people (B=1.163) and somewhat lower for members of the other care-experienced group (B=.659) and those formerly in need (B=.579). This indicates that young people with experience of being in care or in need were disproportionately likely to be receiving these benefits even after controlling for a wide range of social and educational variables. This suggests that their circumstances involve additional barriers with respect to the labour market, perhaps reflecting a higher level of need and/or less strong medical or social support networks.

4.3.8 Long-term unemployed

Table C7 contains the regression models for being long-term unemployed at 20 years and 7 months, defined as being a period of claiming relevant benefits of at least three months straddling the census date. The R^2 statistic of .118 for Model 5 suggests a relatively weak regression model, where key explanatory variables include neighbourhood and household deprivation, special educational needs, ethnicity and KS4 attainment in English and mathematics.

All four care and need groups were significantly more likely to be long-term unemployed than similar young people in the general population. The greatest risk was associated with care leavers (B=.845), followed by the late care-experienced group (B=.695), the other care-experienced group (B=.502) and the formerly in need group (B=.304).

4.3.9 Studying only

Table C8 presents the regression models for young people who were studying only, at Level 3 or below on the census date; the R^2 statistic of .061 for Model 5 suggests a weak regression model. Significant explanatory variables included being male, being from an ethnic minority, having special educational needs and neighbourhood and/or household deprivation. Care leavers were significantly less likely to be studying only (B=-.358), compared to the general population; there was no significant relationship for the other care and need groups.

4.3.10 Summary

In this section, we have addressed the question of whether care leavers and young people in the other care and need groups have significantly different outcomes at 20 years and 7 months, compared to otherwise similar young people in the general population. We did this by using binary logistic regression to simultaneously take into account a wide range of social and educational variables that were likely to influence outcomes.

We found that all four care and need groups were significantly more likely to be NEET than the general population, all else being equal. In large part, this was due to their disproportionately high likelihood of being economically inactive due to disability and/or caring responsibilities, as reflected in their receipt of relevant benefits. They were also significantly more likely to be unemployed, even once other factors were controlled for. Conversely, they were significantly less likely to be in either stable or precarious work than would be predicted by the social and educational variables.

The regression models suggested that there were similar patterns of outcomes for care leavers and the late care-experienced groups – the former were somewhat more susceptible to being economically inactive and long-term unemployed, while the latter were more likely not to be in work, stable or precarious. Likewise, members of the other care-experienced and formerly in need groups had broadly similar outcome patterns that were intermediate between the general population and the other two groups. We will now turn to look in more detail at the three care groups (excluding those formerly in need) in order to better understand the explanatory variables for specific outcomes for these groups.

4.4 Influence of experiences of care

In this section, we turn in more detail to the subset of young people who had experience of care – i.e. the groups previously identified as care leavers, late care-experienced and other care-experienced. The total size of the population used in these analyses is thus 8,400.

Whereas in the previous section we were seeking to understand whether the four care and need groups were significantly more susceptible to having less positive outcomes at 20 years and 7

months than the general population, this section focuses on the specific explanatory variables for the different outcomes for those who were care-experienced. It also engages with any differences between the three care-experienced groups.

We have also integrated additional data from the Children Looked After dataset to explore whether there are specific elements of care-experience that might relate statistically to outcomes at 20 years and 7 months. Specifically, we have used the following:

- Total time spent in care during KS3 and KS4;
- The last type of placement or accommodation that the young person was in when they were in care, grouped into: foster care, kinship care, children's home or other residential unit[26], placed with parents, semi/independent living[27], secure unit[28] or other;
- Whether or not the young person's first instance of care (since the age of 8 – see section 2.1) was during KS3 and KS4;
- The total number of care placements during KS3 and KS4;
- Location of the young person's final care episode: within their local authority, outside their local authority or confidential/unknown.

These variables were suggested by previous studies of educational outcomes for care-experienced young people (Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Berridge *et al.*, 2020) and aim to capture particular circumstances that are known to be disruptive or embody risk. These variables enable us, for example, to broadly distinguish between the very different social and educational contexts of (a) a young person who was continuously in care from the age of 8 with the same set of local foster carers, and (b) a young person who entered care at 13 and experienced five episodes of residential care outside of their local authority.

Table 4.6 provides a cross-tabulation between the care variables and outcomes at 20 years and 7 months. Studying at Level 4+ and stable work have broadly similar patterns with respect to experiences of care, being particularly associated with foster, kinship and parental care, as well as earlier entry into care, longer total periods in care and fewer mean care placements in KS3 and KS4. Receiving benefits indicating that the young person is economically inactive is closely related to a young person's last placement being in a residential setting, most likely reflecting the specialist support that many of these settings provide.

Long-term unemployment was reasonably evenly distributed, being slightly higher for those in semi/independent living and secure units. The latter form of placement was also strongly associated with being missing from the dataset at 20 years and 7 months, suggesting a link between this outcome and early involvement in the criminal justice system. This may begin to explain the strong correlation between secure units and studying at Level 3 or below, perhaps reflecting delayed education or study through prison education.

[26] Where young people live collectively under the supervision of professional staff, including residential school settings.
[27] This grouping includes semi-independent living, where the young person lives in accommodation with some level of formal support and supervision from staff (e.g. supported lodgings, hostels, flats, bedsits and foyers), as well as independent living the young person lives in their own property in the private sector or through a local authority, housing association or similar.
[28] Accommodation where the young person cannot leave due to criminal proceedings or a risk of harm or absconding.

Table 4.6: Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months, by nature of care experience

	Ever studied at Level 4+	Stable work	Precarious work	Economically inactive	Long-term unemployed	Studying only	Missing from the dataset
Last placement type:							
Foster care	17.8%	10.7%	22.3%	30.6%	5.5%	6.9%	6.2%
Kinship care	19.1%	14.2%	27.2%	21.0%	5.5%	5.7%	7.3%
Children's home or residential unit	3.8%	3.3%	12.7%	60.0%	4.7%	4.8%	10.7%
Placed with parents	11.8%	12.5%	28.3%	24.1%	5.6%	8.1%	9.5%
Semi/independent living	8.0%	6.5%	24.3%	37.9%	7.3%	7.2%	8.8%
Secure unit	1.6%	4.0%	15.8%	17.4%	6.1%	33.2%	21.9%
Other or not known	19.9%	11.3%	23.7%	23.1%	3.2%	8.6%	10.2%
Last placement location:							
Within local authority	11.5%	8.3%	23.8%	36.7%	6.1%	6.5%	7.2%
Outside local authority	14.7%	7.9%	18.3%	36.2%	6.8%	8.2%	7.9%
Confidential or not known	12.3%	9.3%	20.0%	36.3%	4.5%	7.7%	9.9%
First placement in KS3 or KS4:							
Yes	10.5%	7.5%	21.2%	37.8%	6.0%	8.0%	9.0%
No	13.7%	9.7%	20.9%	34.9%	5.2%	7.0%	8.6%
Total KS3/KS4 care days (mean)	541	488	464	438	432	380	347
KS3/KS4 placements (mean)	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.6

Overall, fewer care placements and more time spent in care were associated with the more positive outcomes, suggesting that stability is an important factor in adult transitions (Stein, 2012), although the differences were relatively modest. Conversely, instability was associated with economic inactivity and long-term unemployment.

4.5 Multivariate analysis: care-experienced young people

The methodology used in this section is similar to that used in Section 4.3 – i.e. binary logistic regression with incremental modelling. For each outcome, Model 1 is not reported for reasons of space, but an additional Model 6 is reported including the care experience variables outlined above. A significance level of 0.05 (5%) is used in this section to reflect the substantially smaller dataset being used.

4.5.1 Not in education, employment or training

Table D1 (in Appendix D) shows the regression models for whether a young person was deemed to be NEET at 20 years and 7 months, according to the definition in Section 4.1. Model 4 provides

a list of significant explanatory variables for being NEET, including being a young woman, being White British or having a mixed or other ethnicity, having low overall attainment at KS4 and not having good GCSE passes in English and/or mathematics. The strongest relationships, however, were with post-16 pathways, with care-experienced young people being significantly more likely to be NEET if they had not achieved the Level 3 threshold and/or if they had achieved the Level 2 threshold after 16. This was mediated by the type of post-16 institution attended, with being EET associated with further education colleges.

Model 5 sees the addition of a variable representing membership of one of the three care groups. This does not change the list of explanatory variables, but it indicates that the likelihood of being NEET is significant lower (B=-.265) for the other care-experienced group of young people (i.e. those who left care before 14) compared to care leavers.

Finally, Model 6 includes the five variables representing the details of care experience. The total time spent in care and the total number of care episodes were not significant explanatory variables, and nor were the majority of placement types. Those young people whose last placement was in a residential setting (B=.509) were significantly more likely to be NEET, as were those whose last placement was outside the local authority area (B=.256) were significantly less likely to be NEET. The R^2 statistic of .368 suggests a strong regression model.

4.5.2 Ever studied at Level 4+

Table D2 presents regression models for participation in study at Level 4+ at any point within the timescale covered by the data. As might be hypothesised, this was strongly and positively related to attainment in KS4 and post-16 pathways that included achieving Level 3 qualifications, especially with in the context of school. There was also a strong relationship with ethnicity, with care-experienced young people from Black, Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi, mixed and other ethnic minority groups all having a significantly higher propensity to study at Level 4+ than the White majority group; this effect explained much of their lower propensity to be NEET.

The Inclusion of the care-experience variables in Models 5 and 6 offered little additional explanatory value; it was only those whose last placement was in a secure unit (B=-1.504) who were significantly less likely to study at Level 4+, all else being equal. The R^2 statistic for Model 6 was .648, which suggests a very strong model overall.

4.5.3 Missing from the dataset

The regression models presented in Table D3 aim to identify significant explanatory variables for care-experienced young people who are missing from the dataset. As noted earlier, this is likely to be a heterogeneous group who are not recorded as studying, working or receiving benefits at this time. Consistent with this, the R^2 statistic of .108 for Model 6 suggests that membership of this group is relatively hard to explain from the variables in the model.

Care-experienced people who were missing from the dataset were more likely to be young men, those from Black, mixed or other ethnic minority groups (but not Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi), those with low attainment at KS4 and those who did not attain Level 3 qualifications. The propensity was also higher among those who did not study post-16, but lower among those who attended a further education college. The propensity to be missing from the data was lower among

those from low income households and schools without an Ofsted rating; these relationships defy ready interpretation.

4.5.4 Stable work

Table D4 presents the regression models for being in stable work at 20 years and 7 months. Several clear and consistent explanatory variables emerge from the analysis, while the R^2 statistic of .173 for Model 6 suggests a fair model. Stable work is significantly more likely to be held by care-experienced men than women. Conversely, it is significantly less prevalent among Black young people, those in deprived neighbourhoods and those who attended special schools at KS4.

There is a slightly complex relationship between stable work and qualifications. There is a positive relationship with KS4 attainment, but also with delayed post-16 pathways to achieving the Level 2 and/or Level 3 threshold. Similarly, stable work was relatively more common among care-experienced young people who had left education at 16 or had moved into a further education college. Taken in the round, this suggests that stable work was most closely associated with mid-range patterns of attainment, especially outside of the school sector. Indeed, it was negatively associated with only pursuing Level 1 or lower courses.

Model 5 suggests that the other care-experienced group (B=.316) are more likely to be in stable work on the census date than care leavers and the late care-experienced group. However, in Model 6, the relationships shift slightly and it is kinship care that is positively associated with stable work (B=.556), perhaps representing family involvement in securing work for the young person. Stable work is also positively associated with having a final care placement with an unknown or confidential location; this finding defies ready interpretation.

4.5.5 Precarious work

The regression models in Table D5 represent being in precarious work at the age of 20 years and 7 months, with the R^2 statistic of .133 for Model 6 again suggesting a fair explanatory model. Care-experienced men were significantly more likely to be in precarious work than young women, although the relationship was less marked than for stable work. Having special educational needs and/or attending a special school were negatively associated, but unlike for stable work, there was no relationship with neighbourhood deprivation. Being in precarious work was positively associated with having had a fixed-term exclusion during KS3 or KS4.

The relationship between precarious work and attainment is again complex. There is a clear indication in Model 3 that precarious work is associated with not attaining passes in English and/or mathematics at KS4, but not by GCSE outcomes overall; these relationships change with the addition of the post-16 and care variables in Models 4, 5 and 6. It is also positively associated with taking vocational qualifications in KS4. With respect to post-16 pathways, care-experience young people are more likely to be in precarious work if they took longer than usual to reach the Level 2 threshold or did not reach the Level 3 threshold within the timeframe of the data. Precarious work was also associated with leaving education at 16 or studying in a further education college. Overall, these findings suggest that precarious work is associated with lower attainment patterns and longer journeys to reach qualification levels.

Model 6 suggests that members of the other care-experienced group (B=.370) were more likely to be in precarious work than either care leavers or the late care-experienced group; it was also associated with longer periods in care (B=.087). Conversely, it was less common among young people whose last care placement was in a residential unit (B=-.431) or a secure unit (B=-.693), and where that placement was outside their local authority (B=-.245) or in an unknown or confidential location (B=-.272).

4.5.6 Economically inactive

Table D6 shows regression models for being economically inactive and receiving benefits for caring responsibilities and/or disability at 20 years and 7 months. The R^2 statistic of .387 for Model 6 suggests a strong regression model. As might be anticipated, there is a strong association between being economically inactive and having special educational needs during KS4. Care-experienced young people with the highest categories of special educational needs and those attending a special school were significantly more likely to be economically inactive on the census date. Conversely, those who had had a fixed-term or permanent exclusion (or attended alternative provision or a pupil referral unit) were significantly less like to be economically inactive. This is perhaps counterintuitive as these are usually seen as risk factors for young people. One possibility is that these experiences triggered positive interventions that supported adult transitions for some young people in this situation.

Care-experienced Black and Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people were significantly less likely to be economically inactive than their peers, whereas care-experienced young women had a significantly higher propensity; this latter finding may, at least in part, relate to parenthood and its associated caring responsibilities.

Being economically inactive at 20 years and 7 months was clearly associated with lower attainment, even once special educational needs were taken into account. Care-experienced young people were significantly more likely to be economically inactive if they had low KS4 attainment, especially if they had not secured a pass in GCSE English. In term of post-16 pathways, economic inactivity was associated with studying Level 1 or lower courses and not reaching the Level 2 threshold or doing so after 16, as well as not attaining the Level 3 threshold; these were mediated to some extent by the type of institution attended.

With respect to the care variables, being economically inactive was significantly less common for the other care-experienced group (B=-.275) compared to those who were still in care at 16. It was also more prevalent among young people whose last placement was in a children's home or residential unit (perhaps reflecting a higher level of need – B=.725) or in semi/independent living accommodation (perhaps reflecting parenthood – B=.529). Those young people who had more care placements during KS3 and KS4 were less likely to be economically inactive at 20 years and 7 months (B=-.030); this is somewhat hard to interpret.

4.5.7 Long-term unemployed

The regression analyses for being long-term unemployed at 20 years and 7 months (see Table D7) provided the least strong explanatory models, with an R^2 statistic of .100 for Model 6.

All else being equal, care-experienced young men and Black care-experienced young people were significantly more likely to be long-term unemployed on the census date, while those with English as an additional language were less likely. Long-term unemployment was more common those with no post-16 study or studying in a further education college. Taking Level 1 qualifications in further education was associated with long-term unemployment, as was reaching the Level 2 threshold, but not reaching the threshold for Level 3. None of the care variables was a explanatory variable for long-term unemployment.

Overall, the models suggest a very mixed picture, with long-term unemployment not being strongly associated with demographic sites of disadvantage (e.g. neighbourhood deprivation or special educational needs), nor exclusively with very low educational attainment. Educational disruption (e.g. exclusion) was also not an important factor in the regression models, with persistent absence only achieving significance in Model 2 where it influenced KS4 attainment – this, in turn, influenced post-16 pathways.

4.5.8 Studying only

Table D8 presents the regression analyses for the young person's only activity being studying at Level 3 or below on the census date. The R^2 statistic of .126 for Model 6 suggests a relatively weak regression model. Young people were significantly more likely to be studying if they were men and if the school they attended at KS4 was judged as requiring improvement. It was also significantly more common among those young people who had not achieved 'good' passes in English and mathematics and among those who achieved the threshold for Level 2, but not for Level 3.

In Model 5, the other care-experienced group were more likely to be studying only on the census date, but this relationship diminished once the other care-related variables were added in Model 6. At this point, young people whose final placement was in a secure unit (B=1.021) were significantly more likely to be studying only. This perhaps reflects a catching-up after earlier educational disruption or that young people have re-engaged in learning during later incarceration.

4.6 Discussion of findings

4.6.1 Filtering effects

It is important to remember that the relationships identified in these analyses are not necessarily causal and care is needed in their interpretation. For example, a young person who takes vocational qualifications at KS4 may have been steered into doing so if they were not thriving within a traditional 'academic' curriculum. A subsequent adult outcome cannot then be ascribed to the 'quality' of the qualifications themselves as at least part of any statistical relationship will reflect the earlier difficulties and the filtering within the school. In other words, the statistical relationship becomes a proxy for a form of hidden need, disadvantage or challenge.

Perhaps the strongest example of this are the outcomes associated with attending a special school in KS4. Places in these schools are generally reserved for young people with the most profound special educational needs and other challenges. The analysis here cannot illuminate whether the schools were the right option for individual young people, nor whether they were effective in the round; rather, the relationships in the regression models strongly reflect a filtering effect and act as

a proxy for a level of need beyond that represented by a Statement or School Action Plus designation. The same holds for post-16 pathways through further education colleges. These are associated with some of the less positive outcomes in our analysis, but this should not be taken to indicate that further education was failing to support young people effectively.

4.6.2 Explanatory value

There is a marked range in the R^2 statistics for the regression models in this section – from .100 for long-term unemployment to .648 for studying at Level 4+. Broadly speaking, these statistics provide an indication of the extent to which the different outcomes can be readily explained, based on the variables available. Where the R^2 statistic is low, it suggests that there are important factors that have not been captured through the variables included in the model or that outcomes for young people are inherently subject to a high degree of randomness.

The regression models in this study are necessarily built on the data collated by government for administrative purposes. This focuses on factual elements in a young person's life – demographic categories, educational institutions attended, qualifications accumulated and so on. It conspicuously does not include data on the young person's personality, attitudes, beliefs or other psychological factors. It also does not capture psychosocial factors such as the strength of their support networks, the influence of a supportive adult and so on, nor the impact of traumatic experience prior to care. These psychological and psychosocial factors are represented by proxy to some extent in various decisions and outcomes, but there is considerable richness in understanding their lives that cannot be adequately captured by the regression models alone. This, of course, is one rationale for taking a mixed methods approach in this study.

With these caveats in mind, the regression models for (a) studying at Level 4+, and (b) being economically inactive, are strong and enable us to build relatively robust explanations about which young people will have these outcomes based on demographics and their educational histories. In the former case, this is strongly explained by a long history of high attainment and pursuing 'academic' pathways, coupled with a significantly higher propensity among ethnic minority communities. In the latter case, it is strongly explained by a history of higher-level special educational needs and lower attainment, with women and the White British community being significant over-represented. Neither of these constellations of factors are surprising.

Conversely, the regression models for stable work, precarious work, long-term unemployment and study only are considerably weaker and the pathways that lead to these outcomes are less well-defined in the data[29]. Very broadly, higher attainment and living in an affluent neighbourhood are associated with more stable work, while precarious work, studying only and long-term unemployment are associated with lower attainment and shorter (if any) post-16 pathways. There is also a strong ethnicity component, with Black young people being substantially less likely to be in stable work and more likely to be long-term unemployed, all else being equal. Young men are significantly over-represented in all four groups. The overall pattern, therefore, is one where ostensibly similar young people in the mid-to-low attainment range may find themselves in quite different work situations at 20 years and 7 months. This may, in part, be due to the relatively arbitrary divisions between these groupings (see Section 4.1), but this is a challenge for social policy.

[29] This is also true for the group that is missing from the data, but this is, by its nature, heterogeneous.

4.7 Summary

By way of a summary, we will now consider the findings from the opposite perspective – i.e. looking at specific demographic and educational factors and the relationships they have across the range of outcomes, focusing on those with the most marked patterns of influence.

Turning first to gender, we see a clear pattern. All else being equal, young women were significantly more likely to be NEET and this was strongly associated with being economically inactive. Young men were conversely more likely to be in work (stable or precarious), long-term unemployed, studying only or missing from the dataset. One element in the higher propensity for women to be economically inactive is likely to be young parenthood and the concomitant caring responsibilities that are most usually borne primarily by women (Purtell, Mendes and Saunders, 2020). It may also be that women have higher levels of work-precluding disability, but additional analysis beyond the remit of this study would be needed to examine this more closely.

We also see strongly contrasting patterns by ethnicity. Black young people were significantly less likely to be NEET overall, which was largely driven by a high propensity to study at Level 4+ and a low propensity to be economically inactive, once other factors had been controlled for. However, they were correspondingly over-represented in long-term unemployment and being missing from the data, and less likely to be in stable work. This suggests a strong divergence in pathways for Black young people, with those attaining highly at school moving into (mainly) higher education in early adulthood, while those with lower attainment struggling to find high-quality work. The low proportion deemed to be economically inactive is interesting and may suggest a gap in disability diagnosis and/or a lower rate of young parenthood. Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people were similarly under-represented in this group and more likely to study at Level 4+.

The lower designation of special educational needs (School Action) was not significantly associated with any of the outcome groups, including the overall designation of being NEET. However, the higher designation (Statement or School Action Plus) and/or attendance at a special school had stronger patterns of influence. Both were significantly correlated with the likelihood of being economically inactive at 20 years and 7 months and being less likely to be in stable or precarious work on the census date, all else being equal. As well as these direct effects of special education needs, it is also possible – by comparing Model 2 with Models 3 and 4 – to observe their negative impact on KS4 attainment and post-16 educational pathways.

Deprivation plays a perhaps more muted role in the regression models than might be anticipated. Neighbourhood deprivation was associated with a significantly lower likelihood of being in stable work, most likely reflecting the nature of the local labour market. However, this was the only statistical relationship observed, once other factors were taken into account. Similarly, two measures of school effectiveness (Ofsted rating and GCSE pass rate) were included in the regression models, but they were not generally important in influencing outcomes for care-experienced young people.

The models also included several measures of educational disruption during KS3 and KS4, including absence, exclusion and attendance in alternative provision. On the whole, these exerted an influence in the early stages of the regression models, having significant relationships with KS4 attainment (Model 3) and post-16 progression (Model 4). Intriguingly, both fixed-term exclusion and the compound variable for permanent exclusion, alternative provision and pupil referral units were negatively associated with being economically inactive, all else being equal. These relationships are difficult to interpret; one potential explanation is that they are acting as a proxy for

positive interventions that are triggered by exclusion (e.g. additional therapeutic support), but this would need more investigation.

As would be expected in a highly-credentialised labour market, there was a strong and consistent relationship between KS4 attainment and outcomes. Young people with lower overall attainment scores were significantly more likely to be NEET overall (or specifically economically inactive), but less likely to pursue study at Level 4+ or to be in stable work. There was also an additional impact of specifically not having passes in English and/or mathematics at 16 which can readily be seen by comparing Models 3 and 4 across various outcomes. Not possessing these qualifications has a strong filtering effect as they are widely used as baseline entry qualifications for Level 3 study, limiting access for young people who may otherwise have strong attainment in their preferred subject area(s). This is likely to lead to delays in accessing Level 3 courses or pathways away from post-compulsory education and training. In addition to this filtering effect, not having passes in English and mathematics was a significant explanatory factor for being NEET in its own right, while missing either (or both) was negatively correlated with studying at Level 4+. The final point with respect to KS4 attainment is that young people who pursued any vocational qualifications were significantly more likely to be in precarious work or long-term unemployed on the census date; as discussed above, this should not be misunderstood as necessarily a causal relationship as it may, for example, be a proxy for the young person's disengagement from traditional school subjects or low expectations from staff in the school.

The profound influence of post-16 pathways on outcomes can be readily seen in the regression models. The pathways that young people are able to pursue are almost limitlessly complex, so the categorisation used necessarily loses much of the individual detail. Passing the threshold for Level 3 was significantly associated with a lower likelihood of being NEET, largely because of the immediate route into study at Level 4+ that it provides. Those young people not reaching Level 3 in the timescale of study were correspondingly more likely to be in work (stable or precarious), economically inactive, long-term unemployed or studying. The role of reaching the Level 2 threshold was complex and hard to interpret. In general, young people who achieved Level 2 after 16 had better outcomes than those who achieved it at 16 without progressing to Level 3. This might suggest a positive role for persistence in (or a later return to) post-compulsory education, relative to those choosing to leave education at 16.

Finally, we turn to the care variables. Given the diversity of care experiences, it was hypothesised that these would have a strong influence on outcomes, but this was not generally the case. There were some relationships, however, by the type of the young person's final care placement or accommodation. Those who had spent this in a secure unit were significantly more likely to be long-term unemployed or studying only, but less likely to be in precarious work or studying at Level 4+. Those in children's homes and residential units had a higher propensity to be economically inactive (and therefore to be NEET overall), while kinship care was associated with stable work. Some other relationships with the location of the young person's final placement and total time in care emerged, but they were not open to ready interpretation.

Comparing care leavers with the late and other care-experienced groups revealed that their outcomes were generally quite similar. The other care-experienced group (who left care prior to 14) were significantly less likely to be NEET, perhaps reflecting an increasing stability in their lives as they approached adulthood. They were more likely to be in precarious work, but less likely to be economically inactive compared to the other two groups.

5. Quantitative findings – changes in outcomes over time

5.1 Approach

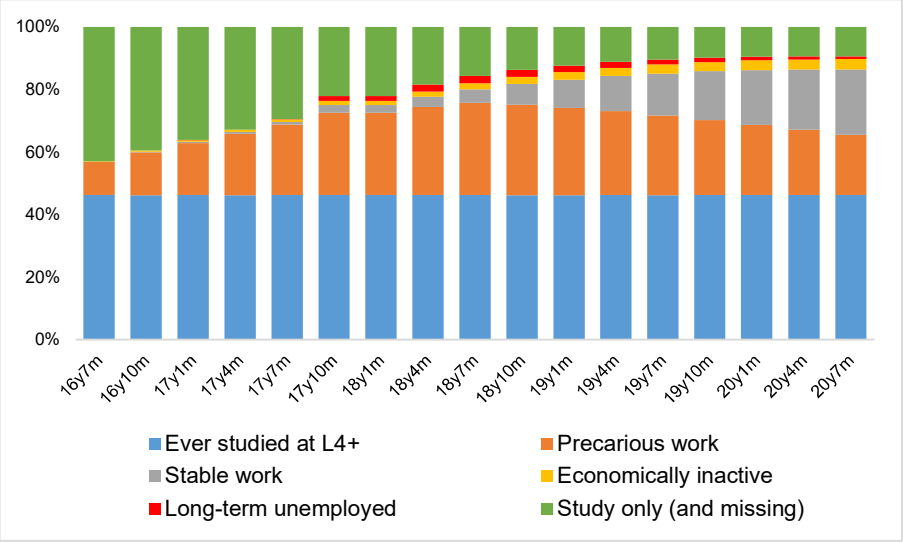
One of the opportunities afforded by the LEO dataset is the opportunity to look at changes in outcomes over time for young people. Aside from the main census point of 20 years and 7 months discussed above, one is able to explore what members of the cohort are engaged in at any chosen point; the limitations of the dataset (as discussed in Section 4.1) continue to apply. In this section, we therefore use the same groupings and outcomes to explore what young people are doing at three month intervals from the age of 16 years and 7 months to 20 years and 7 months – i.e. at seventeen data points. This provides additional insight into the temporal transitions from study to work, economic inactivity or long-term unemployment.

One particular challenge with this analysis is the temporal disjuncture between the employment (April-to-March year) and educational (September-to-August year) datasets. This has made the distinction between the study only and missing outcomes particularly difficult to distinguish and subject to seemingly abrupt shifts – e.g. when courses end and before the young person's next activity begins. In the following analysis, we have therefore combined these two outcomes to mitigate the volatility; as a basic rule, the number of young people in the missing group declines over time as they (re)enter the taxation or benefit systems.

5.2 General population

Figure 5.1 shows the sequence of outcomes for the general population (N=495,880); note that the group who ever studied at Level 4+ remains constant as this group is defined specifically by their activity *at any point* before 20 years and 7 months. As can be seen, the proportion engaged in study only at Level 3 or below (green bars) declines over time, with a concomitant rise in the grey bars representing stable work. The orange bars represent precarious work, which grows until 18 years and 7 months and then starts to decline. The proportions of economically inactive and long-term unemployed are low throughout, but the former increases with time.

Figure 6.1: Outcomes for the general population over time

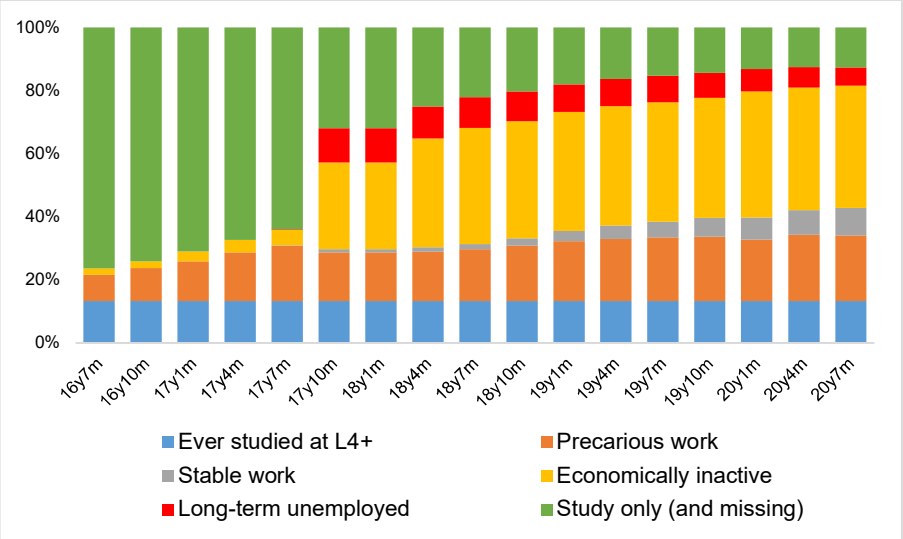


The overall picture, therefore, is of young people making a steady progression from study, first into precarious work and then increasingly into more stable work. The proportions of young people who are recorded as economically inactive or in long-term unemployment are low throughout.

6.3 Care leavers

Figure 6.2 presents an equivalent analysis for the care leaver group (N=3,850). There is a marked shift at 17 years and 10 months as young people move from the studying only (green bars) to being economically inactive (yellow bars) and long-term unemployed (red bars); the former continues to grow over time while the latter declines slightly. This represents the period where many will be aging out of care. The grey bars (stable work) increase as the cohort ages, but remain small within the time period being investigated. Unlike the general population, the proportion of care leavers in precarious work generally increases across the time period, with no noticeable decline in favour of stable work.

Figure 6.2: Outcomes for care leavers over time



5.4 Comparison groups

Figures 5.3 and 5.4 present similar analyses for the late care-experienced (N=1,900), other care-experienced (N=2,650) respectively. The trends through time for the late care-experienced group closely echoed those for care leavers, with a sudden increase in economic inactivity (yellow bars) and long-term unemployment (red bars) at 17 years and 10 months, as well as growing numbers of young people in precarious work (orange bars) and a very slow expansion in stable work (grey bars). The decline in study at Level 3 and below (green bars) was less marked for the late care-experienced group, perhaps indicated more common educational delays associated with entering and/or leaving care between the ages of 14 and 16.

As would be anticipated, there was a less marked aging-out process for the other care-experienced group who had not been in care since at least the age of 14. Rather, there was a steady increase in economic inactivity (yellow bars) over time, most likely representing parenthood and diagnosis of disabilities and illnesses preventing work. However, the pattern of precarious

work (orange bars) was more similar to the general population than care leavers, with an initial increase followed by a decline as the proportion of young people entering stable work (grey bars) increased.

Figure 5.3: Outcomes for the late care-experienced group over time

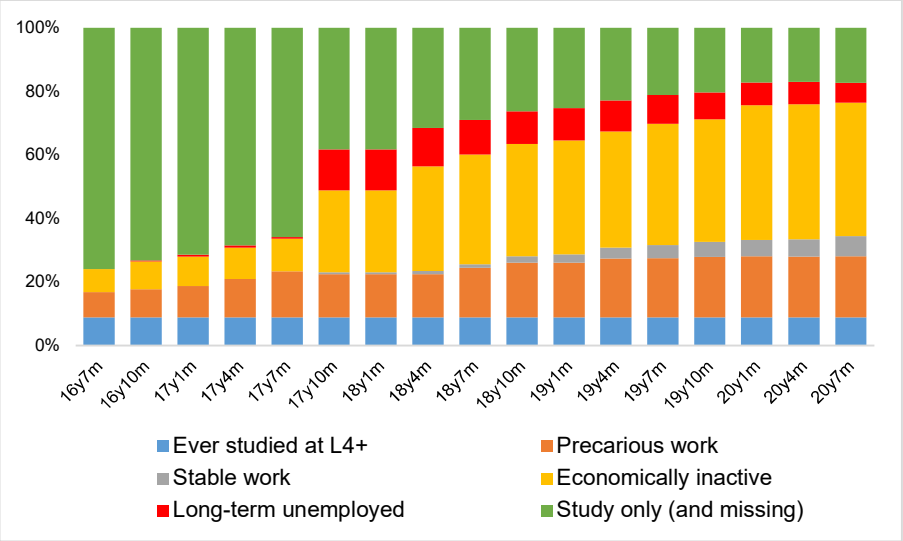


Figure 5.4: Outcomes for the other care-experienced group over time

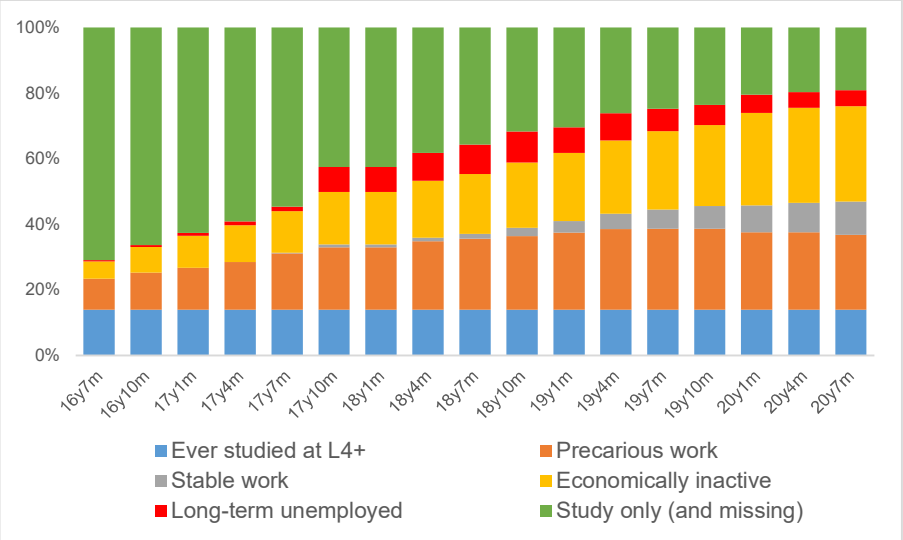
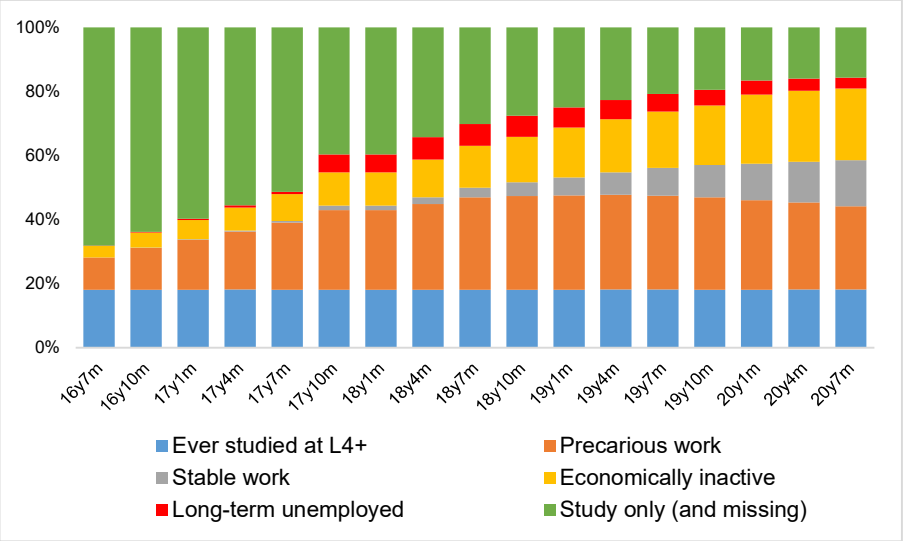


Figure 5.5 shows the sequence of outcomes over time for the formerly in need group (N=26,160). Of the four care and need groups, this is most similar to the general population, albeit that the outcomes are notably less positive on average, as evidenced by the larger yellow (economically inactive) and red (long-term unemployed) bars. There is a more rapid growth in transitions into stable work (grey bars) than for the care-experienced groups and a steady decline in precarious work (orange bars) from the age of 19 years and 4 months onwards.

Figure 5.5: Outcomes for the formerly in need group over time



5.5 Summary

This series of analyses of outcomes over time for young people has illustrated differences in their transitions into the labour market. While the general population shows a relatively smooth progression from study into precarious and then stable work, this is substantially disrupted for care leavers. Stable work remained elusive and even at the last data point, more care leavers were entering precarious work from study. Most notable, though, was the very high proportion of young people who were economically inactive and long-term unemployed, with the former continuing to increase through the time series.

The late care-experienced and other care-experienced groups had patterns that were broadly similar to care leavers, although outcomes were somewhat more positive for the latter, especially with respect to stable work. The group of young people who were formerly in need occupied an intermediate position between the three care-experienced groups and the general population, with a clearer progression into stable work, but substantially higher levels of economic inactivity and long-term unemployment than among the general population.

6. Qualitative findings

As outlined above, qualitative data were gathered from a range of participations to explore factors that impact young people's access to employment. Young people, leaving care professionals, EET workers, carers, representatives from the virtual school and other organisations working with care leavers contributed views via interviews, surveys and focus group discussions. We have elected not to use identifiers for participants when quoting their words to reduce the risk of identifiability.

6.1 Young people's education, employment and training journeys

This section draws on the experiences of the 28 young people across the five local authorities who participated directly in study interviews. Discussions focused on their journeys through and after secondary education and explored their post-school choices and what helped and hindered their career pathways.

Areas of focus were informed by emerging findings from the quantitative strand of the research and existing literature, which highlights aspects of young people's lives as predictors of post-care outcomes. We also consulted with the study's advisory groups of expertise and care-experienced young people, which identified issues around stigma, zero hour contracts and the need for ongoing support regardless of being NEET or participating in EET.

6.1.1 Experience of school

Evidence from our own quantitative analysis and from existing research identifies a risk of disrupted and unsatisfactory school experiences for care leavers (Dixon, 2007; Pecora, 2012; Sebba *et al.*, 2018). Whilst roughly three-quarters of young people in the study had attended mainstream school, five had attended a pupil referral unit towards the end of their school career. In addition, thirteen had experienced a school move during secondary school. Of these, four said this was due to exclusion, all of whom subsequently attended a pupil referral unit. The remaining nine said the change in school was due to a move in care placement:

> *'Yes, I ended up moving four times. One was a placement move, and one was just when I was switching around my living situations ... the other three of them were from family situations.' (Care leaver)*

Nearly all the young people had left school aged 16, though one was 15-years-old. Only two-thirds had completed compulsory education and just over half of the sample said they had achieved their expected GCSE grades.

Young people were asked to sum up their overall school experience. Roughly half reported a negative experience, one-third had a positive experience, and the remaining three described their school experience as 'mixed'. Some young people described an absence of targeted support for individual needs, whilst one young person had been denied the opportunity to sit their exams due to the school's failure to enter them:

'[My school] was just a horrible place to go to. There was hardly any learning support. If something happened and you kicked off, all they'd do is just restrain you. It was just horrible. There was no support to help you deal with things.' (Care leaver)

'I would say [schools] to have more help with kids with mental health or coming from bad backgrounds … just need to take into consideration some people have mental health so when they act up they're not acting up because they're a bad child [it's] because they might not be able to read or write.' (Care leaver)

'I revised for all my exams, and I felt like I were treated unfairly when it came to the exams. I went in to sit them, and I was told that I hadn't been entered in for them because of my absence at school because [of difficulties at home]. Leading up to that, I didn't really have much support, either, from school, and they never told me that they hadn't entered me in for my exams, so I left school with three GCSEs out of the thirteen that I should have had.' (Care leaver)

For some who reported a negative experience, a common feature was the impact of undiagnosed learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, which could impact on school attendance, learning and behaviour. In some cases, a recognition of learning difficulties had only come to light later in their education journeys or after school:

'They never really found out I was dyslexic 'till I got into Year 11, so I used to underachieve. I used to be in like set one for everything, but I used to underachieve massively. They just like put it down to behaviour because of like the stereotype of being in care and stuff, until they actually tested me for dyslexia and then found out I had it, and that's why I was underachieving because I needed like coloured paper and stuff.' (Care leaver)

Around half of the sample identified a 'helpful' teacher during their school experience, who had provided them with a source of support and encouragement to achieve:

'Yes, my teachers encouraged me quite a lot. They saw potential in me that I didn't know that I had. So they just never gave up on me. So yes, I just continued to do well.' (Care leaver)

'My form tutor. She was definitely one of my favourites so I went to her for everything. If I needed anything it was always her I would go to.' (Care leaver)

6.1.2 Post-16 pathways

The most common post-school option was undertaking a BTEC qualification (as shown in Table 6.1). Other studies included GCSE resits, attending college to undertake GCSEs and A Levels, and undertaking Prince's Trust courses. BTEC courses included public services, health and social care, hair and beauty, child care, and mechanics. The range of A level courses included psychology, child development, social care, law, and philosophy. Of those studying for BTECs, A Levels or GCSEs, one-third were related to health and social care or child care.

Table 6.1: Immediate post-school participation

What did you do immediately after leaving school?	N
Study A Levels	4
Study BTEC	15
Other study (e.g. short courses)	6
Apprenticeship	1
Care for child	2

Source: study data

Table 6.2: Other EET participation since

What other EET options have you been involved in?	N
Apprenticeships	5
Further education	22
Higher education	5
Employment	15

Source: study data

6.1.3 Post-compulsory education

Twenty-two of the 28 respondents had attended post-compulsory education either via school sixth form or further education college. As noted above, most commonly this had involved BTEC courses:

> *'I got all the support I needed there, what to expect and things. When I was in college and needed support it was also offered to me.' (Care leaver)*

Five young people had entered full time higher education. They were aged 19 to 23 and were undergraduates in child care, nursing, psychology, and youth and community work. All but one of the local authorities were represented within the higher education group. Three of these young people reported having had negative experiences of school and two had experienced school exclusion. All but one of the higher education group had completed their compulsory schooling. The other young people had returned to education via college before going to university aged 20. Ongoing support from a trusted adult was highlighted by young people as one of the main factors in preparing them for higher education and allowing them the time to choose the right course:

> *'They [foster carers] took me to look around different universities and they've gone through everything with me. Gone through different courses and helped me pick the right one.' (Care leaver)*

6.1.4. Apprenticeships and training

Five of the sample had undertaken an apprenticeship at some point since leaving school. Apprenticeship roles included administration, working with children or youth, and joinery. Over half of those who had completed an apprenticeship were from LA3. Two local authorities were not represented in the apprenticeship group. For some young people, the enabling factor was having access to support from a designated professional or support network to find an apprenticeship:

'I just worked at Subway and then Burger King and then I got this apprenticeship through the Leaving Care [Team]. She works at Leaving Care but she's a woman that does jobs and gets people into work.' (Care leaver)

Some young people reported that schools did not adequately promote apprenticeships as an option, and one young person said they had taken on an apprenticeship in a sector that they were not interested in because they felt restricted by the qualification requirements for other options:

'Yes, I found apprenticeships that required three GCSEs, which I had, so luckily, I managed to go on to an administration apprenticeship. It weren't what I wanted to do, but it were a start.' (Care leaver)

At the time of interview, three of the five young people who had undertaken an apprenticeship after school were in stable employment, one was in precarious employment and one young person had been NEET for three months. Since 2018, eligible care leavers have access to a care leaver apprenticeship bursary[30] (a one-off attendance-based payment of £1,000). At the time of data collection, there was no evidence that young people in the study had received this form of support during their apprenticeships.

6.1.5 In employment

Just over half of the sample had been in employment at some point prior to interview. The types of jobs included nursery practitioner, landscape gardener, recruitment, and retail sector roles. Of those who responded, over half had full-time jobs and most of the remainder had undertaken part-time work. Almost half of the group reported having been employed on zero hour contracts.

Help with raising awareness of opportunities and support in accessing them was highlighted as a key enabler. Young people identified a range of supportive adults including key workers, foster family, employment providers and charities:

'I met him through Centrepoint when I was at Centrepoint ... I had two courses where they ask you what kind of things you're interested in, and they give you help and advice on what jobs are available. Then, obviously, they can send you links to jobs and find ones that are suitable to what you want to do.' (Care leaver)

The need for more employment support and a greater understanding of care leavers journeys amongst employers was highlighted throughout the interviews. Few opportunities for young people just starting their working lives also presented as an obstacle for gaining work experience:

'For [employers] just to be more open-minded about it, and just remember that we're still only young, we don't have experience. It's nice to give us a chance and let us learn and gain that experience.' (Care leaver)

[30] A care leaver apprenticeship bursary is available to care leavers aged between 16 and 24 to help them to access training and support them in the first year of their apprenticeship. A single one-off payment of £1,000 is paid via the Education and Skills Funding Agency to the training provider once the apprentice has completed at least 60 days.

6.1.6 Not in education, employment or training

Around one-third of young people were NEET at the time of interview (see Table 3.3). The mean length of time spent NEET for this group was 10.8 months (range: 1 to 30 months). Data were collected during 2020 and 2021 and might, therefore, be affected by lockdown restrictions:

> *'I was employed at the beginning of the year… I pretty much worked all the time even though it was a zero-hour contract, so it wasn't too bad, but obviously due to Covid I was made redundant.' (Care leaver)*

> *I've got a, it's a zero-hour contract, I work at the stadium when there's football matches or gigs going on there, but obviously, right now with the Covid, there's no fans allowed in, so there hasn't been work.' (Care leaver)*

The most commonly reported reason for being NEET amongst the sample was parenthood (four young people), followed by the impact of Covid (three young people). One of the young people felt that 'going into care' had been a notable factor in them being NEET. Two young people highlighted the impact of anxiety, whilst another stated they were between jobs at the time of interview. Several young people commented on difficulties accessing opportunities due to low levels of skills or experience:

> *'Don't think there that many opportunities to be fair, I think to get a job or apprenticeship in general is quite hard, especially for young people … just the competition, isn't it, who's got more or whatever, bit I think obviously studying wise there is college … that's a facility that young people can use, an opportunity.' (Care leaver)*

> *'I feel like there's lots of jobs available, but sometimes when you apply for them, they say you haven't got any experience, but then it's like, how can I get experience if no one gives me a chance?' (Care leaver)*

6.2 Enablers on the journey towards employment

In this section and the next we look at the enablers and obstacles to participation in employment for young people, drawing on the views of the broader range of respondents. Care-experienced young people were asked about their specific experiences of EET opportunities after school, personal advisers were asked for general observations based on their experiences of working with the care-experienced young people on their caseloads. Leaving care leads, EET workers and virtual school respondents focused on the practice and operational issues and what affects the types of support and opportunities available for young people moving from care to employment. A national overview was provided by respondents working with care-experienced young people across multiple local authorities. In reflecting on enablers and obstacles to care leavers' participation in employment, the presence or absence of several factors resonated across the views of all respondent groups.

The factors that appeared to make a difference to whether or not a care leaver was progressing well in their career options often amounted to a positive care experience. For example, one characterised by stability, timely and effective care and leaving care planning, with an early identification of support needs, and good quality professional support during and after care. Strong

social support networks and young people's own determination also featured in the experiences of those considered to be doing well. Appendix F contains vignettes for four care leavers whose experiences were illustrative of the wider journeys into employment that we heard.

6.2.1 Stability and security

Having a stable care experience was a recurrent feature within the responses as an enabler and protective factor for participation in EET. For respondents in this study, stability included a secure base through few or no care placement moves, finding a consistent source of adult support whether a carer, social worker or teacher, and avoiding school moves. Additionally, for some young people, a stable school experience could mitigate the impact of an otherwise uncertain childhood:

> *'On the caseload of people I work with, all of my young people who have been in a stable care home, so where there was little or no changes in placements, in social workers, those young people really do very well. So that just comes to show how important a stable support network is.' (Professional)*

Conversely, staff and young people identified instability during care as a common experience for young people who were NEET:

> *'I would say there is a massive correlation. Young people who've had multiple moves, disruptive education in secondary school … it is those young people that perhaps don't have a set path, leave education … find themselves NEET.' (Professional)*

> *'I was so distracted from being passed about and so much going on in my life … I couldn't concentrate at school.' (Care leaver)*

Staff and young people also emphasised the importance of stability post-care:

> *'I think when they're … staying put, that can be quite a good influence on our young people, in terms of I guess it's one less thing for them to worry about. Their accommodation, that's sorted.' (Professional)*

Staying Put provision[31] featured strongly in reflections by staff on what had helped their young people's career journeys, particularly in terms of education progression. Some noted that more could be done to make staying in foster care past the age of 18 a viable option for more young people and foster carers:

> *'The importance of Staying Put. I think local authorities need to make that a priority for their young people and not have to move because somebody can't fund Staying Put, or it's too problematic in terms of contracts, or whatever it might be because we know you can support a young person, the research is out there, for at least six months after their 18th birthday. They're likely of remaining in education, employment and training.' (Professional)*

[31] Few, if any, of the young people in our quantitative dataset would have had the opportunity to benefit from the Staying Put initiative as it would have been introduced too late in their care experience.

'If you feel that where you're living is secure, you feel that you're getting that emotional support, you have a good relationship, then you're more likely to engage in employment, in education and training. We've just relooked our Staying Put policy. There were some issues around the finances. We've addressed that. They're the bits, if you know that you've got that stability… if you're at college, you'll know that you're not going to be moving 20 miles away or you're going to be moving to a different local authority, depending on availability of accommodation.' (Professional)

'We have a growing number of young people who are Staying Put and a higher proportion of them are in positive educational pathways, apprenticeships, university, full-time EET.' (Professional)

'The ones whereby we see [a] more natural progression to higher education and they're fully supported, and often it's around Staying Put.' (Professional)

Those young people in the study who had remained with foster carers in Staying Put arrangements also talked of the positive impact on their education and employment opportunities of retaining support and stability:

'It's kind of Staying Put, I live with my previous foster carers... I'm over the age of 18 but rent a room so it's kind of independent. So, when I finished my course… they're the ones that supported me, pushed me… and found the industry that I wanted to work in really.' (Care leaver)

6.2.2 Personal drive and motivation

Having the motivation to pursue opportunities and achieve their goals was often highlighted as a common characteristic of those young people already engaged in EET. This was discussed in terms of '*personal drive'*, a '*certain mindset'*, and the determination to overcome past adversity, low expectations, negative stereotyping or a legacy of family disadvantage. When asked what had helped to find employment, several young people attributed their successful journeys to their self-motivation and tenacity:

'… well, me. I pretty much found every job by myself.' (Care leaver)

'I got the grades... so I obviously worked hard for the things I wanted so I guess it paid off. I had a small friend group…we're still close now.' (Care leaver)

'I don't think I was predicted to pass any of them really because of my behaviour…but I left with all of them apart from maths and English, but I did get my maths eventually in college.' (Care leaver)

Staff also observed that a young people's resilience was a driving factor amongst those in EET:

'The main enablers for those that I've seen have gone on to get something, it's that personal drive. I've seen young people who've had bad things happen in their lives, and they've just kept going. Had that resilience to come back and go again, but not every young person has it. Typically, the ones that are in work and are pushing on have resilience and have overcome significant issues.' (Professional)

For some young people, their motivation and determination had come from earlier encouragement from the people around them, whether family, carers, friends or workers, who had held high expectations for them. It had also been promoted by having a stable base:

> *'I got my degree and a job straight away and well, the biggest thing is my own determination … it's through the help, as well, that I get from social services … my ex-school counsellor.' (Care leaver)*

> *'The things that I notice are enabling young people is they are relatively confident in themselves if they have a good support network, that could be the family, the care family … their circle of peers and friends. The more stable their environment usually reflects in their ability to believe in themselves and their self-efficacy.' (Professional)*

Young people also talked about being driven to achieve by their post-care circumstances, and how employment had provided a sense of agency and stability:

> *'With the instability that came with a lot of other parts of my life, being in control of work and what I was doing every day and the routine from that.' (Care leaver)*

For staff, the importance of not giving up on a young person and keeping them at the '*centre of what we do'* was critical to young people achieving their goals, rather than letting them settle for an option that might not be suitable. This was particularly important for young people in the process of leaving care and moving to semi-independent or supported accommodation, whom may not have access to support from family or former carers:

> *'So they do then lose that impact sometimes of the carer, and I think for [accommodation] providers there is a real poverty of expectations at times, and that the support as well is not always there. If a young person is going to college that then becomes enough, and that's not enough.' (Professional)*

6.2.3 Informal support networks

Reflecting findings from our statistical analysis, interview data demonstrated the important role of informal networks, including family, carers and friends. Access to social capital was evident in shaping young people's attitudes and pathways towards employment. This mostly related to the positive impact of such support on young people's motivation, confidence and sense of agency, as well as practical support to seek out or sustain opportunities:

> *'One of my friends actually helped me. I was like to them, "I need to start my life. I need to do something with myself." One of my friends … sent me a link. He said, "Apply for this. It will be good."' (Care leaver)*

The support from young people's direct networks appeared to be instrumental in providing encouragement and drive. It could inspire young people and support them to achieve their aspirations. Examples included family or carers providing '*positive role models'* or instilling a '*work ethic'* as a basis for young people to build on:

> *'I think it's just about the support network. Really, if you've got all them connections, then I think that's a great tool.' (Care leaver)*

'For us, if a young person's got a good network around them and quite positive role models that have had good experiences themselves or are in the know ... a family member that works for a particular company so they've said, 'This young person's going to come along with us and we'll try and get them a job.' That has happened… sometimes the personal connections of young people is quite important.' (Professional)

'The young people that work have a good work ethic. Those [in education and employment] have had good, strong and encouraging support networks and a team of professionals consistently and regularly reviewing the progress of their learning and development.' (Professional)

'Some carers just don't mind [young people] just doing whatever … whereas my carers are just really supportive and want me to go out and get a job and earn my own money and enjoy life … so carers just sitting down, going through the different things or work that they might enjoy.' (Care leaver)

Rekindling relationships and forming new ones after care could also act as a catalyst for finding and maintaining EET opportunities:

'Going back living with parents, that can have a positive impact on getting them motivated to get into EET. In other cases, it's like they've got a new boyfriend or girlfriend who's like, "Stop being lazy and sitting around."' (Professional)

Respondents acknowledged that informal networks could also pose an obstacle for young people's engagement and, therefore, workers and carers needed to be mindful of the potential negative influences on young people's engagement. Examples included an absence of contact with peers, carers or family members who were engaged in education or work, and peer pressure to disengage from or disregard EET opportunities:

'The relationships and family that surround them does have a big impact, and that is both ways as well. Obviously, it can drag them further away [from opportunities].' (Professional)

'It's about who's around them, who's setting those examples and if they haven't got someone who's getting up in the morning and going to work and they're watching that happen on a day-by-day basis, then they find it harder to aspire to that.' (Professional)

'You only need one or two [of their peers] to be disinterested for the rest to follow suit.' (Professional)

The on-going support of current and former carers was highlighted by several young people as significant factors in their successful participation in employment. Examples included emotional, practical and financial support:

'My foster parent as well, if I needed her. I know I'm not living with her now but she's literally still there for me all the time.' (Care leaver)

'When I had meetings with my social worker or leaving care, [foster carer] would give advice and she also helped me get one of my first jobs. She also offered me help with my CV and going round to look for a job.' (Care leaver)

'Most of my [young people] in college and uni have been supported by their foster carers and have either stayed with their carers with Staying Put or have regular contact with their foster carers. They have a routine and encouragement from their support circle.' (Professional)

In some cases, foster carers or care staff had arranged opportunities or directly provided employment for their young people:

'The second I could, I literally had to get a job, [foster carer] was like "you'll need to get a job. You'll regret it if you don't". It's definitely benefitted me.' (Care leaver)

'My old semi-independent carer was like 'are you looking for work' then rang up friends and he said he'd give [me] a trial. Then ever since he has kept me on.' (Care leaver)

'[Foster carers] are the ones that supported me, pushed me. They found me a nice college.' (Care leaver)

'I currently work for my foster carer. So they're like my boss.' (Care leaver)

Some respondents suggested that EET support for young people living in semi-independent or supported accommodation was patchy and required additional attention. Though respondents noted examples of proactive support to increase young people's access to further education or work-based opportunities, it was felt that this often depended on the provider and the competing demands on supported accommodation keyworkers who were primarily focused on addressing young people's independent living skills and '*firefighting'* immediate needs. Some respondents highlighted the important contribution that key workers could make, being well placed to build on the trusted relationship they had formed, in order to instil a daily routine and structure, and find EET opportunities to develop young people's work related skills and experience. It was noted that this might require specific staff training or links with EET providers for accommodation support staff:

'What support is the key worker who sees the young person 24 hours a day doing to encourage them to get that job interview or get that job?' (Professional)

Carers in the study focus group also raised the importance of residential, foster and supported carers having access to resources, training and information about EET opportunities so that they might best prepare their young people for, and make connections with, work and training opportunities:

'So me, having only really had one young person in college, I don't know all of the different options. Just from my own life, I followed a very standard kind of path of GCSEs … some of the stuff, I don't know that exists. So I guess information about the different options … when you're talking to the young people and trying to help them decide or steer them, it's helpful to have more information yourself to be informed about these things.' (Carers)

In addition to the practical support and encouragement from family, carers and friends, the respondents highlighted the contribution that these relationships make to a young person's sense of stability and security, providing both a physical and emotional anchor:

'I do think informal networks they play a huge role, right? Again, the more stability there is, the better it is.' (Professional)

The positive influence and support of informal networks and the importance of having access to such social capital, cannot be underestimated. It was considered to be a common factor amongst those doing well in their EET journeys. This is an area of support and influence that can be further nurtured and accessed by social workers, personal advisers and young people themselves. One leaving care manager talked of work experience and EET opportunities being an area of discussion during family group conferences, whilst another suggested the development of opportunities for carers, including kinship carers, and key workers to access training and information about EET so that they could better inform the young people in their care.

6.2.4. Care and professional support systems

For those young people who had gained qualifications, having access to support and encouragement from the professionals around them was also often identified as what had '*made a difference'.* Young people attributed their progress to carers, social workers, personal advisers, teachers, tutors, EET workers and virtual school workers, as well as EET providers:

'Foster carer gave me quite a bit of encouragement with my education. If it wasn't for her, I don't think I would have passed my GCSEs.' (Care leaver)

'When I was in a care home, they gave us incentives so to go to college…make us do the work that we needed to do.' (Care leaver)

'[I'd] stay after school for coaching, life in a class. Then I used to do one-to-one tutoring separately but like social services funded.' (Care leaver)

'My PA helped … with my CV … she looked for jobs and she helped my find one. College helped as well. I got careers advice … and when I needed support it was offered to me.' (Care leaver)

6.2.5 Dedicated EET worker

An important source of careers support was having direct access to an EET expert. Three of the five local authorities had a dedicated EET worker to support their care leavers. These staff were directly appointed to focus on EET opportunities and could work directly with young people to develop their skills, confidence and knowledge of opportunities, as well as working with local EET providers to makes connections and source opportunities. Young people and staff talked positively of the support they have received from these workers. One staff member noted the invaluable input of '*our specialist worker with regards to the EET, which I'm very thankful for*'.

These posts were either funded via the leaving care team, the virtual school or a combination of both. In all three areas, the EET worker worked directly with young people and, importantly, supporting leaving care staff to source and provide information and opportunities. These posts were seen as a crucial component within the leaving care remit to support young people's progress after care and an important resource for building links with education, apprenticeships and employment providers and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The EET workers

appeared to work across the whole leaving care cohort, focusing on those with an identified need, those who were NEET and supporting personal advisers to support their young people:

> *'When it comes to looking at jobs and apprenticeships and training, if they're leaving [care], that's when I would get linked in. I've got good relationships with the staff in our virtual school and providers.' (Professional)*

> *'We work with young people and quite closely with the…so the Pas, one of the roles is to advise those people working directly with the young people. We have group supervision for all social care staff so we make sure that our EET adviser attends those and advises on any EET issues that arise.' (Professional)*

Notably, the other two local authorities had recently and reluctantly lost their EET worker due to funding cuts. This was considered a '*significant*' loss to their team and whilst personal advisers were able to pick up some of the work, it was acknowledged that this could not replace the level and type of support provided by a dedicated EET expert, not least due to the already considerable remit and caseloads of personal advisers:

> *'[We] lost that post… and we [personal advisers] all would want to have more time to spend with each young person to support them. An ideal world, it would be reduced cases, so you could work more intensively with them, so now we need to ensure that we access those external agencies, Connexions, Employment Hub, because it's their area of work.' (Professional)*

> *'We did have… an EET worker, and that funding came to an end and that post came to an end. Not having a lead worker for EET, not having somebody that the young people can go to for their specialist advice, that worker was working on a caseload of about 50 young people and at different times and stages. That loss of that post I think is significant … I've always said that that could make a difference, to have that post back. I think especially if you're over 21 and you haven't got a leaving care PA.' (Professional)*

> *'There [is a] lack of opportunities for [young people] and due to not having their own EET worker they have no personalised support. Signing up for education, work, training is difficult and scary and [young people] need a lot of support and encouragement, I feel everyone needs their own EET worker.' (Professional)*

6.2.6 Extension of virtual school beyond 18

In three local authorities, the continuation of the role of the virtual school beyond young people's 18th birthday was considered a critical element in supporting care leavers to access post-compulsory opportunities at the time they needed it and for as long as they needed it. This approach recognises the '*protracted journey'* to EET that some care leavers experience. It makes available specialist EET support for those who might only be ready to engage once post-care circumstances, such as accommodation, have settled down. It also recognises that care leavers who appear to be doing well in their career choices, might nevertheless require support and information to help them sustain participation, whether it be the same pathway or to explore different opportunities. For example, research shows that many care leavers return to learning later (Harrison, 2020). There were some plans in the other local authorities to extend virtual school

support beyond the age of 18 either formally or on a discretionary basis. Staff noted that this carries resource implications, particularly given the increased remit of the virtual school over recent years (e.g. to all children with a social worker as of September 2021):

> *'We're working with the virtual school to continue to support young people post-18. My expectation, at 17 and a half in terms of the looked-after review, is that we get consent from the young person so that the virtual school can be involved with them post-18 so that we can support them in terms of their aspirations.' (Professional)*

One virtual school respondent strongly supported a change in legislation to extend the post-18 virtual school remit more widely, noting that support should mirror that available for children in care. They noted that the removal of support for care leavers at a time that the more complex and disengaged young people need it most, could prohibit or destabilise engagement with EET:

> *'Extended legislation would help because what you currently have is really good legislation up until Year 11 which requires schools to have designated teacher. A really clear set of responsibilities which all disappear at 16, at Year 12, they're all gone. Admissions priority, gone. Pupil premium, gone. Requirements for support, gone. Okay, we still have the PEP[32], but we have no pushback if a college, which they do now say: "Well, we're just not doing PEPs". We have then pushback legally to bring them into the fold. They do not have the same requirements to keep up-to-date with training that the [virtual school] have which has led to that increased intelligence around care-experienced young people.' (Professional)*

6.2.7 Multi-agency cooperation

The impact of professional support on EET was amplified where support agencies and EET providers and programmes were committed to working together. Respondents identified examples of agencies working effectively to address young people's needs and smooth their journeys through care towards EET and positive transitions to independent adulthood. This included closer working with accommodation providers (as noted above) and close working with the DWP, training providers and building links with business via the chamber of commerce:

> *'[The young person] is in a much better place now than he was a year ago, because we all cooperated and talked to each other, communicated.' (Professional)*

> *'Ensure that we access those external agencies, like Connexions, employment [projects], because it's their area.' (Professional)*

> *'I know the government is pushing for government bodies, like DWP, to take a focused interest and I know we have a very positive and healthy relationship with our DWP partners. DWP manager was supportive of the goals and aspirations of the leaving-care team and for the greater good for our young people.' (Professional)*

Some respondents noted that bringing a range of relevant individuals (such as social workers, carers, teachers, virtual school staff, personal advisers, and EET service) together to support care leavers could be difficult to achieve. Reasons for this included staff time and resources, and that

[32] Personal Education Plan.

despite facilitators such as corporate parenting and the Care Leaver Covenant[33], there was no formal requirement for agencies to work together around a care leaver. This was in contrast to multi-agency co-operation and planning for a looked after child:

> *'…needs a bit more closely working with our counterparts in DWP, in housing … with the care leavers champion and virtual school and ourselves to formulate a programme really to look at all our NEET young people. To really target those to think about whether it is employment, apprenticeships, education whatever it is that they need to be supported with and target them with that particular support.' (Professional)*

> *'We all [worked together]. Sadly, that's rather rare. Sometimes, I struggle to get in touch with social workers. They won't reply. They aren't really interested in what I am or what we are doing as an organisation.' (Professional)*

There was some indication from leaving care staff (and external agencies, as expressed above) that it could sometimes prove difficult to engage social workers in matters concerning EET support for their young people:

> *'The discussion need[s] to start with the social worker before the young person becomes 18 and case transfer over to the care leaver team.' (Professional)*

Respondents considered that social workers were often focused on the immediate safeguarding and welfare needs of children and young people in their care and therefore addressing transitional issues such as post-school career pathways and independent living skills were viewed as within the remit of the leaving care teams. The need for earlier planning, recognising that the foundations for EET and post-care outcomes are set whilst in care, was a consistent message from leaving care staff.

6.3 Obstacles on the journey towards employment

6.3.1 Individual circumstances

For some young people, the process of leaving care and striving for a stable transition to independent adulthood could itself pause or disrupt their career opportunities. As in previous research (Dixon *et al*., 2020), young people and staff identified that finding safe and settled accommodation was often the priority for care leavers in the early years post care. For those who were unable to benefit from extended care via staying put with former foster carers or staying close to residential carers, the search for a long-term home of their own was likely to take precedence over participation in EET. This was particularly so for care leavers experiencing housing instability and homelessness:

> *'[Being NEET] … yes, it is because … well once I left care, I was sofa-surfing really.' (Care leaver)*

[33] The Care Leaver Covenant, which originated from the 2016 Care Leaver Strategy, is a national framework to pledge support for care-experienced young people from public, private and voluntary sector organisations. One of the five covenant outcome areas is 'care leavers have improved access to employment, education and training'. See https://mycovenant.org.uk.

Quite often, it's the case that getting them into something just isn't a priority, and the priority may well be that they're homeless and that's obviously going to take precedence over probably doing a CV. What's going on in the background is a massive obstacle. With some cases, it's just a case of, we'll just have to wait, [EET] it has to be shelved until we can sort out anything else that's going on … so accommodation, family issues, mental health, physical health.' (Professional)

Accordingly, support with accommodation could also become the main focus of the professionals around the young person and consequently, help to pursue career pathways was put on hold or '*shelved*' until young people were in a more stable position. The personal circumstances and characteristics of care leavers with more complex lives, were also quoted as obstacles to continuing or pursuing post-care EET options:

'One of the big things that stops a lot of our NEET young people from going into opportunities, it's just the chaotic nature of their lives.' (Professional)

'The different codes for NEET, illness or disability and pregnancy and parenting ... also having self-prescribed diagnoses … social anxiety, generalised anxiety. So the barriers are very much a mixture of the personal characteristics.' (Professional)

'Experiencing other multiple social issues i.e. housing, alcohol & drug misuse, poor emotional health. Not having recovered or [in] a place where past trauma is negatively impacting lack of aspiration, poor self-view, struggling with identity lack[ing] social skills.' (Professional)

As discussed earlier, national data show that mental health difficulties are linked to chances of being NEET, and this was also evident within the qualitative strand. Respondents linked the detrimental impact of childhood trauma and disadvantage (which, without support, resulted in emotional, behavioural, learning or mental health needs) to slow post-care progress generally for some young people. They commonly identified poor mental and emotional wellbeing amongst young people who were NEET or struggling to maintain participation:

'[It's] mainly emotional, behavioural and mental health needs with poor academic expectation at that transition.' (Professional)

'We have 37 NEET … and we've got 12 that are off for illness, mental health … anxiety levels ... there's a lot of it around emotional well-being … and 11 that are young parents or pregnant.' (Professional)

The impact of childcare commitments on employment opportunities for young parents was also evident within the study. Interviews showed that for some, this had put their steps towards employment on hold. With the right support, however, being a young parent could also provide an incentive to pursue EET opportunities:

'I did want to do an apprenticeship but because now I've got a little one it would be difficult for me, just because they're very young.' (Care leaver)

'It's making me more motivated, because I want to be able to give my [child] a good life.' (Care leaver)

It was evident from the views of young people and staff that the '*reasons, that criteria for being NEET'* should not necessarily become obstacles *per se*:

> *'Things like illness or disability and things like that we do try, within young people's pathway plans, to look at those that are NEET for whatever reason, and it's about just making sure that our planning fits those kinds of ... activity levels, and that young people aren't left languishing or things drift. Every young person needs to have some kind of active plan around their education, training and employment.' (Professional)*

Where early support to '*anticipate*', identify and address these needs had been received or where ongoing targeted support was available, young people with disabilities, mental or physical health conditions and young parents were participating in employment, education and training.

The key message here is that services should act earlier to identify those young people for whom the transition from care to independent adulthood is less likely to be straightforward, and put in place an '*active plan'* to prevent them drifting into being NEET long term. Examples of support included volunteering opportunities, short courses and 'taster' opportunities such as visits to college or work places, group work and peer support such as young parents' groups, and targeted help to overcome personal impediments to participation:

> *'I very much believe that the personal can be overcome. It's how as a society and our services, we respond to that, because it can be anticipated through the care journey, the trauma these people have experienced. It's almost as if, for some partners and professionals, that's still the starting point. Like, "You [young people] don't want to do it, you're lacking in motivation around what you want to do with regards to EET", but I think we need to see it from a different perspective.' (Professional)*

Respondents noted that this is a two-way process and while young people can be supported to participate despite personal obstacles, EET providers needed to be mindful of the additional needs of these more complex young people and be willing and able to facilitate these within the opportunities on offer. As discussed further below, this required an appreciation amongst EET providers of the potential impacts of care leavers' past and current circumstances on their engagement with EET. Suggestions to address this included work by leaving care professional and corporate parents to help dispel negative stereotypes, and raise awareness of the effects of dealing with difficulties or past trauma on young people. Respondents talked of having a holistic view of the young person, '*keeping them at the centre*' and applying '*trauma informed'* approaches within EET provision:

> *'We just need an understanding, a respect of the journey that our young people have gone through. What I'm talking about is a more trauma-informed approach, so it's that upfront respect that regardless of the young people in front of us, they've gone through stuff that has made them disadvantaged and feel oppressed.' (Professional)*

> *'For the [EET] successes, the main enablers with young people tend to be that they've got someone in there that they can just turn to and ask any question of. I think that's a real positive, the professionals are a real strength.' (Professional)*

The benefits of having an informed and understanding tutor or manager could make a significant difference to young people's EET experience (also see Appendix F):

'[My employer] understands I have mental health, so if I need to go to the doctors, [they're] really lenient on my having the day off.' (Care leaver)

6.3.2 Interpersonal skills and daily routine

Related to young people's personal circumstances, staff identified limited interpersonal and social skills, and absence of a routine as further barriers to participation for the most vulnerable care leavers. This was considered to be particularly evident amongst young people who had been disengaged from school and/or post-18 EET for some time. Respondents described the challenges of supporting these young people to adapt to structure, regular routine and the everyday expectations and '*mindset'* associated with being in work, training or college:

'Young people like occasionally can't manage to negotiate their morning routine, getting up and making sure they're ready to get to somewhere, and thinking about the transport and how to get there.' (Professional)

Some respondents noted that the effects of low confidence and self-esteem, '*lack of problem solving skills',* or being uncomfortable with new situations and protocols could prevent or destabilise young people's engagement with EET opportunities. Examples included young people reacting negatively to work pressure or criticism and consequently withdrawing from participation or being dismissed:

'Running into conflict with staff/other learners, again avoidance sets in. Having high sensitivities, apparent small subtle issues seem to put [them] off easily. Finding the right provider that suits the person's interests and being accessible – i.e. not 3 busses away, then no bursary, or the reality of having to get up at 7am, when you've had relatively low responsibility … [these are] more visible when [there have been] long gaps between activity.' (Professional)

Staff talked of the broad yet individualised emotional, behavioural, and practical support that was sometimes necessary in order for an EET opportunity to succeed. They described removing any potential hurdles, seemingly big or small, such as accompanying young people to their place of work or training, arranging resources for travel, appropriate clothing and any equipment necessary for them to participate, and maintaining regular contact to check in and reassure them:

'Being supported by professionals to ensure they have the right uniform, equipment, money and skills to attend the training. At times I have had to take the [young people] to the course for the first few days to ensure they felt safe and happy to attend on their own.' (Professional)

'Often, we are knocking on the door, waking them up, picking them up and taking them, and those are the young people we want to target, the ones that have absolutely very little routine. Just even attendance on time is actually a major achievement.' (Professional)

Though seen as necessary, this involved time and resources for personal advisers, who could often be overstretched in terms of their commitments. This issue taps into wider concerns that were raised about realistic resourcing of services that were needing to undertake such targeted

support, whilst having to manage higher caseloads associated with the increase in young people entering care and the extension of support until the age of 25.

The level of need amongst some care leavers highlighted the importance of providing pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship support programmes that aimed to prepare care leavers for the world of work or adult learning. Examples across the local authorities included the provision of 'work coaches' through national and local projects and intensive access programmes, designed as a first step towards mainstream work-based opportunities. One example was the Prince's Trust pre-apprenticeship course, available to all entry level apprentices, which introduced basic skills and procedures for undertaking an apprenticeship with the aim of maximising successful engagement.

Staff recommended that to be most effective, such programmes needed to be broad and holistic to address interpersonal, emotional and practical skills, rather than focused on basic numeracy and literacy alone:

> *'Being able to provide that work placement and work experience, then we can work on what that young person needs. It might be that they need that – let's say the pre-employment knowledge about work etiquette, and how to manage in a work environment. If something upsets you, how to manage that.' (Professional)*

6.3.3 Qualifications, skills and experience

A frequently-cited barrier to work-related opportunities was the level and type of skills, qualifications and experience required to access them, and the disparity with those that some care leavers could offer, particularly in the early years after leaving care. This was referred to as an absence of *'real'* opportunities for care leavers, whether in relation to jobs, apprenticeships or post-16 education. For example, staff in some local authorities noted that even though there were generally enough work-related opportunities coming up, they were not always suited to their young people's skillsets or their interests. This was discussed in terms of young people not having been supported to acquire the qualifications and soft skills such as communication and time management (as noted above), as well as an absence of support with practical considerations such as travelling out of area.

As evidenced by our quantitative analysis and discussed earlier, in comparison to young people generally, care leavers are less likely to leave school with qualifications. Respondents in our qualitative strand identified several points at which the education and career trajectory of care leavers could diverge from that of other young people, due to aspects of their care and leaving care experiences. For example, the most common age range at which young people come in to care (aged 14-16 years) and leave care (aged 16-18 years), coincide with critical points in secondary education experiences, such as choosing GCSE options and sitting exams, which goes some way to explaining the reasons behind education disengagement and the lower levels of qualification among care leavers:

> *'With everything that was going on I wasn't really in the right mindset to learn.' (Care leaver)*

The impact of having lower or no qualifications was evident throughout discussions with respondents about the main obstacles to employment, apprenticeships, further education and higher education. Having a stable school experience and acquiring qualifications meanwhile, was

consistently identified as an enabling factor in positive post-care EET by study respondents, reflecting the data from the quantitative strand and wider research evidence (Berridge *et al.*, 2020):

> *'I look for jobs … it's tough to try and find a job just because I'm not having any qualifications.' (Care leaver)*

> *'Qualification is massive. Our Looked-after children who leave secondary education with not very many GCSEs, that is a major barrier really.' (Professional)*

> *'Employers can only use what they know about a person in order to employ them, and if their qualifications are not at a sufficient level for the role they won't be interviewed, let alone employed for that role.' (Professional)*

Whilst acknowledging the importance of obtaining qualifications, there was some discussion about young people's potential being overlooked due to their low level of qualifications, particularly where life events or care circumstances had obstructed attainment. Some staff attributed this to low awareness amongst EET providers of the care system, as noted earlier, as well as negative stereotyping of care leavers and a limited understanding of the attributes and strengths they could bring to an organisation.

> *'What employers could do is, in some case, to be less focused on the qualification and to look more at the person and the potential within that person. The grades our young people achieve in school aren't always reflecting their capabilities.' (Professional)*

Opportunities such as ring-fenced work placements or internships, and guaranteed interviews for care leavers were suggested as strategies for overcoming the low level of qualifications. Such in-house and flexible approaches '*should be inclusive, not requiring qualifications but instead focusing on the person and their strengths'*. Providing a supported opportunity to gain work-related experience and skills was also seen as paving the way towards re-engaging young people in academic or vocational opportunities:

> *'Being able to provide that work placement and work experience, then we can work on what that young person needs. It might be that they need that say the pre-employment knowledge about work etiquette, and how to manage in a work environment.' (Professional)*

6.3.4 Careers-related knowledge

Some respondents commented that there was a general absence of knowledge amongst young people about the types of jobs that exist within the local and national labour market, and low levels of interest in the options offered to them. Staff talked of the resulting mismatch in skills and expectations for care leavers and EET providers alike:

> *'Job and training opportunities are set up without knowing the needs/likes of [young people] so it's not based on what a [young people] wants. This needs to be [young people] focused and [young people] led.' (Professional)*

'I don't feel like schools teach you anything about … how the real world is really. When you're in school you only hear about being a doctor, a lawyer, fireman, policeman. You don't really hear about any of these other industries that you can go into.' (Care leaver)

'You've got employers that really want to work with you, but the types of opportunities they have are not necessarily what the young people want to do. It's a really difficult one because when you're working with businesses you still have to keep them on board, and young people that are never ready or they face issues. It's really difficult balancing.' (Professional)

It was apparent that in some areas where opportunities had been brokered, there had been limited interest or take up from the young people. To address this, staff recommended that teachers, social workers and carers should begin discussions about career aspirations whilst young people were still in care and at school, and that this should be accompanied by good quality careers guidance and work-experience opportunities to help young people plan and set goals:

'[Young people are] left thinking, "I don't really know what's ahead of me". Then that causes them to disengage. I think that careers information and guidance is really key.' (Professional)

Other examples to promote potential opportunities included taster sessions and introductory tours organised with local businesses to broaden young people's knowledge of the range of jobs, the qualifications they would need to access them and what qualities employers might be looking for in their future workforce. Strategies for working closely with young people on the types of opportunities they might be interested in were also in place in some local authorities, via employment drop-in sessions, support sessions with a DWP worker, and focused consultations with in-care and care leaver groups to ensure that they were aware of their options and so that support workers could source opportunities that met young people's interests and aspirations:

'Young people have to be the central, because there's absolutely no point in trying to encourage them into something they're not interested in, because they won't turn up, so it's an informal chat about, "What would you like to do? What your interests are. Have you thought about…?" (Professional)

6.3.5 Range of realistic opportunities

Linked to young people's qualifications and skills, was the repeated concern that some opportunities are either a step too far for the more vulnerable care leavers (arguably who most need them) or incompatible with their independent living status due to the uncertain nature of zero hour contracts or the sector in which many worked.

Stable and well-paid employment opportunities invariably require young people to have qualifications and experience. Staff and young people indicated that many care leavers therefore have limited options other than low paid or casualised work, which might offer a step on the employment ladder but could also bring instability and uncertainty to other areas of their lives:

'One of the key obstacles for me is about … [lack of] qualifications and pursuing agency work, and the zero-hour contracts as opposed to permanent contracts and

employment, and the impact of that on their benefits, which therefore impacts on their accommodation. It's that cycle of struggles because of that.' (Professional)

While apprenticeships could offer route into longer term and stable opportunities, staff commented that many apprenticeships, including those offered through Kickstart, were also often pitched at too high a level for many care leavers who are NEET. For example, some require 'good' passes in mathematics and English GCSE or five GCSEs overall:

'The standards and expectations are too high … not realistic and we set our [young people] up to fail.' (Professional)

In addition, staff reported that because Kickstart is aimed at people aged 16 and over on Universal Credit, most care leavers under 18 years of age are technically excluded as they receive their living and housing allowances from the local authorities[34]. Though few respondents (staff or young people) had been involved with Kickstart at the time of interview, it was nevertheless considered a valuable, yet missed, opportunity and that care leavers should share the same access to it as any other young person.

There was some indication that further education routes could also be closed to some care leavers. Though limited to a few responses from leaving care staff and virtual school respondents, evidence suggested that entry levels for accessing what were considered *'meaningful'* courses that *'lead somewhere'* were prohibitive. Examples included colleges taking a *'risk averse'* approach to admissions and therefore care leavers had been enrolled on courses below their abilities to minimise the number of course failures. Staff noted that without the same admissions priority that looked after children have in school, care leavers pursuing post-compulsory education can find themselves on a course that is not right for them and that does not meet their interests and their goals. They can be left feeling disinterested, disengaged and ultimately feeling that they are underachieving:

'Things around admissions are really important because it has such a knock-on effect to young people up to the age of 25 … It's difficult when they're met with low expectations as soon as they go to [further education].' (Professional)

Respondents also pointed to variability within further education approaches, inflexibility in further education systems to accommodate crisis points in young people's lives and apply a strength-based or trauma-informed approach, and wider difficulties in accessing affordable childcare, which could deter those with complex lives, mental health issues and young parents from pursuing further education options:

'I'm working with a young woman who also has a baby and she struggles to basically be able to pursue her education and to also get support from the college, with also looking after the baby, costs around day care, etc. That is one thing where, in an ideal world, colleges would also be able to support young mothers more. I know there are a lot of colleges who do, and there are some great schemes out there. The sad thing is, it really varies from local authority to local authority, and from college to college. So if there was more consistency and more regulations to implement things across all boroughs, across all colleges, that would be really good.' (Professional)

[34] Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, local authorities are responsible for the financial support of care leavers up to the age of 18 (with the exception of care leavers who are young parents or who are disabled who may be able to access welfare benefits prior to age 18).

6.3.6 Low pay and casualised work

In addition to the sometimes exclusionary skills criteria for accessing work and related opportunities, was the issue of disincentives due to the levels of pay in relation to a care leavers independent status and associated financial commitments.

Staff and young people commented on low pay levels for apprenticeships and youth jobs, which were often within low pay sectors or involved zero hour contracts. These tended to be set at the national minimum wage, which for a working 18 to 20-year-olds is £6.56 per hour and for an apprentice, £4.30. Even where young people received top-ups to their income from jobs and apprenticeships or were able to access higher paid apprenticeships, it could still be insufficient to sustain their independent living status:

> *'We had apprentices in the council who are care leavers and even though the council pay quite well in terms of an apprenticeship wage, that actually didn't even sustain that particular young person. They had to get another job on top of that working to then continue to pay their rent.' (Professional)*

Low pay could also affect care leavers who were working whilst attending further education and be a disincentive to young parents who might not have ready access to childcare, as noted above:

> *'I am employed, but I'm also doing college as well, but I'm having to drop out of college just so I can fit work in for the [money].' (Care leaver)*

> *'Some of the [young people] are unable to participate in employment as they are parents and the costs for childcare is expensive and when employed their wages cannot cover this additional cost. Some of the [young people] receive better income while on benefits as if employed they have more expenses they need to pay with less wages.' (Professional)*

The level or uncertainty of payments for work and apprenticeships could therefore pose a barrier to engagement for independent young people who are responsible for their household and living costs. Respondents commented on the destabilising impact for those who were in EET, but experiencing difficulties meeting rent, paying for utilities or buying food.

The cost of rent in relation to pay levels was a particular concern for those young people who were living in supported accommodation. Stakeholders noted that supported accommodation offers an important resource to meet the housing and wellbeing needs of those care leavers who are not ready to move to independent living, however, the high cost of this type of accommodation presents a disincentive to work. Supported accommodation tends to be far more expensive than social and private housing rent. For example, estimates suggest supported housing costs £1,300 per month, compared with a national average of £700 or £1,100 in London in the private rental sector (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Care leavers living in such accommodation may struggle to find employment or apprenticeships that pay enough to meet the housing and support costs and therefore face the dilemma of remaining out of full time employment or leaving their accommodation to take up work opportunities:

> *'What young people say to me, as a collective voice, there's no point in them working if they're in supported housing, because your rent and support costs are high … you're going to have to get a very good job before you're better off. So there's a real big*

disincentive to be working if you're in supported housing. So young people have waited to leave [their accommodation] to get a job.' (Professional)

Staff also noted that not only did this put care leavers at a disadvantage compared to young people generally, but also in relation to other care leavers in 'staying put' arrangements who do not have the same costs and outgoings as those living independently or in supported accommodation:

'Again, some of them are quite happy and quite settled on Universal Credit benefit. We do have some young people that if they actually went out to work, they'd end up worse off because of the accommodation [cost]. They're in the supported accommodation where they'd end up having to pay a bigger contribution, and that's a barrier. I think as well, some of the accommodation providers, once they start work, there's that expectation that they move out because it's about the support. Therefore, you're looking at them getting a job and supporting them with that, and then the next thing they're having to do is find alternative accommodation, so there's almost too much change for some young people.' (Professional)

'Like apprenticeships which come out below the minimum wage: why would a young person take on an apprenticeship? What's the motivation? What's the incentive? Okay, if you are 19 and living at home and your mum says you've just got to put £50 on the table and your apprenticeship wage brings you £1,000 a month. If you got £1,000 a month as a care leaver and you've got to pay all your bills because it's taken you above the threshold and you work It out, you're about £20 a week better off.' These are some of the complicated conversations about why care leavers might not be motivated.' (Professional)

Strategies that helped to reduce the impact of pay included council tax exemptions, travel passes, work clothes allowance, top-up for utilities and the provision of food packages. Not only were these variable and discretionary across local authorities, but it was agreed that these were less than ideal and did not provide a strong incentive for taking up opportunities. It was suggested that care leavers in apprenticeships and work should have access to financial assistance or top-ups towards the real living wage, so that they are not disadvantaged by taking up work-related opportunities. The introduction in February 2022 of the basic income pilot[35] to provide care leavers in Wales with £1,600 per month from the age of 18 for two years, might provide a broad benchmark for such support. The Welsh government scheme is available to those care leavers who are NEET as well as those in EET, so, whilst providing an important financial safety net for care leavers, it will be interesting to see whether it may risk further disincentivising paid work and work-based activities for some recipients.

6.3.7 Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown

The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on young people in terms being unable to attend training or education, and being furloughed or losing jobs. There was a concern that those jobs most typically undertaken by young people, such as retail and hospitality, were hardest hit and therefore likely to have longer term consequences for future re-engagement. There was little evidence of the wider impact of Covid-19, although staff talked about the increase in mental health difficulties and feelings of isolation amongst their young people:

[35] See https://gov.wales/basic-income-care-leavers-wales-pilot-announced.

'One impact that is maybe a little bit indirectly linked to their participation in employment is – well, actually directly linked – is their increase in mental health challenges we've seen. So lockdown, not being able to meet, a lot of uncertainty.' (Professional)

Covid-19 lockdowns also impacted the implementation or continuation of various employment related support activities across the local authorities. Staff talked of having to postpone the delivery of work-based events with in-house or external EET providers such as jobs fairs, as well as pausing direct opportunities such as apprenticeships and internships within the council or partner organisations.

6.4 What can be put in place to improve care leavers' journeys into EET?

Interviews and surveys with staff working with care leavers identified a number of common messages, which ran across the local authorities and reflected the issues raised by young people. Appendix G outlines some promising practices from the case study local authorities, while this section explores specific themes arising from the data.

6.4.1 Building foundations through earlier focus on career planning and skills

'Work that [we're] doing about that early planning and early thinking about supporting and facilitating young people in relation to, "What're your educational aspirations? What is it that you want to do?" We should start having those conversations as part of their looked-after reviews at 14.' (Professional)

A recurrent recommendation from participants was the need for social workers and education providers to begin specific conversations and support around career pathways with their young people much earlier, around the age of 14, and critically, before leaving care. A co-ordinated approach with a role for virtual school staff and carers and informed by young people's personal education plans and looked after reviews, could help reinforce a consistent message that education and career journeys mattered. This approach could better prepare young people for their secondary education decisions and future EET plans, identify sources of support and increase their knowledge of the range of future options available.

An earlier focus would also provide relevant staff with opportunities to activate necessary plans for young people identified as at risk of educational difficulties and protracted transitions into post-care EET. Several leaving care practitioners expressed concern that by the time young people entered the leaving care service, they were already disengaged and without the basic understanding and skills necessary to easily re-engage in mainstream options.

Improved and early career guidance and access to work-based and post-16 education 'taster' sessions were also suggested as a means of preparing and inspiring school aged young people. There was recognition that these opportunities would need to be available within school as well as via children's services and the virtual school to ensure that young people who disengage from education can make use of this provision. There was also acknowledgement of the challenges of incorporating this within squeezed school curricula and also staff time across both education and care sectors.

Overall, a joined up and early approach to planning and targeted support, across and within relevant services, could provide a firmer foundation for young people's career pathways.

6.4.2 Increased access and support within post-compulsory education

> *'The ultimate aim for our young people is to find sustainable employment. However, we acknowledge that education, in many cases, is the foundation for most things.' (Professional)*

As discussed above, there was evidence that further education could do more to facilitate care leavers' admission to and engagement with post-16 education, either through access to courses that suit their interests and abilities or providing additional support to those already studying. Respondents observed that some care leavers had limited access to further education options and noted a '*lack of willingness or 'creativity*' within the further education system to enable care leavers to achieve their goals:

> *'Education post-16 is really narrowing in terms of the funnel we're putting young people through, look at funding and access to some of those opportunities and actually there's only a narrow point at which [care leavers] can access those opportunities. Some of those systems and processes, I think, need to change.' (Professional)*

Recommendations included extending the education support and priority access available for looked after children, to care leavers. For example, introducing a designated tutor in colleges, replicating the designated teacher role for looked after children, who understands the care and leaving care system and can link directly with the other support workers around the care leaver. Trauma-informed approaches were also suggested as a means of supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing needs, whilst greater funding and facilities for childcare arrangements could enable young parents to pursue education. Leaving care staff reported that some further education institutions offered such support, but this was highly variable and depended heavily on the efforts of individual tutors and colleges.

Some respondents commented that there had been greater progress in recognising and supporting the needs of care leavers with the higher education sector, thus creating a gap in education opportunities between school, further education and higher education. Improved support within the higher education sector was highly welcomed and several respondents commented on the impact of the Care Leaver Covenant in driving forward increased access and improved support for care-experienced higher education students. This included local authority funding and access to university-specific funding packages, contextual offers and on-site dedicated support workers, as well as further wide-ranging packages of support with accommodation, study, and wellbeing needs:

> *'I would go as far as to say that [higher education] is moving faster with this than [further education], so we have a big gap in the middle.' (Professional)*

> *'Young people starting university, those numbers [are] going up because of the work that the local authority's doing to make sure that young people know how they can be supported and know that university is for them. It is, in large part, due to universities starting to get on board and understanding that this is a group of young people that they want in their university and this is how you get them.'* (Professional)

Recent government plans[36] to introduce minimum qualification requirements to access student tuition and maintenance loans, however, might further restrict access to post-18 education for care-experienced young people, who cannot rely on family support. It might also carry implications for the increased levels of additional support and tuition needed for all school pupils, who are at risk of education disruption and poor attainment.

6.4.3 Increased support and access to employment and work-related opportunities

> *'I wish employers, especially bigger companies, would open up more to give our young people bespoke opportunities. To enter the employment market, to maybe just get job experience to offer more insight. [We] cooperate with a few really amazing, very big companies, and they're absolutely excellent. It would be great if we could increase that.' (Professional)*

6.4.3.1 Entry into employment

There was strong support among respondents for closer links with employment and training providers in order to create more opportunities for care leavers. This included creating full-time and/or permanent posts via ring-fenced jobs, such as care-experienced support worker roles within the leaving care team, or guaranteed interview schemes, where care leavers were automatically selected for interview, often based on a personal statement rather than qualifications. Respondents, however, mostly talked of scope for more employment preparation or work experience schemes to meet the needs of care leavers who were at risk of being long-term NEET, and had more complex circumstances.

This encompassed pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programmes, which aimed to introduce young people to the world of work by creating supported, creative or bespoke opportunities. As discussed earlier, such schemes could be most effective if they included the development of a broad range of soft skills to build confidence, familiarity with work routines, and inspire interest, as well as addressing gaps in education attainment. Examples across the local authorities included 'bite size' taster sessions with in-house or external businesses, a visit behind the scenes of businesses to find out about the range of jobs on offer, and work experience placements, which varied from several days to more substantial internship or apprentice type roles. All of these could demystify the world of work, particularly for those more disengaged young people who might not have encountered a work environment.

6.4.3.2 In-house opportunities in the local authority

There were examples of good corporate parenting in action, with some respondents describing a cross-departmental approach within the local authority to providing looked after children and care leavers with a range of work-experience or work-readiness opportunities. In one local authority, a manager was working closely with commissioners to create work-placement opportunities for care leavers across the council. In-house opportunities appeared to allow greater flexibility in what they offered and how they operated and could therefore be tailored to suit the support needs of each

[36] See https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-and-further-education-minister-michelle-donelan-speech-on-the-augar-review.

applicant. Examples included phased entry to work placements or apprenticeships within the council so that young people had time to adapt to a full-time opportunity, starting with one or two days and building on this as their confidence grew. Another example involved assigning a work mentor to offer one-to-one support.

6.4.3.3 External organisations

Respondents described examples of partnerships and links with external businesses and services to provide jobs, apprenticeships and skills development programmes aimed specifically at care leavers – or at NEET or vulnerable youth more generally. These included programmes delivered by local charities, sports clubs, utility providers and through regional employment support programmes which offered allocated support workers for care-experienced young people who were NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. Attempts to build direct links with local employers involved holding or attending jobs fairs, and utilising local business networks or the chamber of commerce to garner interest in providing opportunities. There was little direct talk of drawing on the corporate social responsibility strategies of businesses, however respondents talked about the shared goals of reducing the number of NEET individuals locally and the importance of employers investing in their local future workforce as incentives to work together.

Attempts to build relationships, gain commitment and source opportunities from in-house or external providers was time consuming for local authority staff and it was noted that having a dedicated EET worker had eased the impact on personal advisers' time, whilst also creating an identified intermediary to broker EET support. Developing such opportunities also involved negotiations around employment systems, human resources protocols, and concerns around equal opportunities, particularly with regard to ring-fenced opportunities. Consequently, staff noted that programmes had therefore stalled or taken considerable time to set up. Some local authority staff commented on the limited resources available to them to pursue such partnerships and opportunities for their young people. Furthermore, for two local authorities, the impact of increased numbers of older care leavers accessing their services, via the extension of leaving care support to age 25, had resulted in increased demand and caseloads. Local authority staff noted that sufficient resources were required to focus on the EET and wider needs of more challenging young people, but also to ensure that those young people who were in EET were also adequately supported to maintain their participation and not, as one young person described, *'just ticked off the list'*. Ideally, this would involve seeing young people through the employment journey from pre-employment support, in-employment support and, if needed, a return to find new opportunities, however, focus appeared to drift towards those in most need to finding opportunities.

Having a dedicated post to focus on EET support and broker opportunities might go some way to resolving these issues, though will potentially incur additional costs. Respondents noted that such posts might be shared with the virtual school or with other employment agencies or programmes.

6.4.3.4 Apprenticeships

> *'If you take apprenticeships which the story for our looked-after children is that it's actually quite difficult to get into an apprenticeship … and they [are] predicated by the fact that you're living at home with your parents, because the wages are quite poor.' (Professional)*

As outlined earlier, there was concern that apprenticeships were not accessible to many care leavers, due to the entry qualification requirements and low pay. There was also an issue with Kickstart criteria that removed access to care leavers aged 16 and 17. Respondents in one local authority noted that apprenticeship opportunities were increasingly at Level 3 or above and therefore at too high a threshold for young people who are struggling to get into EET. There was also some indication that apprenticeships for young people are more common amongst the 19 and over age range generally (Foley, 2021)[37]. However, this is typically around the age when care leavers move into independent living and are likely to incur financial commitments that are at odds with apprenticeship pay levels.

Despite the introduction of the national care leaver bursary in 2018, which provides a one-off payment of £1,000 for care leavers sustaining an apprenticeship for 60 days or more, there was no evidence within our study of this form of support being utilised. Respondents, however, provided examples of local authority funded financial top-ups to support care leavers in apprenticeships including through in-house council apprenticeships, where there was greater flexibility to provide higher rates of pay.

As with pre-employment opportunities, there were also examples of in-house and external support programmes to prepare young people for taking up apprenticeships, though these tended to be aimed at sustaining participation once enrolled, and so did not address the issue of high entry or other prohibitive requirements. Nevertheless, leaving care managers and personal advisers described the necessity of providing financial and practical support in order for apprenticeships to be viable for young people.

A review of financial support systems for care leavers in apprenticeships and low paid or casualised work had taken place locally within some local authorities, however, this might be required at national level to ensure that care leavers, particularly those living independently or in expensive placements, have equal access to opportunities:

> *'There is not level of consistency from government bodies in recognising it's a barrier and what we're going to do about it … it's still piecemeal local authority or leaving care subsidising [income and housing costs].' (Professional)*

6.4.4 Improved awareness and understanding of the impact of care within EET

> *'I think that's a dip where society can improve, in terms of just being more aware and being more educated about, "What does it mean to be a care leaver?"' (Professional)*

The messages and recommendations above rely on relevant staff and organisations having a better understanding of the various needs, circumstances and abilities of looked after children and care leavers as a group. This was considered by respondents, including staff and young people, as crucial to opening up opportunities for care leavers and also enabling their sustained participation, once they had secured EET options.

Recommendations included awareness raising opportunities, which might come directly via social work and leaving care staff, and the virtual school liaising with EET providers to explain some of

[37] Recent data suggest 24% of apprenticeships are undertaken by 16- to 18-year-olds, whilst 30% are undertaken by 19- to 24-year-olds and 46% by those aged 25 and over.

the additional factors to be considered when working with care leavers. In three of our local authorities, this role was undertaken by the dedicated EET worker in their work with a range of training and education providers and employers. Local and national agencies and support programmes for care-experienced young people were also identified as being instrumental in generating a broader understanding, particularly in working with the employment sector, to broker opportunities. Being better informed was the basis of securing appropriate opportunities and providing the right work and wellbeing support for young people applying to or working in their organisation.

There was also evidence of care leavers and looked after children taking an active role in promoting awareness and understanding of the care system, with a particular focus on dispelling myths and negative stereotypes. This in itself was identified as having the added benefit of providing a useful skills development opportunity for young people and something that more local authorities are facilitating via formal means, such as children in care councils or less formal opportunities. Examples included care leaver champions and children in care council members speaking at corporate parenting events, job fairs and other events with local and national organisations. Such approaches, were considered to have a particularly powerful and effective impact on audience, far more so than hearing it from a professional. A respondent reflected that after one such event, an EET provider reported being '*so impressed, like amazing: "I'll take them all"*'.

Respondents were mindful that such awareness raising was as much about highlighting the strengths and capabilities of care leavers, as being realistic about the challenges. For example, the '*learning that comes with being in care'* due to their independent status, their resilience, '*managing meetings early on'* and being involved in *'decision making at a relatively early stage'* were useful skills within the workplace. This connected with wider comments about looking beyond a young person's low level of qualification, which might be due to circumstantial reasons rather than academic ability, and focusing on '*the potential within that person'*.

Linked to improving knowledge of care and leaving care experiences, were calls for an increase in trauma-informed approaches within EET provision:

> *'If we take employers, the lack of being trauma-informed. Let's say one of young people start their work. Very often it happens that in the first few months, even though they maybe did very well on the interview, they have all the qualifications needed, our young people tend to be very overwhelmed if the employer isn't able to give support or isn't aware of some challenges that the young person might have.' (Professional)*

Whilst not necessarily suggesting the need for specific training in trauma-informed approaches, there was clearly an expectation that an increased understanding of the challenges some young people may have encountered during their lives would generate a more understanding and flexible approach to meeting needs. One respondent commented that the impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing within the population generally is having an impact on how organisations approach and support the mental wellbeing of their employees and their students more generally. It was hoped that this would create a more supportive and inclusive work and learning environment for all, particularly for those such as care-experienced young adults who may have additional needs.

7. Conclusions

In this report, we have sought to assemble -novel evidence about the experiences of care leavers and other care-experienced young people as they enter the labour market. Previous studies (e.g. Berridge *et al.*, 2020; Sebba *et al.*, 2015) have demonstrated how care is associated with markedly lower-than-average attainment in school, in part due to the social and educational disruption that it entails, as well as the legacy of traumatic experiences before, during and after care. We have demonstrated here that these patterns continue into early adulthood, where post-16 pathways are strongly influenced by what has happened during compulsory education. We have also shown the impact of wider circumstance – either during or after care – on participation in EET.

Care leavers are thrust into a youth labour market that has become increasingly precarious over recent decades. The shift in the UK economy from manufacturing to information and services has seen an increasing role for further and, particularly, higher education and a decline in traditional routes into work for young people (Kirchner Sala *et al.*, 2015; Leonard and Wilde, 2019). This has been disrupted further by the global financial crisis of the late 2000s and the Covid-19 pandemic (Costa and Machin, 2017; Crowley, 2020; Ernst and Young, 2016). In general, opportunities for young people are poorly paid, unpredictable and without clear career progression routes, while access to higher quality opportunities is competitive (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019). The effects of such factors can be amplified for care-experienced young people who may lack the safety net of parental and other protective mechanisms (Stein, 2012).

In conceiving this study, we posed two research questions and return to answer these now, based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis described in this report:

RQ1: What are the key individual, care, and educational predictors of care leavers' participation in education, employment and training?

In our statistical analysis, care leavers were significantly more likely to be NEET at 20 years and 7 months than other young people, even once a wide range of factors was taken into account. As might be expected, this was strongly associated with their accumulation of qualifications, such that care leavers who had achieved Level 3 qualifications had a lower likelihood of being NEET than those with Level 2 or lower qualifications. In turn, their participation in post-16 education was strongly associated with their attainment at KS4. We noted that attainment in English and mathematics was particularly important in this respect, as these subjects were often required for access to Level 3 courses. In common with earlier studies (e.g. Berridge *et al.*, 2020; Sebba *et al.*, 2015), we found that educational disruptions such as school moves, absences and exclusions were substantially more common among care leavers. Care leavers we interviewed often felt that these disruptions, other negative experiences of school and disruption to their care placements had meant they had not attained as highly as they could have done. A key lever in reducing the proportion of care leavers who are NEET is therefore to support them to attain to their potential.

Within our quantitative sample of care leavers, the most common reason for being NEET was economic inactivity associated with disability and/or caring responsibilities such as parenthood. These were young people who were not seeking work, although many could potentially have entered the labour market with the right support (this is

explored in RQ2 below). Economic inactivity was significantly more prevalent among women and young people who were identified with having high levels of special educational needs in school, but less prevalent among Black and Indian/Pakistani/ Bangladeshi young people. Care leavers whose last placement was in a children's home or residential unit or those in independent or semi-independent living were also more likely to be economically inactive, probably reflecting their higher levels of need. Our interviews suggested that mental health issues made an important contribution to economic inactivity and that these were associated with experiences before, during or after care.

The other group of care leavers who we defined as NEET in our study were those who were long-term unemployed. This was more common among men and Black young people, and it was also associated with undertaking lower level qualifications in further education, if any. Long-term unemployment was also more prevalent among care leavers whose final placement was in a secure unit.

In addition to those who were NEET, we also identified a group of care leavers who were in precarious work – part-time, short contract and/or low paid, as well as those in short periods of unemployment. This was the largest subgroup of care leavers, accounting for around one-third of the total. This experience was familiar to many of the care leavers who we interviewed, including those who had subsequently moved on to more stable work or returned to education. This outcome was associated with mid-level qualifications and was more common among men and care leavers who had been given a fixed-term exclusion in KS3 or KS4. Interviews with care leavers drew attention to the limited opportunities for high quality work that were available and the need to take any work in order to cover their essential costs, even if it did not offer long-term stability or prospects.

Finally, around one-quarter of care leavers were identified as having positive outcomes – either study at Level 4+ (i.e. higher education) or stable work with a long-term contract and an income level above the minimum wage. These were significantly more likely to be young people with high attainment, without special educational needs and living in less deprived neighbourhoods. Within this group, women and Black young people were less likely to be in stable work, while care leavers from ethnic minority communities had a higher propensity to be studying. Stable work was also associated with a final placement in kinship care; interviews with care leavers suggested that social networks were important in sourcing reliable and sustainable work.

We have therefore identified a complex web of influences on outcomes in young adulthood for care leavers, including individual, educational and care-related. In particular, we have identified that the label of 'NEET' may not be entirely helpful as it hides some quite different circumstances for care leavers – e.g. being unable to work due to disability, jostling between short-term contracts or being unemployed for long periods. It is likely that different policy and practice levers are needed for each of these subgroups; our study purposively excluded former unaccompanied asylum seeking children, but they would constitute another subgroup due to the legal restrictions on work for those whose cases remain unresolved.

We have also noted that young people who were in care after 14, but who did not meet the definition of care leavers, were often at similar or greater risk. This may reflect the

greater disruption they experience during KS4 or that they are not eligible for the support services that are available to care leavers. There is a risk that this group is 'forgotten' in social policy terms.

RQ2: What are the perceptions of key stakeholders with regards to the barriers and facilitators for care leavers' participation in education, employment and training, and to the role played by children's social care services in these processes?

We interviewed or surveyed a wide range of stakeholders across five contrasting local authority areas, including care leavers, personal advisers, virtual school staff and carers. This provided us with a rich insight into the barriers and facilitators for care leavers with respect to participation in EET; indeed, there was substantial agreement between stakeholders.

Some of the barriers identified through the qualitative data echoed those from the statistical analysis. Mental health issues and caring responsibilities were frequently mentioned, as well as lower levels of qualification that made it difficult to find work in a competitive and highly-credentialised labour market. Many care leavers were not able to benefit from family and other social networks that otherwise help young people to identify appropriate work and study opportunities.

Stakeholders felt there was a dearth of aspirational job opportunities for young people in general and that care leavers were often poorly placed to secure what was available. Due to their disrupted adolescence, they were less likely to have previous work experience to draw on and some were reported to have 'work-readiness' challenges around the personal skills that are expected in the workplace. It could also be challenging for care leavers to maintain work, especially where they had mental health issues that could impinge on their ability to engage fully and reliably. In the longer term, professionals felt that care leavers needed to have earlier knowledge about which jobs existed and guidance about the pathways to securing them.

It was noted that there could be profound financial and administrative barriers for care leavers considering moving into work from the relative security of benefit receipt. They risked losing income overall, especially if the job was not permanent, while the shift from benefits could make it more time-consuming to access services. Pay levels were generally low, especially for apprenticeships (where the general assumption is that young people will have living costs supported by their family). Our interviewees reported that it was difficult to meet basic costs even working full-time and that this was particularly difficult in some semi-independent and supported housing where costs were higher than average. In such cases, young people could not afford to take up a low paid opportunity without risking their housing stability. This could act as a strong disincentive to work. Several interviewees reported that care leavers could be inadvertently excluded from schemes like Kickstart. While some of these experiences would be shared with other young people, some were more specific to care leavers due to housing arrangements, mental health issues and the absence of a family 'safety net'.

As noted under RQ1 above, one of the strongest facilitators for finding employment was increasing qualifications. Further education was a vitally important pathway for

care leavers to achieve this, with around two-thirds engaging at some point by the age of 20 years and 7 months. Its importance was borne out through our interviews with care leavers, who often saw study in a further education college as a positive alternative to school. However, accounts from young people and professionals suggested that the support provided by further education colleges could be highly variable. Systems were seen as inflexible to the needs of care leavers and less strong than those available more recently in higher education.

Turning to facilitators, a key element that was stressed by care leavers in particular was the need for stability. As discussed in RQ1 above, social and educational disruption in KS4 could lead to lower-than-expected attainment and this pattern persisted into the post-16 period too. Housing was a particular concern that could exacerbate mental health issues, so efforts to provide care leavers with stability and consistency of support were valued. The Staying Put programme was one means of achieving this, but this is currently only accessed by 28% of care leavers (Department for Education, 2021a).

Through stakeholders, we heard about many examples of well-regarded practice with respect to supporting care leavers. Several local authorities had (or had recently lost) specialist EET workers attached to the leaving care team, who were able to seek out opportunities for jobs, courses, apprenticeships and work experience placements; a role which few personal advisers had time to fulfil. We also heard about some virtual schools extending their support to care leavers after the age of 18, despite not having specific funding to do so. There were also examples of further education colleges having a dedicated staff member to work with care leavers, similar to the designated teacher role in schools. Some local authorities were using their own resources to offer care leavers work experience, apprenticeships or jobs on a preferential basis as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities. We believe that a cohesive package of support that combined all these elements would likely be very powerful.

Several of the local authorities in our study offered indirect employment support to care leavers, for example, by waiving council tax in order to make housing more affordable and reduce financial disincentives with respect to work. We note the 2021/22 pilot extension of the Pupil Premium Plus funding to cover 16- to 18-year-olds; this post-dates our data collection, but this would appear to be a positive step in providing local authorities with additional flexible funding[38]. An announcement on the future of this extension is expected imminently.

The professionals we interviewed told us about the positive engagement of some employers in making opportunities available to care leavers, whether through the Care Leaver Covenant or on their own initiative. This appeared particularly powerful where the opportunities were bespoke and underpinned by a trauma-informed approach. Indeed, all organisations interacting with care leavers (including schools, further education colleges, employers and local authorities themselves) would likely benefit from a greater appreciation of the challenges they face.

[38] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-plus-post-16-pilot-submit-an-expression-of-interest. At the time of writing, it is expected that the evaluation report for the pilot will be published shortly.

Many of our findings reflect and add further weight to the existing evidence, outlined in Section 1, that children in care, care leavers and other care-experienced young people face considerable challenges in establishing positive education and employment pathways, due to the trauma and disruption they have experienced. There have been substantial steps forward in policy and practice over the past two decades, to enhance the education support available and provide longer term care and support. Nevertheless, gaps in attainment and in access to, and participation in, post-16 opportunities persist between those with and without experience of care. We believe that the evidence we have assembled and the answers to our research questions provide a strong basis for further and urgent improvements to policy and practice in this area. These underpin the recommendations in Section 8 below.

Our findings suggest a need for greater awareness and action across key sectors to address the additional barriers to employment of further study that care-experienced young people can encounter. Our recommendations relating to practice derive from our conversations with practitioners and young people, focusing on their perceptions of effective practice. The scope of our study did not include undertaking a cost/benefit analysis of these practices and we recognise that they may require the deployment of additional resources. As such we believe that they represent not just a practical set of steps to improve outcomes for care leavers but also a wider message to encourage greater attention to the needs of this disadvantaged group of young people.

8. Recommendations

For national government

1. Policy discourses about NEET care leavers should ensure sufficient focus on the groups who are economically inactive due to disability (including mental health issues and learning difficulties) or caring responsibilities (mainly young parenthood), alongside those who are long-term unemployed.

2. There is a strong case for expanded early intervention, with adult outcomes mainly forming prior to the age of 16. This is particularly true for care leavers identified as having high levels of special educational needs (including mental health issues) who are at higher risk of becoming NEET.

3. Due to the educational disruption that they experience during KS3/4, it is important that care leavers have strong routes into (and back into) post-16 education and training. This could be supported by (a) a funded extension of the role of the virtual school to 25, (b) an extension of the Pupil Premium Plus funding until at least 18, and (c) a statutory equivalent to designated teachers in further education as a focus to develop pedagogy and learner support.

4. Care leavers and other care-experienced young people should be clear priorities for national initiatives designed to support transition into work, such as Kickstart, with attention to ensure they are not inadvertently excluded through the eligibility criteria. They should also be explicitly integrated into regional 'levelling up' initiatives.

5. National government should provide additional 'top up' funding for care leavers to participate in apprenticeships and other schemes to ensure that they are not financially disadvantaged overall compared to other young people. Greater efforts may be needed to ensure that local authorities and care leavers are aware of the full range of support that is available for those who are on low or precarious incomes – the importance of appropriate housing and the impact of housing costs on EET was also noted by many of our interviewees.

6. Young people leaving care between 14 and 16 should be considered to be a particular 'at risk' group with respect to difficult transitions into adulthood due to their higher incidence of educational disruption, lower attainment and the potential of moving back into challenging circumstances in the birth family.

7. Due to the additional educational disruption they undergo, national government should consider broadening the statutory definition of care leavers to include all young people in care after the age of 14, with concomitant additional funding to support positive transitions.

For local policymakers, practitioners and employers

8. Teachers, social workers, carers, the virtual school and the National Careers Service should engage children in care in early discussions around employment and careers to activate effective planning and support for those who are more likely to have a protracted journey into employment.

9. All leaving care services would benefit from resources to appoint a dedicated specialist role focusing on EET for care leavers, working with personal advisers and creating links with education and training providers and employers.

10. Stronger and earlier links with local employers are needed to improve young people's knowledge of the range of opportunities available to them and what skills and qualifications are needed, with the aim of demystifying the world of work and expanding their expectations for their future. This might fall within the remit of the Virtual School and the leaving care EET worker role.

11. Targeted pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship support is needed to prepare young people with the most complex needs to take steps towards mainstream work-related opportunities. These might be delivered by local authorities, combined authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, external providers or other organisations and should be broad-based, including social skills and daily routine, 'work etiquette' and practical skills such as time management.

12. Education providers and employers require greater awareness of trauma and other mental health needs for care leavers and other care-experienced young people. Raising awareness of the strengths of care-experienced young people amongst employers is also important and could be achieved through the local authority. Opportunities for care leavers to contribute to raising awareness can be impactful for them and for their audience.

13. There is a specific role for targeted approaches to support transitions for particular groups of care leavers, especially with respect to gender, ethnicity and disability – e.g. supporting Black male care leavers or female care leavers with mental health issues.

14. Local authorities should further engage their corporate parenting responsibilities to provide preferential access to their own work opportunities for care leavers – many already do, but more can be done. There is also further scope for the local business community to open up employment-related opportunities as part of their corporate social responsibility and through the Care Leaver Covenant.

For researchers and funders of research

15. More needs to be understood about the relationship between disability in childhood (including as recorded as special educational needs) and disability in adulthood for care-experienced young people, with particular regard to mental health issues resulting from childhood trauma before, during or after care.

16. More needs to be understood about care-experienced young people's use of further education as part of their transition pathway into adulthood; a detailed exploration of this was beyond the scope of this study.

17. An evidence base is required concerning the effectiveness of small scale (and often short-term funded) local pre-employment and employment programmes targeted at care leavers.

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APPENDIX A: Source of variables used in quantitative analysis

Variable	Source
KS2 English	Grouped from National Pupil Database (KS2) – ENGLEV
KS2 mathematics	Grouped from National Pupil Database (KS2) – MATLEV
Gender	National Pupil Database (KS4) – GENDER
Ethnicity	Grouped from National Pupil Database (KS4) – ETHNIC
Special educational needs	Combined from National Pupil Database (KS4) – SENPS and SENA
English as an Additional Language	National Pupil Database (KS4) – FLANG
IDACI score	National Pupil Database (KS4) – IDACI
Free School Meals	National Pupil Database (KS4) – FSM
KS4 School Type	Grouped from National Pupil Database (KS4) – NEWER_TYPE
KS4 School Ofsted rating	Integrated from Department for Education dataset
KS4 School GCSE pass rate	Computed from National Pupil Database (KS4) – EXAMCAT
Ever permanently excluded or in Pupil Referral Unit or Alternative Provision	Computed from National Pupil Database (KS3 and KS4) sub-tables on exclusion and alternative provision
Ever a 'persistent absentee'	Computed from National Pupil Database (KS3 and KS4) sub-table on attendance
Ever had a fixed term exclusion	Computed from National Pupil Database (KS3 and KS4) sub-table on exclusion
Changed school mid-year or KS4	Combined from National Pupil Database (KS4) – MOB1 and MOB2
GCSE points attained	National Pupil Database (KS4) – POINTS
GCSE passes at A* to C (English and Maths)	Combined from National Pupil Database (KS4) – LEV2MAT and LEV2ENG
Took any KS4 vocational quals	National Pupil Database (KS4)
Post-16 attainment	Computed from National Pupil Database (KS4 and KS5) and Individualised Learner Records
Post-16 study pathway	Computed from National Pupil Database (KS5) and Individualised Learner Records
FE study at L1 or lower only	Computed from Individualised Learner Records

APPENDIX B: Outcomes at 20 years and 7 months and demographic and educational variables

	Ever studied at Level 4+	Stable work	Precarious work	Economically inactive	Long-term unemployed	Studying only	Missing from the dataset
Gender:							
Female	49.0%	17.5%	19.2%	6.3%	0.8%	3.4%	3.8%
Male	39.7%	23.2%	19.9%	3.5%	1.3%	5.8%	6.6%
Ethnicity:							
White British	39.9%	23.3%	20.9%	5.3%	1.1%	4.5%	5.1%
Black	65.0%	5.8%	13.9%	3.4%	1.3%	5.3%	5.3%
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	68.2%	6.8%	11.9%	2.2%	0.8%	4.6%	5.4%
Mixed ethnicity	49.7%	13.5%	18.9%	5.6%	1.3%	5.1%	6.0%
Other/unknown	56.5%	12.6%	15.4%	3.6%	0.8%	4.9%	6.3%
Language:							
English as primary language	41.6%	22.0%	20.4%	5.2%	1.1%	4.6%	5.2%
English as an additional language	66.9%	7.0%	12.4%	2.3%	0.8%	5.0%	5.6%
Free school meals:							
Eligible within last six years	29.5%	16.8%	25.6%	11.5%	2.6%	6.9%	7.2%
Not eligible within last six years	49.1%	21.6%	17.6%	2.7%	0.5%	3.9%	4.5%
Neighbourhood deprivation:							
IDACI score in top quartile	37.3%	16.6%	23.0%	8.2%	2.1%	6.3%	6.6%
IDACI score in second quartile	38.5%	21.9%	22.2%	5.7%	1.2%	5.0%	5.6%
IDACI score in third quartile	45.0%	22.9%	19.0%	3.6%	0.6%	4.1%	4.8%
IDACI score in bottom quartile	54.7%	20.5%	14.7%	2.4%	0.4%	3.3%	4.0%
Special educational needs (KS4):							
None	51.1%	20.9%	17.2%	2.4%	0.5%	3.6%	4.2%
School Action	24.5%	22.5%	29.2%	6.9%	2.0%	7.5%	7.5%
School Action Plus or Statement	15.0%	14.2%	26.3%	21.4%	3.7%	9.1%	10.3%
School type (KS4):							
Mainstream school	45.0%	20.7%	19.7%	4.1%	1.0%	4.6%	5.1%
Special school	2.0%	3.3%	12.7%	53.9%	4.1%	8.7%	15.3%
Attendance (KS3/4):							
Ever designated as persistent absentee	15.3%	16.7%	29.2%	17.7%	2.9%	7.6%	10.7%
Never designated as persistent absentee	47.8%	20.9%	18.4%	3.3%	0.8%	4.3%	4.5%
Exclusion (KS3/4):							

Ever excluded (permanent or fixed term)	17.4%	21.5%	29.1%	11.3%	2.7%	8.2%	9.8%
Never excluded (permanent or fixed term)	48.6%	20.3%	18.0%	3.9%	0.8%	4.0%	4.5%
Pupil referral unit (KS3/4):							
Ever in a pupil referral unit	7.5%	11.7%	28.3%	21.5%	5.2%	12.1%	13.6%
Never in a pupil referral unit	44.3%	20.4%	19.6%	4.9%	1.0%	4.6%	5.2%
Alternative provision (KS3/4):							
Ever in alternative provision	19.7%	10.4%	20.7%	27.1%	3.2%	7.9%	11.1%
Never in alternative provision	44.3%	20.4%	19.6%	4.8%	1.0%	4.6%	5.2%
Changed schools (KS4):							
Yes	29.0%	17.6%	25.2%	11.4%	2.4%	6.7%	7.8%
No	45.4%	20.6%	19.1%	4.4%	0.9%	4.5%	5.0%
Key Stage 2 English:							
Level 2	8.6%	18.5%	34.3%	12.4%	4.0%	11.2%	11.1%
Level 3	17.3%	23.4%	31.9%	8.5%	2.4%	8.2%	8.3%
Level 4	38.8%	24.7%	22.0%	3.9%	0.8%	4.7%	5.2%
Level 5	69.1%	14.4%	10.0%	1.4%	0.2%	2.0%	2.9%
Other/not known	10.6%	12.8%	25.2%	25.1%	4.3%	10.5%	11.5%
Key Stage 2 Maths:							
Level 2	14.6%	18.3%	34.3%	12.0%	3.5%	8.7%	8.5%
Level 3	21.5%	22.7%	31.1%	8.2%	2.0%	7.3%	7.2%
Level 4	40.3%	24.3%	21.1%	3.7%	0.8%	4.6%	5.2%
Level 5	67.9%	15.4%	9.9%	1.1%	0.3%	2.2%	3.1%
Other/not known	10.3%	11.4%	26.7%	25.7%	4.5%	10.4%	11.0%
GCSE (and equivalent) thresholds:							
5+ A* to C inc. English and Maths	63.8%	17.6%	11.8%	1.1%	0.2%	2.4%	3.1%
5+ A* to C exc. English and Maths	20.9%	27.5%	30.4%	5.8%	1.7%	7.0%	6.7%
5+ A* to G	8.9%	24.8%	35.2%	10.0%	2.7%	9.4%	9.0%
1+ A* to G	2.1%	9.0%	27.4%	30.3%	5.1%	10.3%	15.8%
No GCSE passes	0.2%	2.3%	9.5%	58.0%	3.6%	9.8%	16.6%
None attempted	0.4%	6.1%	27.5%	35.0%	5.3%	10.0%	15.8%
GCSE (and equivalent) points:							
Total points (mean for group)	565	471	424	275	324	395	389
Key Stage 4 English and Maths:							
A* to C English and Maths	63.8%	17.6%	11.8%	1.1%	0.2%	2.4%	3.1%
A* to C English only	24.4%	30.9%	26.7%	3.6%	1.1%	6.7%	6.5%
A* to C Maths only	27.9%	26.4%	28.7%	5.2%	1.0%	5.3%	5.5%
Neither	7.0%	21.2%	33.8%	15.2%	3.2%	9.5%	10.2%
Post-16 study pathway:							
None	4.5%	26.6%	30.1%	13.7%	2.3%	5.2%	17.8%
FE college only	17.8%	27.8%	30.1%	7.9%	2.0%	8.5%	5.8%

Mix of FE college and school	62.2%	17.5%	12.9%	1.4%	0.2%	3.7%	2.1%
School only	70.4%	12.9%	9.8%	1.8%	0.2%	0.8%	4.0%
Achieved NQF Level 2:							
At 16 or earlier	51.5%	20.4%	17.1%	2.5%	0.6%	3.7%	4.1%
At 17 or 18	10.7%	27.6%	36.4%	6.9%	2.2%	11.2%	5.1%
At 19, 20 or 21	2.0%	27.1%	37.8%	9.1%	3.4%	12.7%	7.9%
Never	5.8%	15.0%	28.4%	24.7%	3.7%	7.7%	14.7%
Achieved NQF Level 3:							
At 18 or earlier	65.5%	15.7%	12.5%	0.9%	0.3%	2.7%	2.4%
At 19, 20 or 21	23.9%	31.0%	28.0%	2.9%	0.7%	8.6%	4.8%
Never	2.5%	29.2%	33.2%	13.3%	2.6%	8.3%	10.9%

APPENDIX C: Regression models – whole cohort

Table C1: Logistic regression models for being NEET at 20 years and 7 months (N=530,440)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	1.094***	.340***	.099**	-.001	.019
- Level 2	.506***	.023	-.163*	-.183*	-.164*
- Level 3	.394***	.140***	-.053*	-.063*	-.051*
- Level 5	-.617***	-.480***	-.143***	-.111**	-.114**
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	1.303***	.682***	.279***	.210***	.202***
- Level 2	.709***	.335***	-.009	.032	.039
- Level 3	.537***	.269***	-.004	.033	.034
- Level 5	-.889***	-.490***	-.135***	-.137***	-.144***
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		-.863***	-.942***	-.997***	-.946***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		-.108*	-.089*	.004	-.024
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		-.369***	-.313***	-.225***	-.223***
- Black		-.635***	-.555***	-.324***	-.334***
- Other or not known		-.166***	-.149**	-.093*	-.085
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		.387***	.200***	.184***	.172***
- School Action Plus or Statement		.814***	.492***	.476***	.384***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.631***	-.531***	-.458***	-.433***
IDACI score (continuous)		.782***	.847***	.706***	.797***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		.632***	.565***	.526***	.471***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		1.102***	.838***	.680***	.566***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		.050	.048	.044	.057
- Inadequate		-.013	-.078*	-.017	-.002
- Requires improvement		-.021	-.058**	-.030	.-027
- Outstanding		.007	.021	.020	.015
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		.048	-.021	.008	-.044
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		1.028***	.598***	.456***	.437***
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		.174***	.071**	.071**	.015
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		-1.217***	-.660***	-.441***	-.407***
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		.372***	.115***	.035	-.011
GCSE points attained (continuous)			-.003***	-.002***	-.002***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			.917***	.544***	.539***
- Just maths			.586***	.392***	.385***
- Just English			.667***	.431***	.431***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					

- Yes			-.008	.004	.007
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				1.971***	1.960***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.377***	.406***
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				1.186***	1.200***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				1.975***	1.948***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.434***	.427***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				-.258***	-.220***
- FE college only				-.860***	-.835***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.565***	-.544***
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					.646***
- Late care-experienced					.942***
- Care leaver					1.089***
- Formerly in need					.490***
CONSTANT	-3.670***	-3.426***	-2.643***	-3.613***	-3.809***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.142	.270	.299	.354	.360

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C2: Logistic regression models for studying at Level 4+ by 20 years and 7 months (N=530,440)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.989***	-.651***	-.233***	-.070*	-.070*
- Level 2	-1.349***	-1.089***	-.431***	-.328***	-.329***
- Level 3	-.752***	-.600***	-.137***	-.092***	-.093***
- Level 5	.903***	.769***	.484***	.431***	.431***
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.817***	-.808***	-.008	.017	.017
- Level 2	-.640***	-.784***	.137**	.075	.074
- Level 3	-.465***	-.517***	.064***	-.001	-.002
- Level 5	.716***	.688***	.378***	.351***	.351***
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		-.322***	-.195***	-.113***	-.115***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		.643***	.633***	.523***	.524***
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		1.186***	1.203***	1.075***	1.075***
- Black		1.798***	1.802***	1.534***	1.533***
- Other or not known		.725***	.684***	.529***	.529***
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		-.307***	-.083***	-.020	-.018
- School Action Plus or Statement		-.374***	-.018	.095***	.100***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		.885***	.765***	.663***	.662***
IDACI score (continuous)		-.836***	-.922***	-.498***	-.496***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		-.313***	-.238***	-.102***	-.096***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		-.784***	-.143	.383***	.399***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		-.075***	-.136***	-.091***	-.091***
- Inadequate		-.043*	.019	.044*	.043*
- Requires improvement		-.045***	-.028**	-.019	-.019
- Outstanding		.129***	.121***	.067***	.067***
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		1.533***	.940***	.708***	.708***
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.095	.144*	.155	.160
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.945***	-.499***	-.089***	-.083***
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.222***	-.106***	.044*	.046*
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.992***	-.676***	-.321***	-.317***
GCSE points attained (continuous)			.003***	.002***	.002***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			-1.763***	-.984***	-.983***
- Just maths			-.865***	-.584***	-.584***
- Just English			-.827***	-.548***	-.548***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.304***	-.216***	-.216***
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				-2.908***	-2.902***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.125***	.126***

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				-3.005***	-3.003***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				-3.044***	-3.043***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.494***	.493***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				-1.079***	-1.079***
- FE college only				-1.024***	-1.024***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.313***	-.313***
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					-.076
- Late care-experienced					-.100
- Care leaver					.059
- Formerly in need					-.108***
CONSTANT	-.536***	-1.089***	-1.938***	-1.682***	-1.678***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.236	.380	.448	.594	.594

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C3: Logistic regression models for being 'missing' from datasets in 21st year (N=530,440)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.664***	.207***	.063*	.008	.004
- Level 2	.681***	.289***	.145*	.123*	.118
- Level 3	.412***	.180***	.044*	.036	.034
- Level 5	-.451***	-.256***	-.096***	-.072***	-.072***
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.219***	.250***	.011	-.018	-.014
- Level 2	.103	.155**	-.071	-.037	-.039
- Level 3	.080***	.097***	-.079***	-.044*	-.044*
- Level 5	-.299***	-.307***	-.134***	-.136***	-.135***
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		.505***	.452***	.407***	.397***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		.125***	.145***	.228***	.234***
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		.091**	.131***	.235***	.236***
- Black		-.089**	-.035	.158***	.161***
- Other or not known		.204***	.229***	.290***	.290***
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		.133***	.034	.019	.021
- School Action Plus or Statement		.167***	.005	.000	.024
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.061*	.012	.081**	.075*
IDACI score (continuous)		.191***	.217***	.066	.050
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		.037*	-.002	-.037*	-.025
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		.099*	-.029	-.211***	-.149**
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		.010	.012	-.014	-.015
- Inadequate		-.050	-.091**	-.063*	-.065*
- Requires improvement		-.036*	-.055**	-.043*	-.044*
- Outstanding		-.012	-.003	-.006	-.004
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		-.437***	-.153**	-.089	-.097
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		.104	.040	.046	.064
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		.575***	.342***	.183***	.189***
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		.100***	.041	.025	.038
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		.355***	.198***	.089***	.098***
GCSE points attained (continuous)			-.002***	-.001***	-.001***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			.509***	.205***	.206***
- Just maths			.322***	.189***	.189***
- Just English			.357***	.191***	.190***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			.007	.008	.007
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				1.204***	1.211***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.249***	.243***

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				.683***	.681***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				1.223***	1.227***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.186***	.188***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				.249***	.243***
- FE college only				-.596***	-.600***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.576***	-.578***
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					-.194**
- Late care-experienced					-.356***
- Care leaver					-.564***
- Formerly in need					-.130***
CONSTANT	-2.870***	-3.153***	-2.704***	-3.091***	-3.055***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.032	.059	.070	.122	.123

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C4: Logistic regression models for being in stable work at 20 years and 7 months (excluding those studying at Level 4+ and missing – N=268,070)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.635***	-.152***	-.032	-.009	-.017
- Level 2	-.480***	-.168**	-.029	-.009	-.017
- Level 3	-.276***	-.130***	-.017	-.014	-.018
- Level 5	.131***	.088***	-.003	-.003	-.002
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-1.104***	-.739***	-.540***	-.524***	-.519***
- Level 2	-.692***	-.490***	-.277***	-.280***	-.281***
- Level 3	-.406***	-.284***	-.130***	-.132***	-.133***
- Level 5	.261***	.129***	.019	.016	.017
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		.322***	.370***	.379***	.364***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		-.321***	-.324***	-.332***	-.322***
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		-.392***	-.393***	-.407***	-.405***
- Black		-.689***	-.700***	-.729***	-.724***
- Other or not known		-.150***	-.150***	-.160***	-.158***
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		-.234***	-.167***	-.163***	-.157***
- School Action Plus or Statement		-.590***	-.484***	-.470***	-.420***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.071*	-.105***	-.119***	-.127***
IDACI score (continuous)		-.825***	-.891***	-.841***	-.850***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		-.412***	-.388***	-.372***	-.344***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		-1.504***	-1.347***	-1.259***	-1.134***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		-.012	-.018	-.015	-.017
- Inadequate		-.063**	-.029	-.031	-.033
- Requires improvement		-.017	.002	-.004	-.003
- Outstanding		.006	.000	-.004	-.004
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		.144***	-.045	-.070	-.075
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.147*	-.048	-.041	-.007
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.573***	-.400***	-.359***	-.339***
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.224***	-.175***	-.160***	-.133***
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.233***	-.117***	-.073***	-.053***
GCSE points attained (continuous)			.001***	.001***	.001***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			-.418***	-.385***	-.385***
- Just maths			-.167***	-.164***	-.164***
- Just English			-.202***	-.191***	-.193***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			.035***	.040***	.040***
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				-.129***	-.109***

- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.042	.037
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				.097***	.099***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				-.012	-.006
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				-.370***	-.363***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				-.053**	-.055**
- FE college only				-.142***	-.140***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.108***	-.108***
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					-.557***
- Late care-experienced					-1.042***
- Care leaver					-.920***
- Formerly in need					-.345***
CONSTANT	-.191***	.098***	-.262***	-.082*	-.051
Nagelkerke's R^2	.075	.154	.167	.173	.176

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C5: Logistic regression models for being in precarious work at 20 years and 7 months (excluding those studying at Level 4+ and missing – N=268,070)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.305***	-.114***	-.130***	-.122***	-.128***
- Level 2	.058	.043	.020	.024	.018
- Level 3	.069***	.056***	.028*	.029*	.026*
- Level 5	-.061***	-.066***	-.033**	-.036**	-.036**
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.035	.036	-.027	-.024	-.021
- Level 2	.244***	.181***	.107**	.104**	.104**
- Level 3	.186***	.149***	.085***	.083***	.082***
- Level 5	-.168***	-.132***	-.087***	-.092***	-.091***
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		-.129***	-.132***	-.130***	-.141***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		.154***	.155***	.147***	.155***
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		.166***	.168***	.156***	.158***
- Black		.270***	.276***	.255***	.260***
- Other or not known		.090***	.092***	.083***	.084***
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		.093***	.073***	.075***	.078***
- School Action Plus or Statement		-.024	-.043**	-.038**	-.008
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		.084**	.092***	.084**	.078**
IDACI score (continuous)		.213***	.213***	.233***	.224***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		.036***	.030**	.035***	.052***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		-1.213***	-1.164***	-1.149***	-1.082***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		-.006	.002	.003	.002
- Inadequate		-.006	-.006	-.006	-.007
- Requires improvement		.000	.000	.000	.000
- Outstanding		-.021	-.020	-.023*	-.023*
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		-.039	.044	.026	.021
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		.007	.003	.007	.028
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.019	-.042**	-.022	-.011
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		.031*	.028	.033*	.051**
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		.039***	.018	.037**	.049***
GCSE points attained (continuous)			.000	.000	.000
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			.224***	.246***	.246***
- Just maths			.126***	.135***	.135***
- Just English			.214***	.223***	.221***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.004	.000	-.001
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				-.210***	-.197***

- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.069**	.065**
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				-.016	-.017
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				-.084***	-.081***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.037**	.042**
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				-.078***	-.081***
- FE college only				-.103***	.103***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.185***	-.186***
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					-.364***
- Late care-experienced					-.646***
- Care leaver					-.442***
- Formerly in need					-.161***
CONSTANT	-.452***	-.452***	-.616***	-.454***	-.427***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.008	.021	.022	.024	.026

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C6: Logistic regression models for economically inactive at 20 years and 7 months (excluding those studying at Level 4+ and missing – N=268,070)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.900***	.271***	.096**	.012	.038
- Level 2	.249***	-.073	-.208**	-.242***	-.219**
- Level 3	.186***	.046*	-.078***	-.087***	-.073**
- Level 5	-.086**	-.083**	.085**	.065*	.062*
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	1.269***	.601***	.343***	.289***	.283***
- Level 2	.673***	.291***	.071	.090	.099
- Level 3	.452***	.188***	.025	.042*	.044*
- Level 5	-.535***	-.190***	-.005	-.026	-.031
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		-1.192***	-1.258***	-1.316***	-1.266***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		.058	.049	.102*	.069
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		-.122*	-.133*	-.098	-.097
- Black		-.206***	-.202***	-.072	-.084
- Other or not known		-.089*	-.107*	-.081	-.072
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		.341***	.237***	.231***	.214***
- School Action Plus or Statement		.995***	.797***	.789***	.682***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.518***	-.491***	-.459***	-.435***
IDACI score (continuous)		.809***	.902***	.765***	.859***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		.669***	.635***	.596***	.532***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		1.660***	1.379***	1.283***	1.160***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		.047	.041	.042	.057
- Inadequate		.020	-.037	-.005	.010
- Requires improvement		.001	-.030	-.012	-.009
- Outstanding		.062**	.073**	.080***	.078**
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		-.747***	-.430***	-.311***	-.283***
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		.035	-.046	-.029	-.092
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		.923***	.620***	.504***	.481***
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		.220***	.135***	.118***	.047*
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		.313***	.135***	.039*	-.016
GCSE points attained (continuous)			-.002***	-.002***	-.002***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			.446***	.315***	.312***
- Just maths			.225***	.215***	.206***
- Just English			.252***	.189***	.190***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.037*	-.026	-.023
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				1.059***	1.037***

- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.002	.030
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				.500***	.510***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				1.025***	.998***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.484***	.475***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				-.020	.016
- FE college only				-.272***	-.249***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.040	-.017
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					.659***
- Late care-experienced					1.163***
- Care leaver					1.337***
- Formerly in need					.579***
CONSTANT	-2.659***	-2.701***	-1.878***	-2.545***	-2.732***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.114	.291	.310	.343	.354

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C7: Logistic regression models for being long-term unemployed at 20 years and 7 months (excluding those studying at Level 4+ and missing – N=268,070)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.781***	.235***	.125*	.096	.110*
- Level 2	.827***	.248**	.133	.107	.116
- Level 3	.576***	.234***	.115**	.107*	.113**
- Level 5	-.517***	-.268***	-.077	-.064	-.066
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.769***	.736***	.549***	.535***	.530***
- Level 2	.688***	.619***	.430***	.430***	.434***
- Level 3	.358***	.305***	.147***	.149***	.150***
- Level 5	-.199***	-.130*	.075	.082	.078
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		.319***	.296***	.278***	.316***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		.114	.123*	.148*	.132
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		.317***	.323***	.349***	.352***
- Black		.316***	.346***	.404***	.400***
- Other or not known		-.068	-.063	-.040	-.036
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		.338***	.248***	.235***	.227***
- School Action Plus or Statement		.638***	.522***	.502***	.437***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.377***	-.355***	-.334***	-.315***
IDACI score (continuous)		1.473***	1.496***	1.426***	1.484***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		.704***	.675***	.646***	.612***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		-.534***	-.472***	-.432***	-.539***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		.033	.049	.038	.044
- Inadequate		.171**	.157**	.159**	.166**
- Requires improvement		.059	.050	.051	.053
- Outstanding		-.147**	-.132**	-.124**	-.126**
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		-.264*	.011	.020	.036
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		.104	.072	.065	.027
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		.226***	.113**	.072*	.055
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		.269***	.246***	.229***	.188***
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		.284***	.200***	.144***	.118***
GCSE points attained (continuous)			-.001***	.0003*	.0002
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			.785***	.625***	.627***
- Just maths			.489***	.408***	.405***
- Just English			.490***	.409***	.411***
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			.066*	.049	.051
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				.205**	.186**

- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.050	.066
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				.229***	.235***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				.253***	.237***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.283***	.274***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				.274***	.300***
- FE college only				.298***	.319***
- Mix of school and FE college				-.142	-.124
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					.502***
- Late care-experienced					.695***
- Care leaver					.845***
- Formerly in need					.304***
CONSTANT	-4.268***	-5.255***	-5.576***	-5.938***	-6.060***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.048	.103	.109	.114	.118

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table C8: Logistic regression models for studying (L3 or lower) only at 20 years and 7 months (excluding those studying at Level 4+ and missing – N=268,070)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.414***	.172***	.111**	.132***	.130***
- Level 2	.484***	.219***	.154*	.150*	.148*
- Level 3	.251***	.092***	.032	.028	.027
- Level 5	-.143***	-.026	.038	.084***	.084***
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.178***	.253***	.173***	.194***	.196***
- Level 2	.115*	.127*	.047	.038	.038
- Level 3	.093***	.114***	.052**	.042*	.042*
- Level 5	-.001	-.050*	.008	.060**	.061**
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male		.411***	.389***	.396***	.390***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed		.275***	.279***	.282***	.286***
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi		.472***	.472***	.505***	.506***
- Black		.594***	.605***	.618***	.618***
- Other or not known		.292***	.294***	.310***	.311***
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action		.121***	.083***	.071***	.072***
- School Action Plus or Statement		.192***	.137***	.136***	.150***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes		.299***	.313***	.337***	.333***
IDACI score (continuous)		.348***	.365***	.340***	.331***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years		.079***	.067***	.062***	..068***
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special		-.333***	-.338***	-.009	-.015
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known		-.010	-.003	-.008	-.009
- Inadequate		.069*	.059	.042	.040
- Requires improvement		.026	.021	.013	.013
- Outstanding		.015	.018	.040*	.041*
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)		.172**	.299***	.302***	.298***
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes		.039	.016	.030	.041
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes		.041*	-.027	.014	.018
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes		.081**	.064**	.051*	.058*
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes		.078***	.031	.020	.024
GCSE points attained (continuous)			-.0004***	-.001***	-.001***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths			.241***	.159***	.159***
- Just maths			.173***	.069**	.069**
- Just English			.091**	.015	.015
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes			.028	-.015	-.015
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3				-.413***	-.407***

- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21				.091**	.089**
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3				-.082**	-.081**
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3				-.133***	-.130***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes				.040	.042
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None				.732***	.729***
- FE college only				1.265***	1.263***
- Mix of school and FE college				1.312***	1.310***
Care/need groupings (ref = General population)					
- Other care-experienced					.082
- Late care-experienced					-.152
- Care leaver					-.358***
- Formerly in need					-.088**
CONSTANT	-2.415***	-3.002***	-2.971***	-3.828***	-3.813***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.009	.031	.033	.061	.061

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

APPENDIX D: Regression models – care-experienced cohort

Table D1: Logistic regression models for being NEET at 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.186	-.035	-.156	-.154	-.136
- Level 2	-.187	-.219	-.188	-.193	-.213
- Level 3	-.141	-.211*	-.193*	-.193*	-.186*
- Level 5	-.159	.070	.036	.039	.040
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.758***	.510***	.387**	.380**	.356**
- Level 2	.467*	.300	.358	.352	.384
- Level 3	.116	-.018	-.003	-.008	.005
- Level 5	-.273*	-.098	-.158	-.158	-.162
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	-.565***	-.592***	-.609***	-.602***	-.593***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	-.301*	-.288*	-.234	-.248	-.237
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	-.430*	-.437*	-.469*	-.460*	-.499*
- Black	-.788***	-.785***	-.712***	-.719***	-.747***
- Other or not known	-.266	-.327*	-.264	-.271	-.293
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	.165	.116	.118	.126	.134
- School Action Plus or Statement	.250**	.119	.155	.132	.128
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.138	-.064	-.049	-.023	-.027
IDACI score (continuous)	.088	.106	.140	.222	.269
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	-.042	-.027	-.010	.007	.008
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	.506**	.265	.133	.141	.138
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	-.033	-.005	.015	.017	.002
- Inadequate	-.183	-.160	-.065	-.059	-.045
- Requires improvement	-.162*	-.147	-.095	-.096	-.097
- Outstanding	.227**	.208**	.121	.117	.099
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	.126	.037	.055	.042	.039
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	.414***	.066	.082	.097	.103
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	.054	-.001	.017	.010	.000
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	-1.382***	-.829**	-.538	-.512	-.479
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	.022	-.140*	-.046	-.049	-.045
GCSE points attained (continuous)		-.003***	-.001**	-.001***	-.001**
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.440**	.351*	.357*	.381*
- Just maths		.307	.328*	.332*	.358*
- Just English		.387*	.300	.301	.299
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					

- Yes		-.252***	-.170*	-.164*	-.166*
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			2.132***	2.125***	2.059***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.562*	.559*	.500
- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			1.394***	1.388***	1.333***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			1.959***	1.955***	1.874***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			.218**	.218**	.210**
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			-.848***	-.848***	-.806***
- FE college only			-1.506***	-1.519***	-1.470***
- Mix of school and FE college			-1.109***	-1.121***	-1.104***
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				-.265***	-.291**
- Late care-experienced				.022	-.083
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					-.028
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					.128
- Kinship care					-.064
- Placed with parents					.154
- Semi/independent living					.437
- Children's home or residential unit					.509*
- Secure unit					-.499
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					-.061
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					-.021
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					.124
- Outside LA					.256**
CONSTANT	-.926***	-.208	-1.375***	-1.321***	-1.614***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.244	.285	.357	.360	.368

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D2: Logistic regression models for studying at Level 4+ before 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-1.197***	-.698**	-.514	-.509	-.492
- Level 2	-.630	-.392	-.563	-.561	-.459
- Level 3	-.613***	-.269*	-.330*	-.324*	-.322*
- Level 5	.518***	.126	.127	.137	.106
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-1.159***	-.325	-.315	-.320	-.372
- Level 2	-.377	.382	.265	.263	.230
- Level 3	-.617***	-.079	-.260	-.274*	-.299*
- Level 5	.408***	.077	.004	.004	.035
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	-.298***	-.249**	-.200	-.203	-.153
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	.827***	.752***	.447*	.441*	.432*
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	.836***	.916***	.842***	.856***	.831***
- Black	1.508***	1.498***	1.111***	1.129***	1.142***
- Other or not known	.933***	.987***	.757***	.775***	.775***
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	-.186	-.086	-.096	-.092	-.107
- School Action Plus or Statement	-.348***	-.149	-.163	-.191	-.217
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	.655***	.476**	.365	.393*	.342
IDACI score (continuous)	-.149	-.296	.252	.353	.467
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	-.017	-.014	.029	.056	.085
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	-.627	-.134	.694	.687	.783
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	-.127	-.245	-.083	-.060	-.008
- Inadequate	.073	-.019	-.183	-.191	-.159
- Requires improvement	-.007	-.029	-.042	-.054	-.033
- Outstanding	.002	-.033	-.090	-.097	-.096
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.319	-.032	.377	.378	.357
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.926***	-.304**	-.007	.012	.005
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.127	.002	.101	.091	.076
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	.901**	.100	.229	.248	.248
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	-1.029***	-.617***	-.137	-.133	-.130
GCSE points attained (continuous)		.003***	.001*	.001*	.001*
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		-1.674***	-.630***	-.620**	-.619**
- Just maths		-.777***	-.459**	-.467**	-.490**
- Just English		-.802***	-.370*	-.373*	-.349*
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.121	-.073	-.081	-.079
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			-4.712***	-4.700***	-4.627***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.081	.082	.096

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			-2.970***	-2.977***	-2.964***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			-3.223***	-3.217***	-3.237***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.072	-.073	-.063
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			-1.633***	-1.632***	-1.560***
- FE college only			-1.260***	-1.260***	-1.251***
- Mix of school and FE college			-.537***	-.537***	-.540***
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				-.205	-.052
- Late care-experienced				-.236	-.182
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					-.019
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					-.095
- Kinship care					-.152
- Placed with parents					-.639
- Semi/independent living					-.192
- Children's home or residential unit					-.438
- Secure unit					-1.504*
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					-.091
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					.023
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					-.029
- Outside LA					.240
CONSTANT	-1.339***	-1.945***	.240	.314	.288
Nagelkerke's R^2	.350	.434	.644	.645	.648

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D3: Logistic regression models for being 'missing' from datasets in 21st year (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.281	.171	.138	.146	.148
- Level 2	.320	.314	.364	.382	.372
- Level 3	.236*	.199	.214	.216	.220
- Level 5	-.405*	-.302	-.310	-.316	-.303
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.130	-.015	-.058	-.050	-.043
- Level 2	-.027	-.130	-.128	-.131	-.152
- Level 3	.198	.126	.147	.149	.140
- Level 5	-.078	.033	.009	.008	.007
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	.491***	.493***	.475***	.465***	.427***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	.348*	.358*	.442**	.454**	.439**
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	.133	.136	.184	.177	.175
- Black	.316	.337**	.481**	.479**	.465**
- Other or not known	.507**	.492**	.554**	.557**	.546**
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	.222	.189	.206	.201	.207
- School Action Plus or Statement	.057	-.032	.000	.040	.063
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	.217	.277	.293	.252	.251
IDACI score (continuous)	.592*	.591*	.564*	.452	.398
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	-.189*	-.184*	-.182*	-.211*	-.218*
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	.242	.165	.117	.111	.062
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	.537**	.555**	.540**	.537**	.524**
- Inadequate	.032	.049	.096	.086	.084
- Requires improvement	.137	.151	.172	.172	.176
- Outstanding	.159	.156	.132	.138	.135
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	.074	.012	-.004	.008	-.004
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	.499***	.315**	.271**	.250**	.235
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	.082	.056	.074	.081	.095
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	.063	.403	.488	.459	.435
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	.266**	.162	.132	.128	.107
GCSE points attained (continuous)		-.002***	-.001*	-.001*	-.001*
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.161	-.025	-.031	-.034
- Just maths		-.006	-.095	-.095	-.103
- Just English		.186	-.001	.003	.005
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		.021	.072	.072	.078
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			1.170***	1.186***	1.165***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			-.026	-.012	-.003

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			.402	.415	.420
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			1.177***	1.182***	1.148***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.227*	-.232*	-.215*
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			.333*	.329*	.343*
- FE college only			-.366*	-.357*	-.352*
- Mix of school and FE college			-.319	-.312	-.295
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				.306*	-.015
- Late care-experienced				.193	-.003
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					-.462
- Kinship care					-.233
- Placed with parents					-.116
- Semi/independent living					-.253
- Children's home or residential unit					-.276
- Secure unit					.145
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					-.031
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					.015
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					.144
- Outside LA					-.047
CONSTANT	-3.605***	-3.193***	-3.879***	-4.015***	-3.494***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.054	.065	.101	.103	.108

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D4: Logistic regression models for being in stable work at 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.197	-.055	.035	.030	-.006
- Level 2	-.296	-.298	-.220	-.221	-.165
- Level 3	.058	.101	.121	.120	.089
- Level 5	.357**	.287*	.330*	.327*	.318*
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.761***	-.631**	-.573**	-.570**	-.583**
- Level 2	-.555	-.494	-.555	-.538	-.560
- Level 3	-.027	.032	.041	.042	.033
- Level 5	-.038	-.098	-.057	-.061	-.055
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	.548***	.583***	.584***	.571***	.600***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	.019	.014	.046	.064	.086
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	-.341	-.313	-.321	-.346	-.357
- Black	-.967***	-.979***	-.978***	-.998***	-.939***
- Other or not known	-.249	-.238	-.229	-.231	-.204
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	-.103	-.085	-.094	-.096	-.096
- School Action Plus or Statement	-.276**	-.215*	-.220*	-.179	-.174
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.060	-.129	-.093	-.126	-.102
IDACI score (continuous)	-1.003***	-1.062***	-1.122***	-1.229***	-1.237***
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	.040	.025	.027	.005	-.060
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	-1.755***	-1.481***	-1.273***	-1.287***	-1.218***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	-.246	-.271	-.294	-.301	-.276
- Inadequate	-.089	-.086	-.057	-.057	-.057
- Requires improvement	-.059	-.061	-.076	-.075	-.067
- Outstanding	.018	.013	.037	.040	.047
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	.151	.283	.349	.346	.395
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.395***	-.143	-.114	-.139	-.138
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.080	-.022	-.005	-.006	.027
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	-.080	-.289	-.404	-.429	-.381
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.178*	-.021	-.028	-.024	.027
GCSE points attained (continuous)		.002***	.002***	.002***	.002***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.076	-.104	-.117	-.145
- Just maths		.156	-.066	-.075	-.103
- Just English		.190	.009	.000	-.017
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		.056	.012	.014	.019
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			-.236	-.215	-.114
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.487*	.484*	.481*

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			.493**	.512**	.562**
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			.325*	.336**	.399**
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.632***	-.633***	-.631***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			.617**	.603**	.630**
- FE college only			.533***	.543***	.581***
- Mix of school and FE college			.341	.355	.353
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				.316**	-.222
- Late care-experienced				-.058	-.219
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					-.077
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					.325
- Kinship care					.556*
- Placed with parents					.305
- Semi/independent living					-.134
- Children's home or residential unit					-.272
- Secure unit					-.488
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					.022
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					.008
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					.391*
- Outside LA					-.027
CONSTANT	-1.626***	-2.594***	-2.701***	-2.766***	-2.877***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.113	.128	.157	.161	.173

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D5: Logistic regression models for being in precarious work at 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.278*	-.267*	-.205	-.211	-.222
- Level 2	-.140	-.169	-.160	-.166	-.150
- Level 3	.045	.012	.014	.010	-.005
- Level 5	-.146	-.057	-.031	-.030	-.024
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.387**	-.423***	-.387**	-.388**	-.386**
- Level 2	-.208	-.279	-.293	-.285	-.337
- Level 3	-.070	-.132	-.131	-.132	-.137
- Level 5	-.278**	-.190	-.148	-.147	-.155
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	.253***	.268***	.249***	.245***	.264***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	-.344**	-.320**	-.266*	-.259*	-.239
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	.167	.201	.247	.240	.272
- Black	-.218	-.168	-.093	-.096	-.014
- Other or not known	-.239	-.217	-.175	-.170	-.129
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	.010	-.007	-.020	-.021	-.021
- School Action Plus or Statement	-.136*	-.158*	-.184**	-.181*	-.174*
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.222	-.206	-.153	-.155	-.116
IDACI score (continuous)	-.221	-.230	-.286	-.292	-.296
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	.039	.034	.030	.030	.018
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	-1.013***	-.855***	-.704***	-.713***	-.655***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	-.168	-.158	-.185	-.187	-.170
- Inadequate	-.066	-.047	-.044	-.050	-.049
- Requires improvement	-.036	-.041	-.055	-.057	-.059
- Outstanding	-.196*	-.187*	-.150	-.149	-.144
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.036	-.010	-.008	-.008	.014
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	.013	.051	.039	.036	.056
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.013	.005	-.014	-.011	.004
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	.124	.162	.009	.007	-.007
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	.196**	.185**	.101	.105	.135*
GCSE points attained (continuous)		.0003	.0005	.0004	.0003
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.415***	.032	.030	.017
- Just maths		.420***	.104	.099	.089
- Just English		.561***	.302*	.298*	.287*
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		.270***	.214**	.210**	.206**
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			.320*	.329*	.372**
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.432**	.428**	.423*

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			.654***	.659***	.660***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			.445***	.453***	.500***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.177*	-.176*	-.189**
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			.674***	.673***	.665***
- FE college only			.924***	.929***	.924***
- Mix of school and FE college			.389*	.395*	.384*
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				.061	.370*
- Late care-experienced				-.123	.119
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					.087*
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					-.107
- Kinship care					.062
- Placed with parents					.054
- Semi/independent living					-.238
- Children's home or residential unit					-.431*
- Secure unit					-.693**
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					-.021
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					.004
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					-.245*
- Outside LA					-.272**
CONSTANT	-1.033***	-1.680***	-2.307***	-2.285***	-2.210***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.085	.094	.123	.124	.133

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D6: Logistic regression models for being economically inactive at 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.178	-.050	-.141	-.141	-.120
- Level 2	-.212	-.293	-.338	-.344	-.369
- Level 3	-.048	-.163*	-.171*	-.172*	-.162*
- Level 5	-.401***	-.132	-.162	-.158	-.162
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.865***	.614***	.514***	.508***	.487***
- Level 2	.275	.084	.110	.105	.157
- Level 3	.151*	.001	-.002	-.009	.016
- Level 5	-.179	.018	.006	.010	-.003
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	-.930***	-.991***	-1.036***	-1.028***	-1.025***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	-.217*	-.167	-.064	-.088	-.070
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	-.601**	-.591**	-.533**	-.525**	-.557**
- Black	-.881***	-.857***	-.703***	-.714***	-.730***
- Other or not known	-.363**	-.409**	-.325*	-.336*	-.361*
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	.104	.040	.031	.042	.045
- School Action Plus or Statement	.511***	.388***	.391***	.356***	.342***
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.356*	-.294	-.245	-.203	-.214
IDACI score (continuous)	.019	.040	-.009	.124	.177
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	-.034	-.025	-.045	-.018	-.005
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	.794***	.630***	.612***	.636***	.630***
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	.094	.123	.116	.127	.123
- Inadequate	-.072	-.043	.017	.029	.040
- Requires improvement	-.099	-.088	-.069	-.068	-.067
- Outstanding	.148*	.144*	.111	.105	.087
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.208	-.295*	-.308**	-.330*	-.332*
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	.322***	-.012	-.047	-.023	-.018
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	.010	-.045	-.074	-.087	-.101
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	-.850***	-.336	-.215	-.166	-.128
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	.086	-.100	-.161**	-.165**	-.162*
GCSE points attained (continuous)		-.002***	-.002***	-.002***	-.001***
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.715***	.396**	.407**	.429**
- Just maths		.595***	.434**	.441**	.465**
- Just English		.373**	.178	.182	.181
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.151*	-.140*	-.134*	-.138*
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			1.457***	1.448***	1.376***
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.451*	.453*	.395

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			1.127***	1.119***	1.064***
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			1.494***	1.489***	1.410***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			.457***	.461***	.451***
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			-.331**	-.327**	-.268*
- FE college only			-.462***	-.475***	-.415***
- Mix of school and FE college			-.447*	-.463**	-.425*
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				-.400***	-.275*
- Late care-experienced				.024	-.012
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					.019
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					.225
- Kinship care					-.079
- Placed with parents					.138
- Semi/independent living					.529*
- Children's home or residential unit					.725**
- Secure unit					-.415
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					.057
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					-.030*
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					-.004
- Outside LA					.104
CONSTANT	-.561**	-.194	-1.103***	-1.037***	-1.519***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.289	.326	.370	.376	.387

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D7: Logistic regression models for being long-term unemployed at 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.127	.108	.143	.144	.168
- Level 2	.399	.342	.301	.304	.322
- Level 3	.230	.164	.164	.164	.172
- Level 5	-.402	-.262	-.235	-.236	-.235
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.583**	.472*	.483**	.481*	.470*
- Level 2	.818**	.681*	.706*	.704*	.690*
- Level 3	.448**	.336*	.333*	.333*	.325*
- Level 5	-.073	.114	.163	.166	.157
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	.592***	.612***	.587*	.593*	.618***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	-.114	-.088	-.003	-.013	-.007
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	.093	.139	.284	.289	.261
- Black	.346	.418*	.575**	.578**	.557**
- Other or not known	-.533	-.507	-.442	-.445	-.451
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	.254	.210	.204	.206	.213
- School Action Plus or Statement	.224	.181	.137	.121	.130
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.820**	-.793**	-.768*	-.748*	-.730*
IDACI score (continuous)	.413	.421	.364	.415	.434
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	.174	.170	.158	.169	.174
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	-.792**	-.637*	-.494	-.479	-.455
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	-.305	-.308	-.348	-.337	-.350
- Inadequate	-.021	-.003	-.037	-.024	-.001
- Requires improvement	-.021	-.023	-.053	-.049	-.057
- Outstanding	-.232	-.219	-.162	-.163	-.165
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	.327	.332	.305	.302	.292
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	.019	.039	-.011	.001	-.001
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	.090	.112	.064	.059	.047
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	.159	.197	-.020	.010	-.010
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	.279**	.247*	.076	.074	.066
GCSE points attained (continuous)		.001	.001*	.001	.001
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.823***	.289	.293	.294
- Just maths		.519*	.156	.160	.166
- Just English		.810**	.481	.481	.484
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		.209	.125	.127	.124
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			.753**	.740*	.755**
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.211	.215	.225

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			.982**	.974**	.982**
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			.638**	.629**	.648**
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			.288*	.290*	.282*
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			1.356***	1.358***	1.301***
- FE college only			1.665***	1.659***	1.608***
- Mix of school and FE college			1.288**	1.283**	1.244**
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				-.175	.143
- Late care-experienced				.044	.126
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					-.017
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					.451
- Kinship care					.446
- Placed with parents					.327
- Semi/independent living					.432
- Children's home or residential unit					.328
- Secure unit					-.009
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					-.014
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					.029
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					-.221
- Outside LA					.209
CONSTANT	-3.932***	-4.848***	-6.532***	-6.518***	-6.982***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.058	.065	.095	.096	.100

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table D8: Logistic regression models for studying (L3 or lower) only at 20 years and 7 months (N=8,400)

	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
KS2 English (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	.432*	.333*	.368*	.376*	.381*
- Level 2	.732*	.659*	.630*	.635*	.622*
- Level 3	.151	.053	.038	.041	.056
- Level 5	-.345	-.129	-.121	-.121	-.112
KS2 mathematics (ref = Level 4)					
- Not known	-.496**	-.601**	-.493**	-.487**	-.463**
- Level 2	.308	.217	.186	.187	.192
- Level 3	.118	.032	.035	.039	-.003
- Level 5	.087	.236	.297	.291	.314
Gender (ref = Female)					
- Male	.605***	.589***	.561***	.550***	.434***
Ethnicity (ref = White British)					
- Mixed	-.100	-.044	.003	.018	-.054
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	-.100	-.062	.007	-.005	-.039
- Black	.164	.231	.304	.295	.172
- Other or not known	.227	.241	.297	.299	.255
Special educational needs (ref = None)					
- School Action	.125	.069	.061	.060	.046
- School Action Plus or Statement	.078	.010	-.031	.017	.012
English as an Additional Language (ref = No)					
- Yes	.113	.161	.244	.198	.101
IDACI score (continuous)	.524*	.544*	.477	.333	.246
Free School Meals (ref = Not eligible)					
- Eligible within the last six years	.062	.061	.046	.008	.037
KS4 School Type (ref = Mainstream)					
- Special	-.405	-.321	-.140	-.156	-.183
KS4 School Ofsted rating (ref = Good)					
- Not known	.147	.167	.125	.108	.093
- Inadequate	.237	.260	.240	.229	.196
- Requires improvement	.264*	.272*	.241*	.239*	.232*
- Outstanding	-.137	-.125	-.057	-.053	-.038
Ever permanently excluded or in PRU/AP (ref = No)					
- Yes	.353	.328	.317	.327	.275
Ever a 'persistent absentee' (ref = No)					
- Yes	-.018	-.107	-.135	-.167	-.183
Changed school mid-year or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes	.127	.121	.094	.102	.107
KS4 School GCSE pass rate (continuous)	.204	.436	.224	.185	.148
Ever had a fixed term exclusion (ref = No)					
- Yes	.318**	.238*	.092	.089	.024
GCSE points attained (continuous)		-.0001	-.001	-.001	-.001
GCSE passes at A* to C (ref = English + maths)					
- Neither English nor maths		.864***	.437*	.430*	.428*
- Just maths		.794***	.417*	.412*	.391
- Just English		.521*	.197	.198	.205
Took any KS4 vocational quals (ref = No)					
- Yes		-.001	-.071	-.072	-.039
Post-16 attainment (ref = L2 at 16 and L3 at 18+)					
- Never achieved L2 or L3			.461	.483*	.437
- Achieved L2 after 16 (if at all) and L3 before 21			.207	.218	.283

- Achieved L2 after 16, but never L3			.503*	.527*	.553*
- Achieved L2 at 16, but never L3			.750***	.761***	.731***
FE study at L1 or lower only (ref = No)					
- Yes			-.327**	-.330**	-.249*
Post-16 study pathway (ref = School only)					
- None			1.171***	1.164***	1.079***
- FE college only			1.921***	1.932***	1.829***
- Mix of school and FE college			1.701***	1.721***	1.637***
Care/need groupings (ref = Care leavers)					
- Other care-experienced				.376***	.234
- Late care-experienced				.151	.085
Years in care during KS3 and KS4 (continuous)					-.011
Type of last placement (ref = Other or not known)					
- Foster care					-.238
- Kinship care					-.472
- Placed with parents					-.246
- Semi/independent living					-.426
- Children's home or residential unit					-.504
- Secure unit					1.021**
First care episode during KS3 or KS4 (ref = No)					
- Yes					-.017
Number of placements in KS3 or KS4 (continuous)					-.008
Location of last care placement (ref = within LA)					
- Unknown or confidential					-.044
- Outside LA					.077
CONSTANT	-3.501***	-4.136***	-5.414***	-5.545***	-4.979***
Nagelkerke's R^2	.053	.062	.101	.105	.126

*** p < .0005 ** p < .01 * p < .05

APPENDIX E: Local authority profiles

The local authorities were selected as matched pairs based on the proportion of 19 to 21-year-old care leavers who were NEET in three years up to 2019. A combination of rural, mixed and urban authorities was selected. Some consideration was given to Ofsted inspections, but as these were undertaken at different time points across the local authorities, they were used mainly as wider context for understanding the selected local authorities.

Table D1: Profile of local authorities included in the study

LA	NEET %		High or Low NEET 19-21 (H/L)	Ofsted rating	Pairings
	17-18yrs %	19-21yrs %		Leaving Care	
1	45-50	25-30	L	Good	3b
2	20-25	40-45	H	Good	3a
3	15-20	35-40	L	Inadequate	1b
4	35-40	45-50	H	Good	2a
5	35-40	50-55	H	Requires improvement	1a

A brief overview of the five local authorities that participated in the study is provided here:

- **LA1**. The Ofsted inspection of children's services report for LA1 took place relatively recently and the experience of care leavers was rated as 'good'. - This is an improvement on the previous judgement of 'requires improvement', where it was noted that there were high numbers of NEET care leavers. A number of positive areas were highlighted in the recent report such as education being actively promoted for children in care and the virtual school is effective in ensuring that children make good progress and reach their potential. Due to this, most care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training opportunities. However, while the number of children persistently absent from school is reducing, the numbers remain relatively high and this is a clear area for improvement identified by the virtual school. There is a strong commitment to keeping care leavers in 'staying put' arrangements which benefits them by providing stable placements.

- **LA2**. The latest inspection of children's services took place some time ago and this rated the experience of care leavers as 'good'. The report highlights a number of positive features within the local authority to support care leavers in employment, education, or training. The result of this is that the proportion of care leavers aged 16 to 19 who are in education, employment or training is well above the national average. Some possible reasons for this include a recent reorganisation so personal advisors can concentrate their work with care leavers and provide better support. In addition, some care leavers have received funding for driving lessons which has been particularly useful to the care leavers that need to drive due to employment. Care leavers are also provided with stable and safe accommodation and are given priority in the bidding for council tenancies. The report also highlighted that the care leavers that currently attend university have 'staying put' arrangements to support their education. The report has also highlighted a number of areas that could be improved to better

support care leavers. Care leavers aged 19 to 21 who are in education, employment or training is well below the national average. The cause of this has been identified that care leavers require more support from personal advisors. Another factor is that many are unable to gain employment due to depression and anxiety. The council has also been slow to offer care leavers the opportunity for work experience and apprenticeships across the council and it has been recognised that more needs to be done for care leavers that are NEET.

- **LA3.** The Ofsted inspection for children's services report for LA3 took place some years ago and the experiences of care leavers were reported as being 'inadequate'. The virtual school was highlighted as performing well and progress made by children was considered to be good compared to the national average of children in care. However, post-16, one in five children in care do not regularly attend education and training placements and this was highlighted as an area for improvement. Many other factors that influence a person's ability to be in education, employment or training were highlighted as being inadequate. Long wait times for mental health services means positive progress is undermined and there is limited support. In addition, social workers do not see children regularly and when they do there is not enough time to really engage with them leading to poor support for their futures. Finally, many young people have been placed in unsuitable accommodation, including bed and breakfast, together with an absence of risk assessments, have left children at risk of harm. Less than half of children in long-term care have a placement for more than two years and this shortage of stable placements is disruptive and unsettling.

- **LA4.** LA4 received an inspection of children's services report by Ofsted some time ago, when the experience of care leavers was rated as 'good'. It highlighted support with education, training and employment where care leavers receive funding for equipment and travel, while young people taking up an apprenticeship do not have to pay council tax. The authority currently employs a substantial number of apprentices who are care leavers. A more recent inspection also judged the local authority to be 'good'. It noted that most care leavers were in suitable accommodation that matched their needs, and young people are encouraged to remain in 'staying' put arrangements which provides stability. Another positive area identified was a drop-in centre that provides a highly responsive service where young people can get instant support in times of a crisis. However, due to the limited opening times, those in education, employment or training are unlikely to be able to gain access to this service. Another area for improvement is that some care leavers do not have the support they need to access and maintain education, employment and training. The consequence of this is that the daily lives of care leavers are unstructured and their life chances are reduced.

- **LA5.** LA5 received an inspection of children's services report by Ofsted relatively recently and the experience of care leavers was rated as 'requiring improvement' to be good. The virtual school has been highlighted as effective due to its high aspirations for the progress and well-being of children in its care. As a result of this, children in care have achieved educational outcomes that are in line with children in care nationally. There has also been additional support for young people over the age of 16 which is encouraging more young people to stay in education, employment or training. For example, there is a dedicated careers officer which offers young people the opportunity to begin employment at their own pace and according to their own preferences. Consequently, many care leavers are in education, employment or training. The report also highlights that the majority of care leavers live in suitable accommodation and staying put arrangements are readily available. Another positive initiative to support care leavers is an exemption from paying council tax.

APPENDIX F: Care leaver case studies

Four case studies drawn from the interviews with young people were compiled by the peer researchers. These exemplars were considered to encapsulate important enablers and obstacles experienced by care leavers on their journeys to employment. The names used are pseudonyms.

Abs: School support and personal motivation

Abs had a positive experience of secondary school, however there were difficulties due to emotional wellbeing and entry to care. Abs identified a number of challenges: *'I was struggling a bit, because I was having emotional issues and all that, because I was made under care, and I lost my mum when I was young, and I didn't have my dad'.* The transition into care was a challenging time for Abs, however they had a stable school placement and additional support was put in place to address some of the challenges. Abs had access to a school counsellor and additional one-to-one tuition for maths and English.

Abs became a parent soon after leaving school and took time out of education to take care of their child. However, Abs was motivated to re-engage with education to improve their circumstance and pursue a career. Alongside their parenting role, Abs began a degree. At the time of interview, Abs was awaiting their final grade and had a health care job lined up following graduation.

Brodie: Limited support, but motivated to find opportunities

Brodie had a mostly negative experience of secondary school and experienced a number of challenges, which resulted in exclusion at the end of Year 7. Brodie explained that they had attended a number of schools and finished their formal education in alternative provision: '*Yes, I got kicked out at the end of Year 7, so I went to a different school. Obviously, I got kicked out of that school, so I went to an alternative learning course*'. Brodie did not complete any GCSEs but did achieve basic functional skills in food preparation and health and safety.

Brodie lived in several foster and residential placements whilst in care, and on leaving care spent some time in custody before moving to independent accommodation: '*Obviously, at one point I went inside for a bit. I changed PA a couple of times, and they basically lost contact with me, apparently. So I didn't hear from no one in ages'*. Brodie stated they did not have much support in getting work, however, he developed his own CV and tried hard to find opportunities, often struggling alone to do so: *'They [leaving care services] are meant to support me, but they don't really, because I'm asking them to help me with job searches and to get jobs and that for ages, because obviously I know they have certain connections that I don't*'.

Brodie did have agency work prior to the Covid-19 pandemic however during the lockdown this ended abruptly, *'I was working for [an] agency, I was actually doing all right, and even they was giving me furlough for a bit but, obviously, they stopped all of that. So yes, little things like that'.* Brodie identified that they felt let down by their leaving care service, but they are managing with support from the DWP and claiming Universal Credit, and hopes that once the lockdown lifts they will be able to re-engage with the agency they previously worked for.

Chris: Disrupted education, but increasing stability through work

Chris had a mostly negative experience of secondary school due to multiple placement moves. Moving had a significant impact on their education particularly during GCSEs when Chris had to move to a new school with different GCSE exam boards: *'I moved exam boards, moved schools. So everything that I had previously learnt became invalid*'. As a result of this, Chris had to drop some of their GCSE options and learn an entirely new curriculum in a short amount of time. Despite having this disruption to education Chris achieved over five GCSEs, including maths and English, all at grade C or above. However, Chris had been predicted all A* at GCSE, which they felt they could have achieved had they not had disruption to education as a consequence of placement moves.

After finishing secondary school Chris attended sixth form to study three A Levels but Chris had to leave before finishing the courses due to '*issues with the local authority and also where I was living'* and experiencing '*homelessness and then hostels*'. Chris found that to be able to finish sixth form they would have had to claim benefits to support themselves and so Chris decided to start working full time instead. Working became a source of stability and control and something to build Chris's sense of self-esteem in *'working is … something that I've always done and I've prided myself in'*. At the same time that Chris found working to be a source of pride, at times it had also had a detrimental impact on their health: '*my health got quite bad and ending up working like sixty hour weeks at 19 wasn't helping*'.

Chris felt that the local authority had forgotten about them and felt they had not been adequately supported through education. Chris is currently in full time, stable employment which Chris puts down to *'purely just been my own aspirations, my own drive to be independent'* and '*with the instability that came with a lot of other parts of my life, being in control of work and what I was doing every day and the routine from that*' was important. Chris is currently studying for a qualification in order to apply for a promotion with their current employer and Chris aims to keep working up into a senior position within the company.

Dani: Overcoming obstacles through supportive workers and employers

Dani had mostly enjoyed secondary school from Year 7 to Year 9, but Dani's experience at school became negative after experiencing difficulties at home in Year 9: '*I wasn't really in school, and when I was, I was playing up, because I had other things on my mind*'. Dani found difficulties at home to be the biggest barrier to their education and experienced poor mental health as a result. In addition, Dani felt unsupported to deal with their poor mental health and school. Consequently, Dani did not achieve their expected GCSE grades because '*I was focused on other things that were happening, so my head really wasn't in it'*.

Dani found the manager of their semi-independent accommodation to be very helpful with encouraging aspirations for employment and the manager used his own connections to find Dani work with a local company: '*he rang up and then he asked if they needed any workers and he said, 'I'll give them a trial.' Then, ever since that trial, he has kept me on*.' Dani found their employer to be extremely supportive and attentive to Dani's mental health needs. Dani highlighted that his employer supported them in several ways: '*he's really lenient on me having the days off that are needed. Also, he encourages me to go to the gym to help on my mental health*'. This demonstrates the importance of having access to those with network connections for employment and having a supportive employer.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic Dani had been struggling financially and was not able to use the furlough scheme as they had been employed for less than six months. Dani explained that limited qualifications and poor mental health was their biggest barrier to employment and had felt '*pushed to the side*' in the past because of this. However, with the support of Dani's current employer, Dani feels they have now found a long-term career and hopes this employment becomes more stable.

APPENDIX G: Examples of positive practice

There were many examples of positive practice around work-based opportunities for care leavers across the local authorities. There were also many planned activities and strategies that had been underway or due to begin at the start of the Covid-19 lockdown, and were on pause at the time of interview. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the potential range of activities that might smooth the way for creating effective and appropriate work based opportunities.

In-house practices:

- Peer mentoring pilot for approximately 20 care leavers, that provides training and skills development alongside work experience, where care leavers are paid for their '*time and emotional investment'* throughout their training and their work with other young people.

- Financial top-ups to make sure low pay does not negatively impact on young people's accommodation. In addition to council tax exemptions, the local authority provides a fuel allowance and other financial support so that young people receive a certain level of income, meaning they are not financially disadvantaged because they have chosen to work or become an apprentice.

- Creation of a pool of care-experienced casual workers that can be drawn upon to work across a range of local authority projects and events, enabling young people to build a broad based experience and skills portfolio as well and participate in paid work.

- The local authority has created an 'opportunity bank', which will operate across the council and with the external providers to provide a bank of work experience opportunities, some of which are ring-fenced for care-experienced young people.

- The leaving care team has an employment hub, which also hosts a NEET drop in. It also liaises with an in-house apprenticeship team in the HR department. When young people are interested in an apprenticeship, they are matched with an available opportunity within the council. Young people receive initial support with a CV, or personal statement and they can visit the departments of interest either as a one off visit to look at different areas and jobs. They can then opt to spend a fortnight in different areas to explore what they like and things they do not like. Opportunities are tailored to the young people, so it can become quite bespoke. As it is hosted within the local authority there is scope to be sympathetic and flexible about how *'some of our young people can be'.*

- The local authority offers ring-fenced interviews for care leavers as part of their corporate parenting remint. When the council advertises job roles, there is a question on the application from which asks, 'Are you a care leaver or have you been in the care system?' If the answer is 'yes', if the young person meets the essential criteria in the person specification, they are automatically offered an interview.

Collaborations with external organisations:

- Utilities company and catering company provide work experience placements with a view to local care leavers progressing on to ring-fenced apprenticeships.

- The leaving care team have access to ring-fenced apprenticeships through the NHS and have links with an employment agency that offers care leavers EET support including CV writing and interview skills.

- The local authority works with an external employment skills and placement programme for care leavers. The allocated worker offers individual attention to support a young person and can work with them long term, to build confidence and, skills, practising interview techniques, writing CV, buying clothing for interviews, attending interviews with the young person and helping with transport costs to attend work or college.

- The local authority works in partnership with a sports foundation, to provide targeted programme of support of individuals who are NEET. The programme aims to target care leavers who might not be ready to put a CV together and have limited work-related skills. It is an initiative centred around sport, but focuses on confidence-building and developing soft skills. It is a tiered programme, which involves young people undergoing the initial part of the programme to gain confidence, and the ability to try new things. The next tiers are aimed at those that are interested in more opportunities to develop their skills toward an apprenticeship or coaching, that could lead to a qualification.

- A DWP work coach regularly attends the leaving care team's care leavers employment club, which has led to improved links and '*removed barriers'* between young people and the DWP. The direct involvement has allowed the work coach and care leaver group to get to know each other in a less formal environment and this has helped with matching young people skills and interests to upcoming opportunities. They have been able to fast track information on opportunities and support young people directly to complete applications.