

UCAS

NEXT STEPS:

WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS FROM A CARE BACKGROUND IN EDUCATION?

In collaboration with

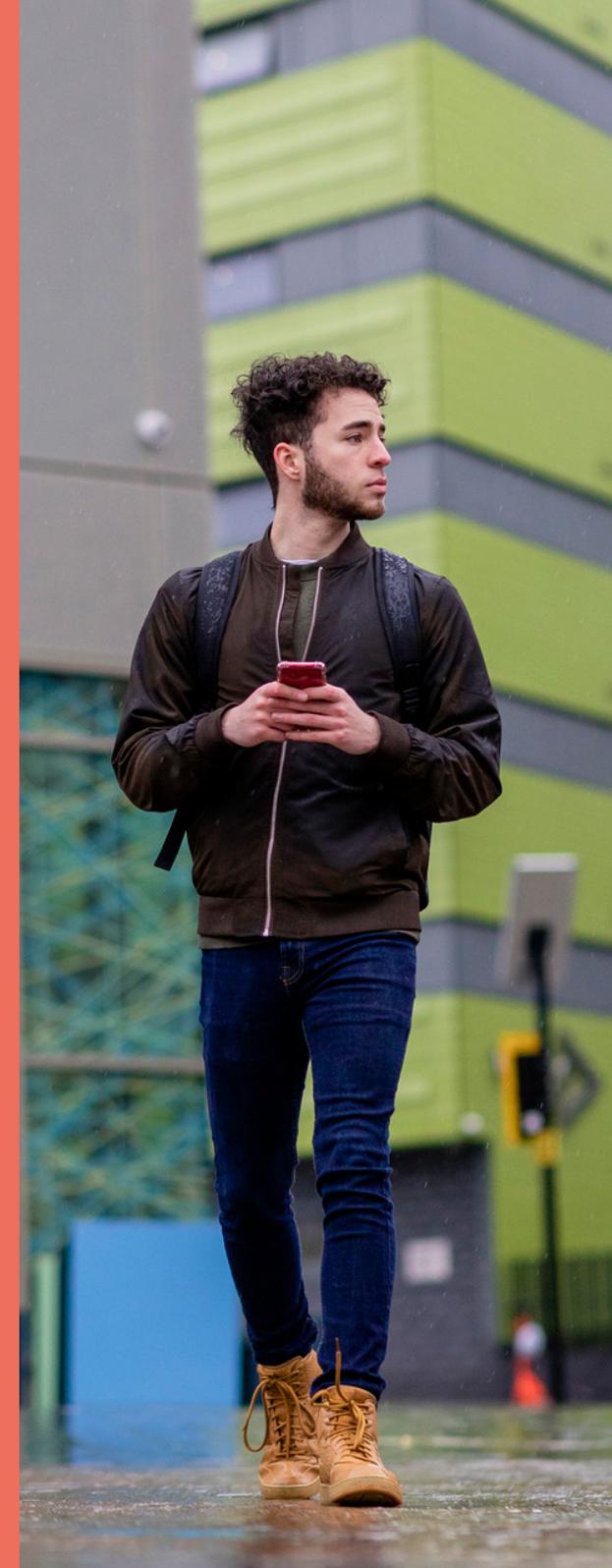
Unite

Foundation



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FOREWORD



FIONA ELLISON
DIRECTOR, UNITE FOUNDATION

It is wonderful to see this report focusing on the experiences of young people who've been in the care system, and who are now embarking on their university journey. Although it is a journey that can truly change the lives of those who are care-experienced, it can still present considerable barriers and roadblocks to success along the way.

At the Unite Foundation we have been supporting care-experienced and estranged students for the last 10 years, providing a ground-breaking scholarship that covers the cost of rent and bills for up to three years for 365 days a year. We are an evidence-led organisation at heart because we know that, in order to drive forward real change, we need the supporting data to sit alongside the real-life experiences of the students we work with.

Recent analysis conducted by Jisc found there is "strong evidence that the Unite Foundation scholarship improves care leaver students' educational outcomes, specifically in year-to-year progression, completion and degree outcome". This echoes the **Positive Impact** research we published at the start of 2020, which found that higher education can be transformational for care leavers – as long as they're supported to complete their degree.

We are delighted to partner with UCAS to build on and broaden this research picture. This report provides an opportunity for the sector to understand more about care-experienced students, understanding their experiences of getting to university or college, as well as highlighting some of the barriers many will have faced in getting to this point.

We hope this report opens up conversations across HE institutions about what is being done to support care-experienced students, and to raise questions about whether the support provided is truly enough to help remove the considerable roadblocks they face. We call on leaders within the higher education sector, wider sector bodies, and third sector partners to come together to support more care-experienced students progress into higher education, and to help these young people recognise this is a viable option for them.

We particularly welcome the recommendation to look holistically at the student experience for care leavers. We know – because our data tells us – that creative and radical interventions can really turn the dial when it comes to attainment, retention and completion for care-experienced students. The importance of **belonging**, fiscal support and the provision of wellbeing support all play a part in improving the lives of students from a care background. We encourage every colleague across the sector to consider this: what can you do to create the change that is needed to ensure care-experienced people can fully and equitably access higher education?

REFLECTION



PATRICIA AMBROSE
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL NETWORK
FOR THE EDUCATION OF CARE
LEAVERS (NNECL)

This new report from UCAS clearly highlights the challenges often faced by care-experienced applicants when thinking about, and moving into, higher education. While many universities and colleges continue to develop and expand the range of support they provide, there is still much more that needs to be done to ensure that all of these applicants receive the high quality and personalised guidance they need.

As a practitioner network, NNECL is committed to working with UCAS, virtual schools, local authorities, fostering agencies and all other relevant organisations to transform the educational landscape for care-experienced people. These students deserve the very best advice and support from us all.

We welcome the report's recognition for the **NNECL Quality Mark**. This is a developmental process to assist universities and colleges in reviewing and improving the support they provide – right through from early outreach activities to graduation and beyond. The framework covers all of the things care-experienced applicants see as important, including: mental health and wellbeing, financial support, accommodation, help with applications, and induction and transition to higher education. Thirty universities and colleges have now received the award, with more currently in progress. Our aim is that, over time, the Quality Mark will become a useful and trusted marker for care-experienced applicants when researching their future options.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Care-experienced¹ students are one of the most widely recognised disadvantaged groups in higher education (HE): they are less likely to attend higher tariff providers, more likely to drop out, less likely to achieve a first or upper second degree, and take longer to complete their undergraduate studies than their non-care-experienced peers². However, **research has shown** that HE can be transformative for students from a care background, and those who complete their undergraduate courses do at least as well in their future careers as other students.

Currently, just 13% of care leavers enter HE by their 19th birthday, compared to 45% of the wider population³. In its **final report** earlier this year, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care set out a ‘mission’ to double this proportion by 2026. This ambitious proposal is welcomed but it will require significant collaboration across education sectors, local authorities, and government bodies to help care-experienced individuals view HE as a viable choice. The Unite Foundation has **found** that care-experienced students still face a multitude of challenges – particularly related to accommodation, finances, the loss of support networks, and wellbeing. This report reinforces the additional barriers created by socio-economic factors, mental health and disability, and access to specific information, advice and guidance. In recognition of these issues, most universities and colleges have specific policies in place to aid retention and good outcomes, with support ranging from offer-making strategies, bursaries, transition support, and year-round accommodation. These obstacles must be removed or significantly reduced if we are to see a meaningful improvement in progression.

Our findings show a high proportion of mature care-experienced applicants who are motivated by career progression: they are 69% more likely to apply to HE aged 21 or over, 112% more likely to take an Access to HE Diploma, and 179% more likely to apply for health and social care degrees. As such, we believe that the government’s stronger ambitions for true lifelong learning and the introduction of the **Lifelong Loan Entitlement** (LLE) may offer care-experienced people greater flexibility and better funding opportunities as they progress through to their next steps, whatever their age. Furthermore, the broader range of alternative routes, such as apprenticeships, presents an ideal opportunity for those who prefer a vocational pathway. However, positive destinations other than HE also appear to be out of reach for those who have been in care. In **England** alone, 41% of care leavers aged 19-21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2021, compared to 12% of all young people, with similar figures seen for **Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland**. UCAS is committed to ensuring all students are able to access information and advice about the full range of post-secondary opportunities, including apprenticeships, and that widening access and participation should not be restricted to HE alone. Consequently, we welcome the mission set out in the Independent Care Review that at least 3,500 new well-paid jobs and apprenticeships should be made available to care leavers each year by 2026, with an improvement to the existing **apprenticeship bursary**. Alongside this,

¹ See Annex B for definitions (e.g. ‘care leaver’ and ‘care-experienced’) used in this report

² www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/51a83529-f7d4-4e8e-b854-22fb0a971460/student-characteristics-data-student-outcomes-report-2022.pdf

³ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education-2020



UCAS notes a wider recognition of care-experienced apprentices' needs emerging, with targeted guides from organisations such as **Amazing Apprenticeships**, and case studies sharing good practice from the **Learning and Work Institute**.

Through our **'Next Steps'** report series, UCAS shows how specific cohorts of under-represented and disadvantaged applicants progress, exploring their experiences in education to date, their expectations for HE, and how their circumstances have influenced their choices. This series highlights the key challenges for these groups in order to drive improvements in how they are supported across the education sectors. In this report, we examine the progression of the 9,000 care-experienced individuals who applied to HE in 2022. Alongside analysis of UCAS application data, we also conducted a survey of 500 applicants who shared a care background as they looked towards starting their studies in autumn 2022. We found:

- ▶ **Education can be disrupted for this cohort, and changing schools is common:** 19% had moved schools once, 11% had moved schools multiple times.
- ▶ **Care-experienced students' journeys are often longer and non-linear:** one third of applicants were aged 21 or above, compared to one fifth of applicants without a care background. Applicants were more than twice as likely to take the Access to HE Diploma.
- ▶ **Applicants have lower average attainment prior to HE and are more likely to attend lower tariff providers:** they are 51% less likely than their non-care-experienced peers to achieve A*AA or above at A level and 62% less likely to achieve AAAAA-AAAAB in their Scottish Highers. In addition, they are 30% less likely to be accepted at higher tariff providers.

- ▶ **Access to specific guidance about going to HE as a care-experienced student is inconsistent:** 60% stated they received no guidance specific to being care-experienced during their application journey. Applicants seek advice from a wide variety of trusted people, not all of whom will have had access to the latest information and resources about UCAS applications or the specific support available in HE for care-experienced students.
- ▶ **The intersectionality of care experience with other personal characteristics presents additional challenges:** these applicants are 38% more likely than non-care-experienced applicants to come from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR4 Quintile 1), twice as likely to be from Mixed or Black ethnic groups, 79% more likely to identify as LGBT+, almost twice as likely to share a disability, and nearly three times as likely to share a mental health condition.
- ▶ **Applicants do not always talk about their circumstances with school staff:** only a quarter were always open about their care background, and a third did not discuss this with anyone at school unless they had to.
- ▶ **Their experiences of support in school or college have been inconsistent:** they feel most supported pastorally (41%), but least supported with social and extra-curricular activities (32%).
- ▶ **They have positive expectations for support in HE:** two thirds expect the pastoral and educational support and student living to be good or very good, and two in five believe the social and extra-curricular support will be good or very good.
- ▶ **Applicants from a care background are motivated by career prospects, especially in health and social care:** they are 179% more likely to apply for health and social care than non-care-experienced students, and 50% more likely to apply for nursing and midwifery.
- ▶ **HE choices are strongly influenced by applicants' individual support needs:** over three quarters prioritised access to mental health and wellbeing support, with financial support, accommodation, and pre-entry support also important influential factors.

Based on the insights from this report and third-party research – as well as our experience of supporting care-experienced applicants – the following recommendations and actions have been proposed to help care-experienced individuals progress successfully to all post-secondary pathways, taking into account the challenges they are more likely to encounter on their journeys.

	Recommendation	For
1	<p>UK Government departments to share verified data about applicants who have been in care to facilitate better targeting and consistency of support and offer-making strategies</p> <p>As part of its commitment to driving efficiencies within the student journey, UCAS now supplies universities and colleges with individual-level verified free school meal (FSM) data for 18 year olds in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This verified data enables improved identification of disadvantaged students, more accurate data collection, and reduces burden. Extending this service to include data about looked-after children could add further value and close some of the support gaps for this group.</p> <p>UCAS recommends that UK Government departments provide verified data for looked-after children alongside FSM data, which we will subsequently share with universities and colleges to facilitate greater efficiencies in the admissions process, and allow them to identify those in need more accurately.</p>	<p>UCAS, Department for Education, Welsh Government, NI Executive</p>
2	<p>Higher education admissions policies to recognise the impact of educational disruption, with clear commitments regarding offer-making strategies for care-experienced applicants published online</p> <p>Following publication of the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) final report in 2016, Scottish universities introduced minimum entry requirements for care-experienced applicants – an initiative that aimed to encourage more applications from this group, and to demonstrate the sector’s recognition of the challenges they face. This has already had a positive effect on recruitment, with the proportion of care-experienced applicants more than tripling over five years – from 0.5% of all undergraduates in 2015/16 to 1.9% in 2020/21⁴.</p> <p>Universities UK’s Fair Admissions Review (2022) recommended that universities and colleges across the UK should consider introducing minimum entry requirements for care-experienced applicants, with further exploration to be undertaken within a wider consultation following the conclusion of the review. This approach is already starting to be adopted at some universities and colleges.</p> <p>Throughout this report, we see that care-experienced applicants’ understanding of the support mechanisms in place to help them access and succeed in HE is limited. Three in five (60%) received no support specific to going to university or college with a care background, and less than a third (32%) had researched support for care-experienced students before making their decisions.</p> <p>UCAS supports UUK’s proposal and recommends that the introduction of minimum entry requirements forms a key part of their wider consultation; we would support the implementation of any such initiative through information and advice targeted to applicants, advisers, and universities and colleges to promote a heightened awareness of the initiative and broader support available.</p>	<p>Universities UK, universities and colleges, HE regulators</p>

⁴ www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2022/05/maintaining-momentum-towards-fair-access-annual-report-2022/documents/maintaining-momentum-towards-fair-access-annual-report-2022/maintaining-momentum-towards-fair-access-annual-report-2022/govscot%3Adocument/maintaining-momentum-towards-fair-access-annual-report-2022.pdf

	Recommendation	For
3	<p>Greater support for care-experienced mature students through common routes, such as the Access to HE Diploma and, in future, the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE)</p> <p>However, the Diploma specification does not currently contain specific support for these students, so this could be an ideal opportunity to connect them to information and advice about the support available in HE, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Guidance for Access to HE course providers and Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) about the support mechanisms available for those with care experience progressing to HE. ▶ Opportunities for care-experienced students presented prominently in all outreach activities, and through promotion of the LLE. <p>Our data also shows a high proportion of mature care-experienced applicants who are motivated by career progression: they are 69% more likely to apply to HE aged 21 or over, and 179% more likely to apply for health and social care degrees. We believe the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) presents a significant opportunity for care-experienced individuals to re-engage with education, so this should be reflected in the policy aims. University and college admissions policies for care-experienced applicants should also make specific considerations for mature students.</p> <p>UCAS recommends QAA works with expert organisations to develop guidance for Access to HE course providers and AVAs that covers the information and advice care-experienced students can access in HE, from pre-application through to graduation. In addition, we feel the policy aims of the LLE should be considerate of the specific needs of care-experienced students, and acknowledge their longer, less linear educational journey.</p>	<p>QAA, Access to HE course providers, AVAs, Department for Education, universities and colleges</p>
4	<p>Closer engagement with the networks and individuals that care-experienced students trust for information and advice</p> <p>This report finds care-experienced applicants seeking support from a diverse range of trusted individuals. However, 60% still received no support specific to going to university or college as a care-experienced student; some receiving support from a personal adviser still felt particularly unsupported with information about certain elements of progressing to their next step, including apprenticeships (45%), mental health and wellbeing support (40%), and support for a disability or learning difference (36%).</p> <p>UCAS believes a collaborative approach is needed to ensure the right information reaches those who are considering their post-secondary options. While there is a wide range of information about support for care-experienced students, those who are best placed to support young people do not always have access to it – and that the HE sector needs to engage more broadly to ensure this information gap is filled. UCAS recognises that it could play an important role in convening these organisations and networks to reach the local authority staff, foster carers and families who directly engage with looked-after children and young people about their choices.</p> <p>UCAS recommends local authorities and third-sector organisations work with UCAS to ensure those who directly advise young people about their post-secondary pathways have access to the latest information, resources and training about making an application and getting support. This should include information about mental health and disability support.</p>	<p>UCAS, third sector organisations working with care-experienced individuals, local authority leaving care teams, and government and HE sector bodies</p>



Recommendation	For
<p>5 Universities and colleges should consider opportunities to improve the care-experienced student experience holistically across the whole institution, and review current practice to address challenges – this should be student led, and acknowledge the intersectionality of care experience with other characteristics</p> <p>Activity should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Support service teams should be aware of the high proportion of care-experienced students, and the challenges they face, and take steps to identify them in order to offer holistic support (e.g. routine checks on year-round access to accommodation). ▶ Social sciences and nursing faculties should be aware of the high proportion of care-experienced students, and the challenges they face, and review programmes accordingly (e.g. to consider funding during support placements). ▶ Universities, colleges, and student unions should consider the proactive provision of social and extra-curricular support to help students to develop important social networks, and integrate successfully into the learning community. ▶ Universities and colleges to publicly demonstrate their commitment to care-experienced students via recognised schemes such as the NNECL Quality Mark and the Care Leaver Covenant. ▶ Outreach and widening participation teams to engage with local authorities, schools and colleges to help fill the knowledge gaps for those advising young people about going to HE from a care background. 	<p>Universities and colleges – including student support teams, social sciences and nursing faculties, student unions</p>

THE UCAS FAIR ACCESS PROGRAMME – NOVEMBER 2022

Through the Fair Access Programme, UCAS aims to build on the work already underway to widen access and participation – both within UCAS, and across the wider sector. A detailed overview of this programme can be found in our earlier report, **Next Steps: What is the experience of disabled students in education?**

While we have seen significant progress in the proportion of the most disadvantaged students applying to HE in the past 15 years, momentum has slowed: in 2021, the **Multiple Equality Measure (MEM)** equality gap widened for the first time in a decade. A more competitive environment is also emerging, with almost one million undergraduate applicants predicted by 2026, which presents significant risks to the recent progress made in widening access and participation.

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES OF THE FAIR ACCESS PROGRAMME?

Informed by national consultation, the UCAS Fair Access Programme aims to support universities, colleges and employers in their efforts to widen access and participation by:

- ▶ transforming the sector's understanding of students through new questions, data and insight;
- ▶ connecting HE and outreach providers to the hardest to reach students, earlier;
- ▶ helping the sector understand what works in widening access and participation;
- ▶ bringing schools and universities closer together;
- ▶ removing barriers and inspire students.



TO DATE, THE PROGRAMME HAS DELIVERED:

Continued reform of the application service: For 2023 entry, UCAS has introduced seven new questions into the application so a broader range of students can easily flag their circumstances and access the right support for their needs. This new data will also transform our knowledge about the progression of these students – to be explored in future ‘Next Steps’ reports. Students have welcomed these new questions, with almost every applicant responding to them, and one in five flagging an individual circumstance. At this point in the cycle, more than 2,000 carers have applied to HE, as have more than 500 students estranged from their parents.

Development of the Outreach Connection Service: Aiming to raise awareness of the full range of outreach and support available, this new service will help schools and students navigate and connect to the opportunities offered by HE providers and third-sector organisations. Not only will this significantly enhance our understanding of how students engage with such opportunities and their subsequent progression, it will also inform sector-wide evaluation and impact measurement. After extensive research and scoping, we are aiming to launch the service for the next UCAS cycle, creating a ‘single source of truth’ about the trusted outreach opportunities available to all UCAS-registered centres in the UK, working closely with a range of partners to act as early adopters.

Greater visibility of grades on entry to HE: Also in 2023, UCAS is planning to release the grades-on-entry tool, providing visibility of a range of qualifications that students hold at the point of entry to HE. While this data is already available via the Adviser Portal, this new development will ensure applicants who do not have access to an adviser can also benefit.

Fully personalised student journeys: By understanding the needs of specific groups of disadvantaged and under-represented students across their full decision-making journey, we can help raise aspirations and build confidence, and help to tackle the knowledge gaps of lesser-supported students. UCAS aims to present the information and advice students need at the point of optimum impact to support informed decision making across the full range of post-secondary pathways. To ensure students with individual needs feel prepared at each stage of their journey, we’ve worked with expert organisations to bring together practical tips and useful resources for those who are advising students about their next steps in the **adviser toolkits**.

Data and insights: Utilising our data science capabilities, we publish **analysis and insight reports**. Our ‘Where Next?’ and ‘Next Steps’ series offer fresh insights into the potential barriers students face when navigating their post-secondary destinations, and aiding policy considerations on how they can be overcome. Our **Outreach Evaluator** data tool supports the evaluation of widening access and participation activities by matching individuals’ data to the UCAS database to trace their progress. At each stage, this data is compared with an appropriate control group, and a report produced on any significant change, offering robust statistical evidence on the impact of engagement activities for HE and outreach providers.

Targeting support in schools and colleges: We are working directly with the lowest progression schools and colleges across the UK to deliver bespoke professional development and resources designed to support students to explore their options and make high quality applications that are right for them. Our targeted Further Education College Programme was launched in October 2022 in the North East, Hull and East Yorkshire.

UCAS will release updates on the progress of these ambitious plans in future ‘Next Steps’ reports.



SECTION ONE

HOW DO CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS PROGRESS TO THEIR NEXT STEP?

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SECTION:

- ▶ The number of UK applicants sharing a care background has doubled since 2008.
- ▶ Care-experienced applicants are nearly twice as likely to be disabled and nearly three times more likely to share a mental health condition than non-care-experienced applicants.
- ▶ They are 38% more likely to be from a disadvantaged background, nearly twice as likely to be from Mixed or Black Ethnic groups, and nearly 79% more likely to identify as LGBT+.
- ▶ Care-experienced applicants are significantly more likely to be mature applicants, and more than twice as likely to hold an Access to HE Diploma.
- ▶ They are 179% more likely to apply for health and social care courses, and 50% more likely to apply for nursing and midwifery.

In 2008, UCAS introduced a new question into the application enabling people with care experience to share their circumstances. The primary aim was – and still is – to initiate an important conversation between the applicant and their university or college about the support they need to access and thrive in HE. Fourteen years on, more than 80,000 applicants have shared details about their care background – from 4,495 in 2008 to reach 8,930 in 2022⁵, an increase of 99%. Over this period, the proportion sharing this information has risen from 0.8% of all UK applicants in 2009 (the lowest point) to 1.6% in 2022 (the highest point). Of those who shared their care background in 2022, the most common duration given was three years or more (4,070), followed by one to three years (2,270). Similarly, **DfE data** over the same timescale shows the progression rate for care leavers entering HE rose from 6% to 13% for those who were looked after continuously for 12 months.

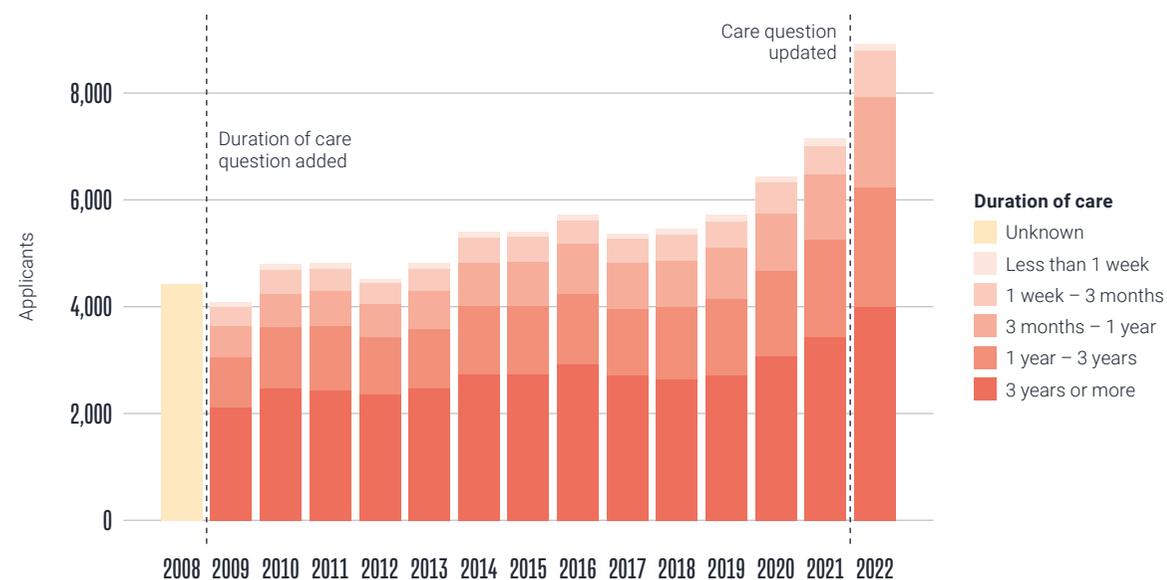


Figure 1: UK applicants 28 days after JCQ results day sharing care experience in the UCAS application, split by duration of care, 2008-2022⁶

⁵ Note: this data is self-declared and unverified

⁶ The duration of care question was included for the 2009 cycle. In 2022, we updated the supporting text to clarify what we mean by 'in care', mindful of the different definitions considered across the UK and between individual universities and colleges.

Intersectionality: Compared to non-care-experienced applicants, those from a care background are:

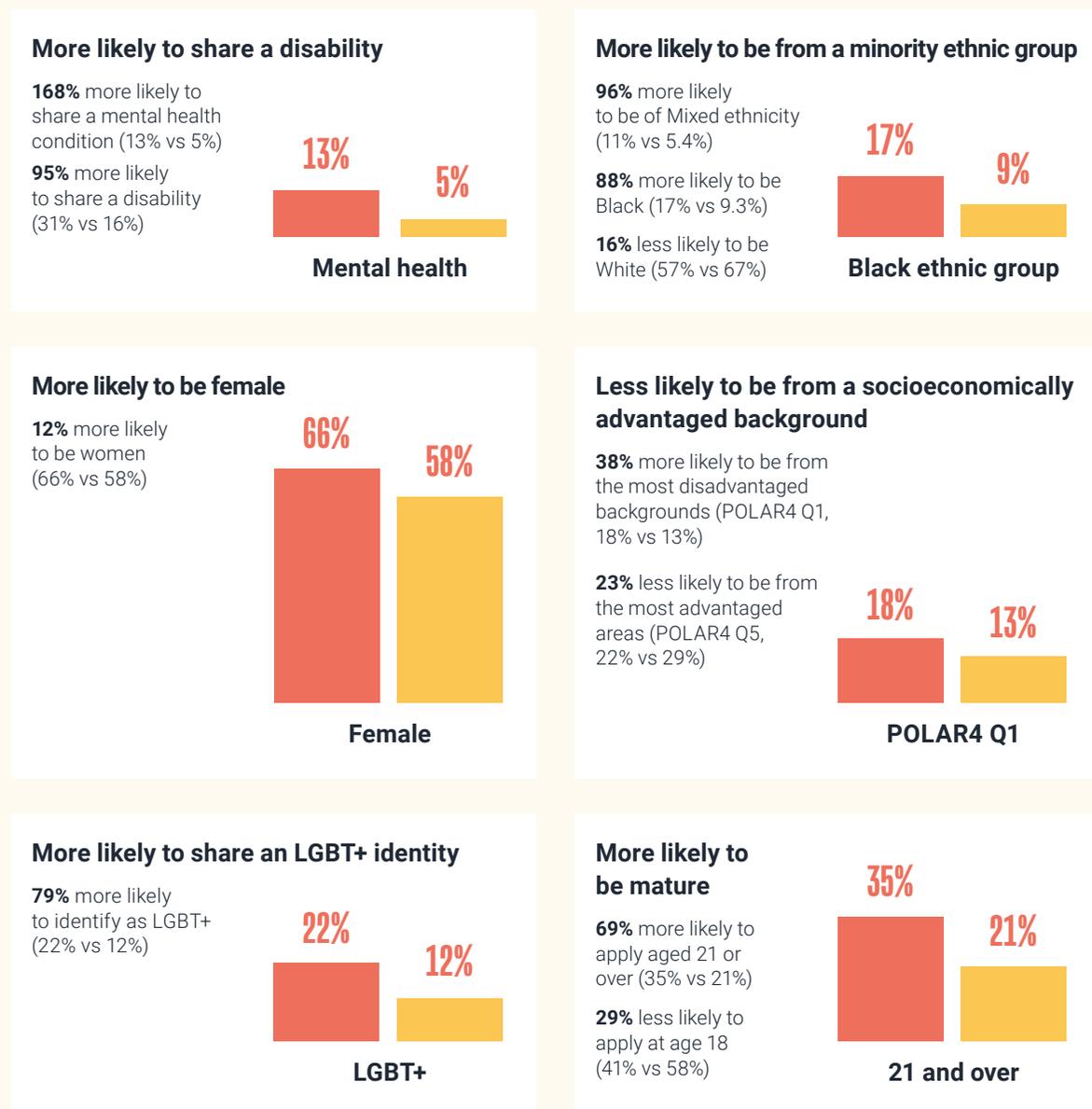


Figure 2: Key figures for applicants sharing care experience overall, with comparisons to non-care-experienced applicants overall, 2022 cycle

■ Care-experienced
■ Non-care-experienced

WHO ARE THE CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS THAT APPLY TO HE?

Figure 2 highlights the importance of considering how multiple characteristics can intersect and present additional barriers. For example, care-experienced students are much more likely to share a disability and/or mental health condition but – as explored in Section Two – do not feel supported with these aspects when applying to HE. We see a particular over-representation of applicants with hidden disabilities: they are 79% more likely to share a social, behavioural or communication impairment (e.g. an autistic spectrum condition) and 43% more likely to share a learning difference (e.g. dyslexia). In **Next steps: What is the experience of disabled students in education?** we find that applicants with hidden disabilities feel more negatively about their experiences in education and have lower expectations for HE. In addition, the stark figures for those sharing mental health conditions highlight this as a major challenge for care-experienced students, as supported by **ONS data**, and more than two fifths of our survey respondents delayed applying to HE for this reason. This over-representation – also explored in UCAS' 2021 **report on student mental health** – shows that, while it is important for all prospective students to know how to access mental health support in HE, this information should feature prominently alongside details of financial and accommodation support for those with care experience.

UCAS' data also shows that the overall gender gap is even more pronounced for care-experienced applicants, even though **UK Government statistics** show 64% of 18 year old care leavers in 2021 were men – a disparity which is set to grow⁷. This may indicate that care-experienced boys are more disengaged with HE, and need additional help and encouragement to see this as a viable option,

⁷ learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1622/statistics-briefing-looked-after-children.pdf

and to ensure they are aware of alternative pathways, such as apprenticeships. And this support needs to extend beyond the age of 18: our data shows that care-experienced applicants are much more likely to be mature, reinforcing existing **findings** that care leavers are less likely to enter HE straight from school and apply when they are 21 or above – beyond the point at which they receive support from their Personal Adviser or school. Additionally, while 82% apply before their statutory support from the local authority ends when they turn 26, nearly a fifth apply after this point, meaning they are ineligible for local authority support or the care leaver bursary.

Measures such as POLAR4 can be misleading in this context because care placements may not necessarily reflect the true picture of socio-economic disadvantage. In addition, looked-after children are not eligible for free school meals (FSM) and will not be captured by this measure either. Nevertheless, the UCAS data still shows a higher proportion of care-experienced applicants applying from the most disadvantaged areas (Quintile 1). Looking at this data alongside gender and ethnicity, we see a higher proportion of ‘white, working-class boys’ applying with care experience (4.0%) than without (3.1%); however, the progression rate for White care-experienced applicants is lower overall, reflecting **NNECL findings**. In contrast, a much higher proportion are from the Mixed and Black ethnic groups, aligning with **government data** showing an over-representation of Black children in care.

“ I’m looking forward to starting placements or adult nursing, and having to do assignments funnily enough! It just feels very exciting.

Applicant behaviour: compared to non-care-experienced applicants, those from a care background are:

More likely to have taken vocational or technical qualifications to access HE

- ▶ **112%** more likely to take an Access to HE Diploma (6.5% vs 3.1%)
- ▶ **40%** less likely to apply with A levels (27% vs 45%)
- ▶ 18 year olds are **46%** more likely to apply with only BTECs (13% vs 9%)



Less likely to achieve top grades in post-16 qualifications

- ▶ 18 year olds are **51%** less likely to achieve A*AA or above at A level (12% vs 24%)
- ▶ **31%** less likely to achieve ABB or above at A level
- ▶ **23%** less likely to achieve DDD or above in the BTEC Extended Diploma (44% vs 57%)
- ▶ Scottish 18 year olds are **62%** less likely to achieve the equivalent of AAAAA-AAAAB (17% vs 43%) and **175%** more likely to achieve the equivalent of 5 Cs or below in their Highers (29% vs 10%)



More likely to study health and social care in HE

- ▶ **179%** more likely to study health and social care (5.9% vs 2.1%) and **50%** more likely to study nursing and midwifery (10% vs 7%)
- ▶ **44%** less likely to study economics (1.3% vs 2.3%), and **38%** less likely to study geography and earth sciences (1.3% vs 2.0%)



More likely to enter lower tariff providers

- ▶ **23%** more likely to be accepted at a lower tariff provider (46% vs 37%)
- ▶ **30%** less likely to be accepted at a higher tariff provider (20% vs 28%)
- ▶ 18 year olds are **28%** less likely to be accepted at higher tariff providers (24% vs 34%)



Figure 3: Key figures for applicants sharing care experience overall, with comparisons to non-care-experienced applicants overall, 2022 cycle

“ I’m looking forward to graduating and helping to make a positive difference in people’s lives through work as a nurse.

Care leaver progression to higher tariff providers grew to 2% in England (580 students⁸) in 2020/21 – the first increase in over 10 years – compared to 11% for all other pupils⁹. Figure 3 may offer some context: care-experienced applicants are more likely to take post-16 vocational qualifications but **UCAS research** has shown that BTEC-only applicants are much less likely to enter higher tariff providers than those holding only A levels. This cohort is also much more likely to prefer courses such as health and social care, midwifery and nursing – more commonly offered by lower tariff providers. Compounding this is the lower attainment profile of looked-after children¹⁰ - before these young people have even reached post-16 education, they are at an academic disadvantage. UCAS analysis of GCSE data for applicants in 2022 (Figure 4) shows a distinct gap between those with care experience and those without, with one in three (35%) achieving an average of grade 7 (or higher) in their top three GCSEs, compared to one in two (53%) applicants without care experience¹¹.

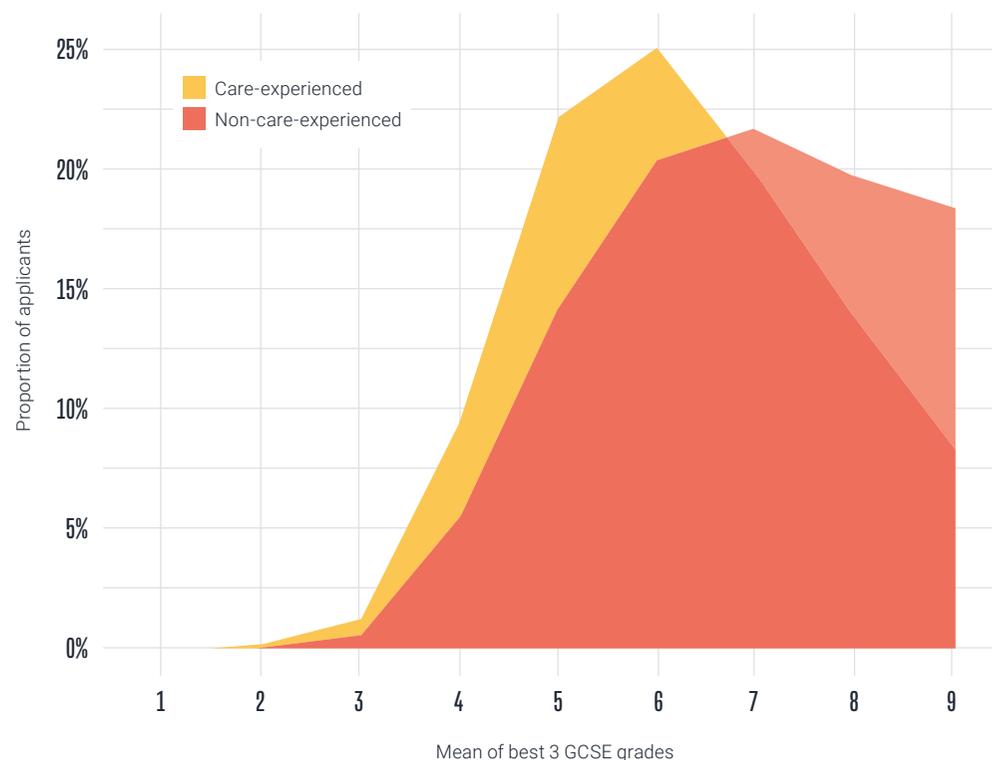


Figure 4: Average GCSE attainment for UK HE applicants who applied by 28 days after JCQ results day, split by care experience, 2022 cycle

“ I am looking forward to gaining more skills in the job I love doing, which is looking after and caring for others, and trying to make that little bit of a difference in someone’s life.

⁸ questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-17/hl298

⁹ Pupils who had been in continuous care for 12 months or more: explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education

¹⁰ www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/tailored-resources/lacyp/statement-7

¹¹ GCSE attainment is calculated by taking the rounded mean of the best 3 achieved GCSE grades per applicant, excluding those who achieved fewer than 3 GCSEs. This includes UK applicants of all ages. Applicants with letter-graded GCSEs have had their grades converted such that A*=8.5, A=7, B=5.5, C=4, D=3, E=2, F=1.5 and G=1.

The subsequent impact on post-16 attainment and post-18 progression is evident, and we should bear in mind the individuals who reject HE for this reason. Many universities and colleges have offer-making strategies in place for care-experienced applicants, acknowledging that circumstances can impact attainment but not affect potential. However, it is not always clear which admissions teams have these strategies in place, or what those differential offers might look like. To address this, Scottish universities have committed to **guarantee an offer** to care-experienced applicants who meet the minimum entry requirements of their course. This is a welcome change that aims to create a more equitable system and improve the transparency around contextual offers for some of the most disadvantaged students.

In Section Two, we will see career progression is a strong motivational factor for care-experienced applicants, as reflected both in the qualifications they take to enter HE, and the undergraduate courses they apply to. In UCAS' **Where Next** report, we noted the synergy between students' subject choices and their parents' and carers' careers. In lieu of a stable family network for many looked-after children, the role social workers play in supporting young people in care appears to have a strong influence on their choice – careers with which they may feel familiar and knowledgeable – as well as their apparent desire to help other young people in need. With our findings showing the importance of career progression and vocational qualifications for this group in mind, UCAS welcomes the mission set out in the Care Review to increase the number of well-paid jobs and apprenticeships for care leavers and urges to Government to be bold in its commitment to this group.



SECTION TWO

HOW DO STUDENTS FROM A CARE BACKGROUND FEEL ABOUT THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES?

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SECTION:

- ▶ Only 23% were always open about their care background.
- ▶ Three in five applicants received no guidance specific to going to HE with a care background.
- ▶ There is diversity in the people who support care-experienced students.
- ▶ Over three quarters said mental health and wellbeing support was the most influential factor in their decision.

WHAT HAVE APPLICANTS' EXPERIENCES BEEN IN SCHOOL OR COLLEGE?

When asked about their experiences of support in school or college, students were split fairly evenly between those who felt positively supported, those who felt unsupported, and those who felt neutral across all aspects. In summary, they felt the general/pastoral support they received was strongest (41% felt supported, 31% felt neutral and 28% felt unsupported), and social/ extra-curricular support was felt to be weakest (32% felt supported, 29% felt neutral, and 39% felt unsupported).

A key challenge for young people is moving schools due to a change in their care placement; this can be very disruptive academically, pastorally and socially, and may contribute to the lower average educational attainment¹² of care-experienced people. A fifth (19%) of survey respondents told us they had moved schools once due to a change in their care placement, and 11% had moved multiple times. 35% of those who were in care between the ages of 11 and 16 reported that they had moved schools at least once, as did 35% of those in care between the ages of 17 and 18. Changing schools at these ages, when the students would have prepared for and taken GCSE/National 5 qualifications as well as post-16 qualifications, is likely to have significantly disrupted their education. One respondent talked about the challenge of adapting to new exam boards and curricula which, "... put me at a disadvantage when taking my GCSEs. I received no support and was always put down with target grades of 3 in nearly all my subjects, and this unfortunately convinced me that there was no point in trying".

“

The only thing I want to stress the importance of is compassion and patience. We have been through a lot.

¹² explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england

Impact of moving schools due to a care placement changing:

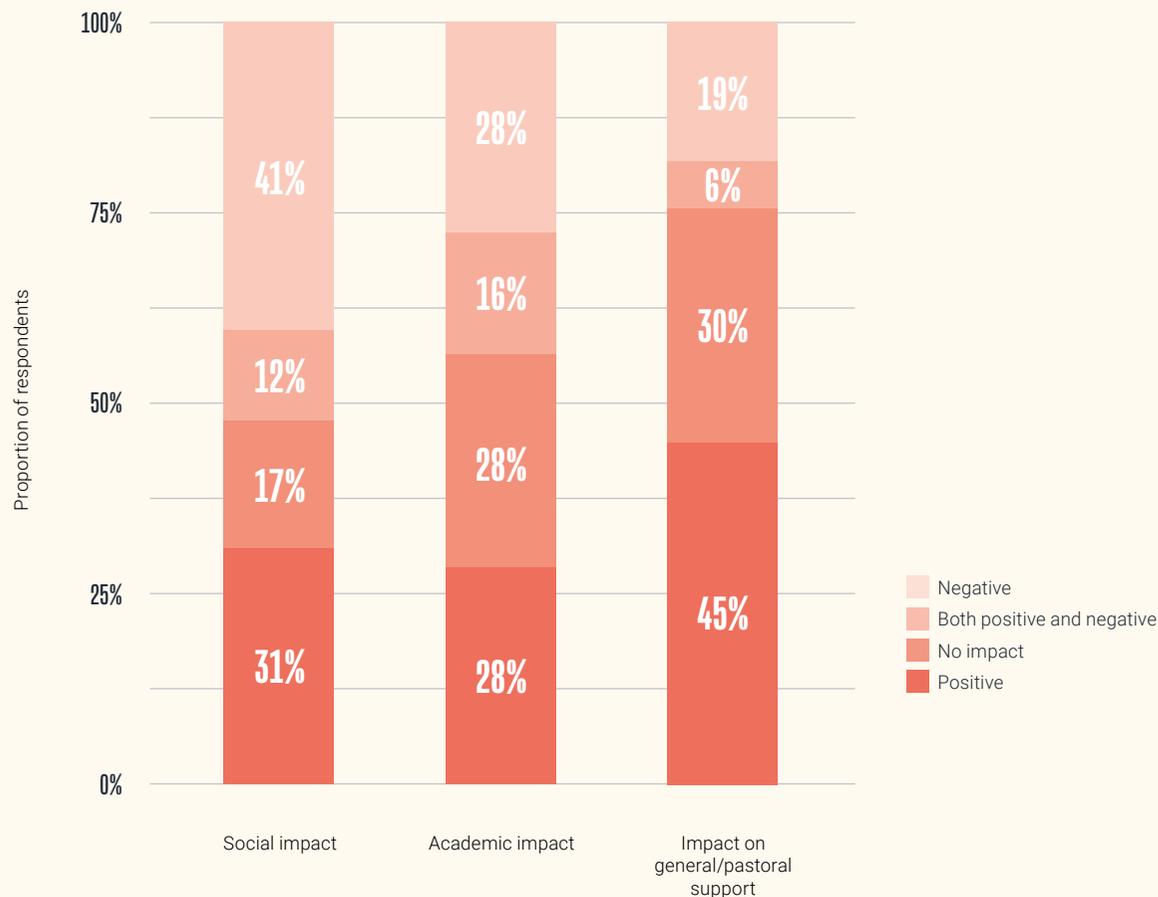


Figure 5: Summary of responses to the question, 'You said that you had to move schools because your care placement changed. How did moving schools impact you?'

“ My college teacher wanted me to spread my wings – he knew how trapped I felt at home with my family and he wanted me to keep pursuing my dream.

However, moving schools can also have a positive impact – and students used the free text to tell us more:

"Moving schools put me into a better, more positive environment, I was able to build relationships and become comfortable with other students."

"Moving schools if you are care-experienced is often a fresh start ... it's a new lease of life, a different social environment, and a chance to prove yourself in a fresh educational setting. Whilst it's tough at first to settle into a new school, as the social aspect improves so does your educational aspect – overall it's a good thing."

These free text responses show that friendships, inclusion and belonging can affect how young people perform academically, and the Unite Foundation has **found** that a holistic approach to supporting care-experienced students can improve retention and success. Indeed, many universities and colleges acknowledge this, offering societies, clubs, mentoring and buddying opportunities as part of their care experience support packages.

WHO SUPPORTS CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS' RESEARCH TO APPLY TO HE?

Support in school or college

Some care-experienced students lack a stable and supportive family network on which they can rely for guidance when making decisions about their next steps, so school and college are important sources of information and advice; indeed, care-experienced applicants seek support from a range of different staff members during their application, as seen in Figure 6.

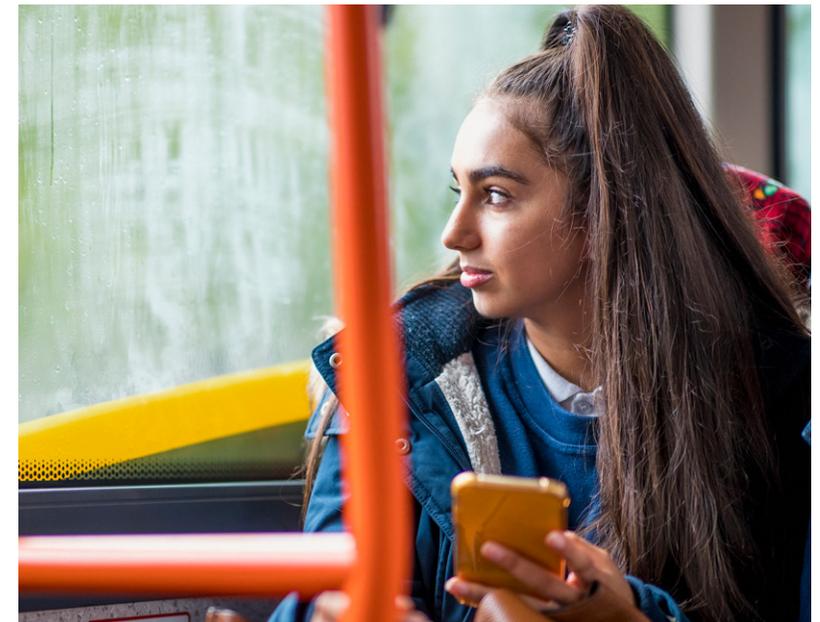
Who is most likely to help care-experienced students to apply in schools and colleges?		
	A form tutor	49%
	A careers adviser, UCAS adviser or similar	35%
	A subject teacher	28%
	A head of year (or similar)	23%
	A Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) or learning support adviser	8%

Figure 6: Summary of responses to the question, 'Who at school or college helped you apply to university or college as a care-experienced student?'

Students used the free text to explain how important these relationships were along their journey:

"My career adviser at school was amazing and knew all the details of what a care-experienced person could benefit from when going to uni, and she helped me to apply and research different opportunities. She also put me in touch with the care-experienced named person at uni so they could help me further."

"I really appreciated the time my mentor gave me as I don't trust easily which allowed us to form a foundation of trust. This in itself boosted my confidence to embrace change... [They] prioritised getting to know me as an individual rather than what was written on paper."



Although these conversations are valued highly by students, staff members who are not UCAS or careers advisers may lack specific knowledge about the support available to care-experienced applicants, or even the latest advice about applying to HE and apprenticeships more generally. Conversely, UCAS or careers advisers who are best placed to offer this specific guidance may not know which students need it: nearly a third (31%) of respondents did not discuss their care background with anyone at school unless they had to, and 26% only discussed it with staff members who already knew about their circumstances. Only 23% were always open about their care background, so there is a risk that some young people miss out on crucial information – indeed, three in five (60%) respondents told us they had received no guidance specific to being care-experienced at all during their application journey. The Office for Students (OfS) **recommends** universities and colleges address this problem through targeted attainment-raising activities and communications with students and local authorities. In addition, UCAS is of the view that local authorities must be proactive in ensuring young people do not dismiss HE as a viable option before outreach opportunities become available; with the support of the DfE, we are keen to work with local authorities and third sector organisations supporting care-experienced individuals to support these earlier conversations through enhanced resources, such as the UCAS Hub and **adviser toolkits**.



Support outside of school or college

Who supports care-experienced applicants with their choices outside of school or college?

	Family members	47%
	A local authority adviser, social worker or other support worker	35%
	Foster carers or guardians	29%
	Staff or carers at a children's home	4%

Figure 7: Summary of responses to the question, 'Have you received any information, advice or guidance about going to university or college as a care-experienced student from the following?'

There is also diversity in the range of people from whom care-experienced students seek guidance outside of school or college, but the challenge remains the same: making sure these trusted individuals have the knowledge and resources to support young people to make informed decisions. Although there is a range of information and advice available to help guide care-experienced people make their decisions, the HE sector needs to think more broadly about how it is disseminated to ensure it reaches those who support applicants along their journey. In its **Positive Impact? report** (2020), the Unite Foundation recommended “third sector organisations to work together to develop a set of training materials for schools, FE and HE staff (and other key stakeholders) which can help increase awareness of the needs and challenges experienced by care-experienced and estranged students”. UCAS is well positioned to bring together organisations across the education, outreach and charitable sectors to share insight and resources – and there is a clear opportunity for us to work with a wider range of networks to reach the individuals who directly advise care-experienced people. Through the Fair Access Programme (see page 10), we are committed to growing our range of partners and stakeholders, and developing additional resources (such as our **teacher toolkits**) to support these important conversations.

Under the **Children and Social Work Act 2017**, local authorities are required to publish their ‘local offer’ – a clear offer of support for those leaving care. Looked-after children have a social worker and a personal education plan outlining their education aims, supported by the virtual school. From age 16, a Personal Adviser helps them make decisions about their future independence, including education and employment, accommodation, and finances – and sets out how the local authority will support them, forming their Pathway Plan.



My social worker wanted me to push myself.

Half (50%) of survey respondents leaving care¹³ had already spoken to their Personal Adviser about their plans to go to university or college, and told us more about the support they had received:

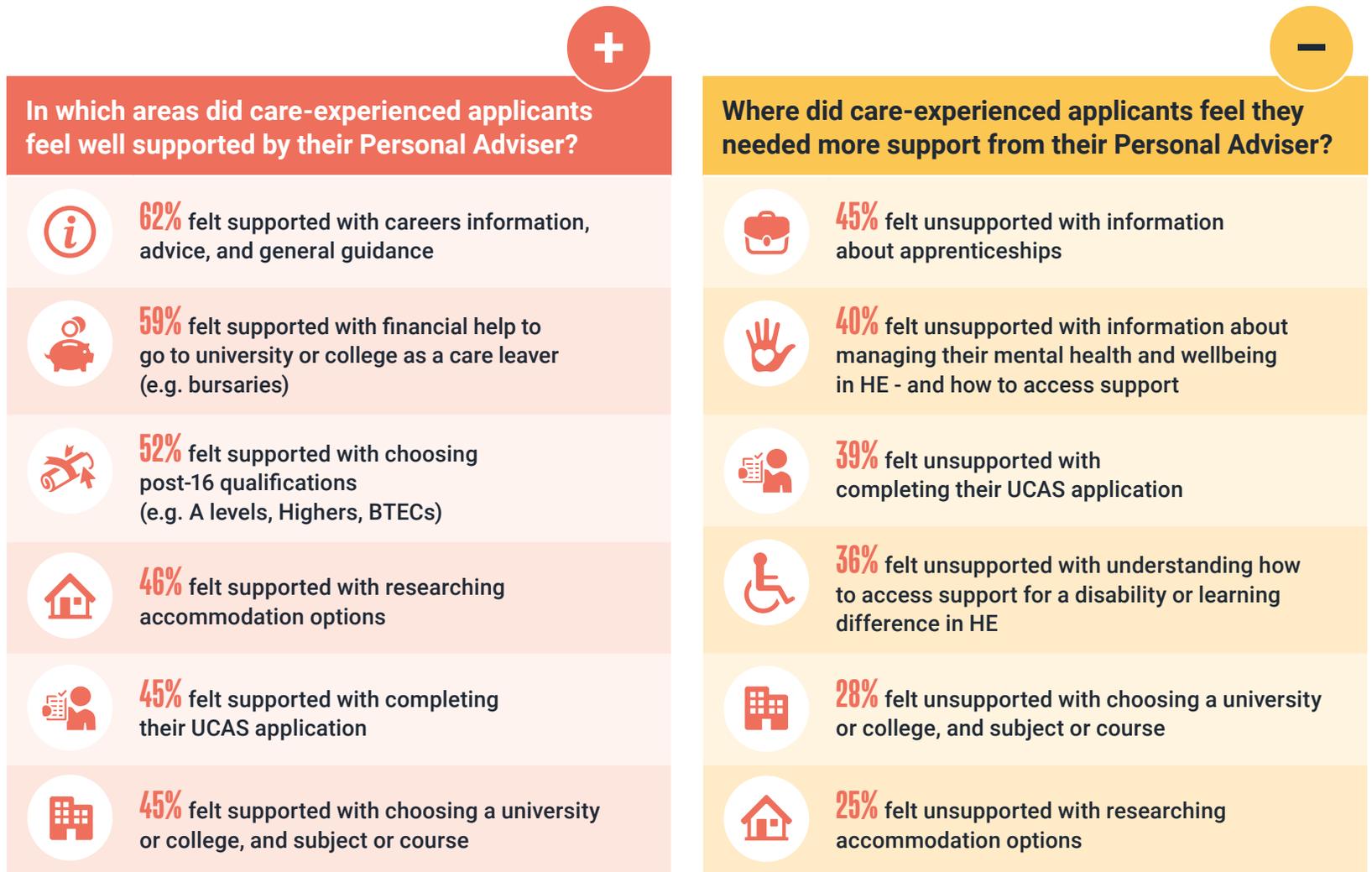


Figure 8: Summary of responses to the question, 'How supported have you felt by your pathway plan Personal Adviser so far in relation to the following areas?'¹⁴

¹³ Applicants who said they were currently in care or were in care between the ages of 17 and 18 were asked the question 'Have you spoken to your Pathway Plan Personal Adviser about your plans to go to university or college?'

¹⁴ The following statistics cover the proportion of applicants who said they had discussed their HE plans with their Personal Adviser.



Many students clearly feel well supported by their Personal Adviser and value their help, but knowledge gaps are evident – notably about apprenticeships. Given this group’s higher vulnerability to poor mental health, it is also concerning that two fifths did not receive enough advice about managing their mental health and wellbeing in HE. Additionally, while 46% felt supported when researching their accommodation options, a quarter did not – mindful that housing fragility is a particular concern for these students, a lack of guidance in this area could have significant impact on their decision making, and potentially limit their choice of university or college, or even delay or discourage entry to HE.

UCAS welcomes the ambition set out in the Care Review to double the number of care leavers progressing to HE by 2026. Achieving this would require sustained collaboration across education sectors, local authorities and government bodies to address the existing inconsistencies and gaps in knowledge, reflecting NNECL **recommendations** that the HE sector should improve its links with local authorities (including social workers and Personal Advisers) to improve the flow of up-to-date knowledge. Moreover, it would require clarity on who is ultimately responsible and accountable for every young person receiving the specific and specialist guidance they need to make informed decisions about their next steps. This clarity would enable universities and colleges, outreach providers and other organisations – including UCAS – to support the trusted individuals advising young people with information, training and resources. Furthermore, UCAS believes that conversations with the Personal Adviser should start earlier to support post-18 decision-making at an earlier age – in line with the recommendations in our **Where Next?** report – and extend beyond age 26 to ensure parity of support to those returning to education as mature students.

Not all care-experienced individuals are entitled to local authority help, or have access to an adviser in school or college. We found that a third (31%) of respondents learned about the support available to care-experienced students from the UCAS website or social media channels. We are committed to being the go-to source of information and advice about the full range of post-18 options; as we learn more from our data and research about how different groups of under-represented and disadvantaged students progress, we continue to enhance the personalisation in the **UCAS Hub** to support these journeys.

Of those who knew about HE support for care-experienced students, how did they find out about it?

	From their Personal Adviser¹⁵	49%
	From a teacher or staff member at school or college	46%
	From the UCAS website or social media channels	31%
	From the university or college website	31%
	From a parent or foster carer, or a staff member at a children's home	26%
	From a family member	12%

Figure 9: Summary of responses to the question, 'You said that you knew support was available for care-experienced students in higher education. How did you find out that support was available?'

¹⁵ Proportion of applicants who had discussed their HE plans with their Personal Adviser, were aware of available support for care-experienced students, and answered that they had found out about the support from their Personal Adviser.

¹⁶ Scottish domiciled care-experienced applicants were asked 'Were you aware that care-experienced students were eligible for the guaranteed offer in Scotland before this survey?'

INFORMATION AND ADVICE: HOW DO CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS RESEARCH THEIR CHOICES, AND WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM?

Although there is a broad range of support for care-experienced students, less than a third (32%) had researched this support, and more than half (54%) did no research in this area at all. Of course, if you don't know support is available, it follows that you don't know to research it, and 59% were unaware of support for care-experienced students in HE before researching their options. Indeed, we can see that the number of applicants who knew about support and the number who actively researched it are similar.

Again, certain individuals are instrumental in giving prospective students the specific information they need about going to university or college from a care background:

This highlights the mismatch between those who are asked for guidance and those who are equipped with the knowledge to provide it effectively: while 47% sought help from their family members, only 12% of those who researched support found out about it from this source. This could impact applicants who may not be aware of initiatives designed to help them access HE, such as the **guaranteed offer** in Scotland, which our survey suggested not all students had knowledge of.¹⁶ UCAS believes that greater transparency around an institution's offer-making policy for care-experienced students is a positive step in supporting this group, and Scotland's adoption of minimum entry requirements for care-experienced applicants is something we endorse UUK exploring further for UK wide adoption as part of the next stage of the Fair Admissions Review. We recognise that UCAS plays a vital role in connecting prospective students to the right information about initiatives such as this, and the ongoing enhancements to personalisation in the UCAS Hub will help us to ensure students – and those who advise them – receive the right information for their needs. When asked which factors influenced their choices, care-experienced applicants strongly favoured the universities and colleges that demonstrated they could support their individual needs.

Which factors most influenced care-experienced applicants' decision making? ¹⁷		
	Access to mental health and wellbeing support	76%
	Help with the costs of graduation	65%
	Financial support (e.g. bursary)	64%
	Guaranteed accommodation for the duration of their studies	63%
	Guidance through the application process	62%
	Induction events, activities, and visits to prepare for HE	61%
	A web page outlining the support available	61%
	Year-round accommodation	54%

Figure 10: Summary of responses to the question, 'As a care-experienced student, how much did the following factors influence your decisions when you were researching your options?'

“

I was barely aware of anything regarding the extra support I could be offered, so I didn't know to research or look for anything.

When asked which factors influenced their choices, care-experienced applicants strongly favoured the universities and colleges that demonstrated they could support their individual needs. Mental health and wellbeing support was a significant consideration, affecting the decisions of more than three quarters of care-experienced applicants. Other important factors were related to finances, accommodation, and the provision of pre-entry support and information.

“

I feel that since I moved back with one of my parents, I haven't spent enough time with them (missed time in care) and as I didn't receive re-integrating support, I needed a more local university so I could stay at home – I am not yet comfortable moving away and possibly losing that support.

¹⁷ Proportion who selected 'I only applied to universities and colleges that offered this', 'I took this into account alongside other important factors', or 'It had some influence, but there were more important factors' for each factor. Applicants who selected 'Not applicable/I didn't research this' were excluded from the total for the relevant factor.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO – EXPECTATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR HE

What are care-experienced students looking forward to in HE?		
	Studying a subject I love	71%
	Meeting new people	68%
	Deepening my knowledge and skills in a particular area	68%
	Being more independent	66%
	Making a fresh start	64%
	Joining clubs and societies, or taking up a new hobby	44%
	Exploring a new town or city	44%

Figure 11: Summary of responses to the question, 'Is there anything you are particularly looking forward to about starting university or college?'

Care-experienced applicants are looking forward to their next steps – particularly new opportunities to develop academically, make new friends, and improve their career prospects. Many expressed excitement about making a fresh start, becoming independent, and achieving their goals:

"I'm looking forward to achieving something big for myself. The hardest part was getting in and now the next step is to finish what I have begun. I am really excited for my journey – I haven't told many people but I want to make myself proud. I was told that only 6% of care leavers make it to university, so this made me feel important and that I'm off to a good start."

"I'm looking forward to starting afresh and being more independent – also, to be able to encourage other family members to attend university and access further education."



Applicants' expectations for support in HE

In addition, they expect the support in HE to be more positive than they have experienced in school or college:

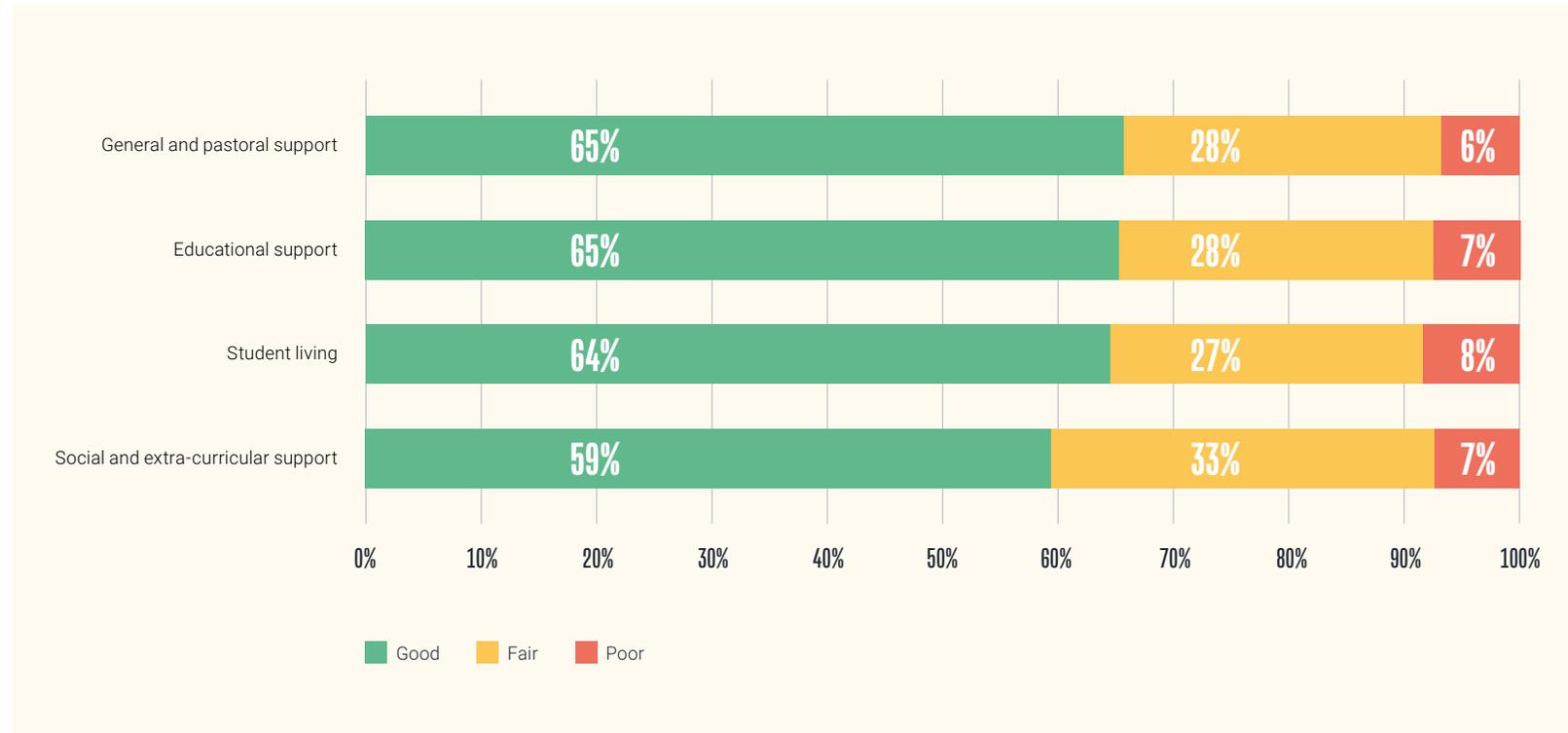
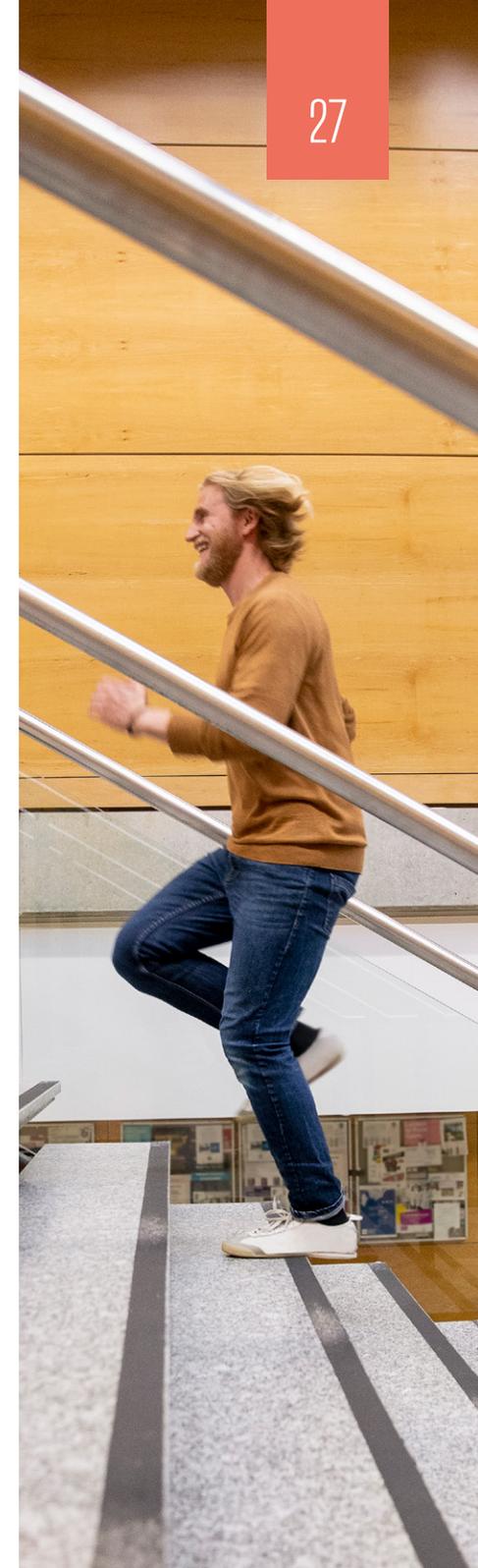


Figure 12: Summary of responses to the question, 'As a care-experienced student, how do you generally expect your student experience of the following factors to be at university or college?'





What are care-experienced students' motivations for entering HE, compared to non-care-experienced students?

When asked about their motivations for going to university or college, care-experienced applicants' reasons are broadly similar to their non-care-experienced peers; however, they place more value on career prospects, finances and independence, and less value on meeting new people, experiencing university life, and having fun – although they are looking forward to these aspects too.

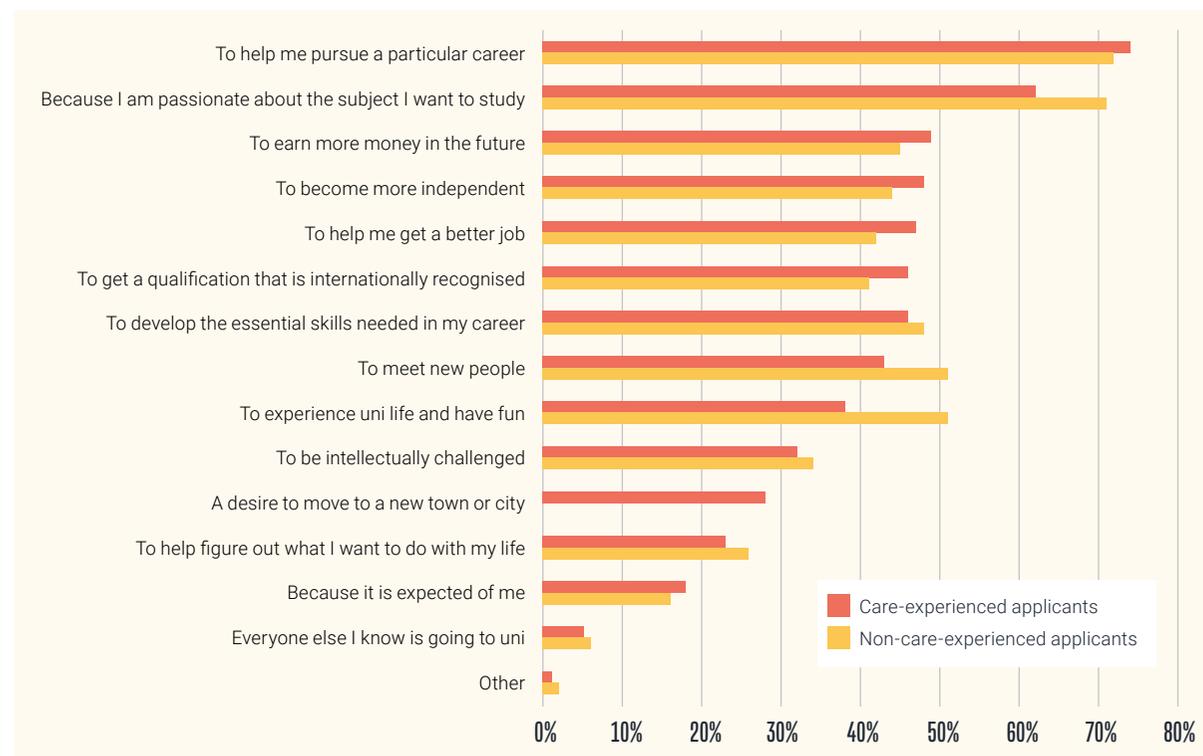


Figure 13: Summary of responses to the question 'Why do you want to go to university or college?' split by care experience¹⁸

¹⁸ Non-care-experienced applicant figures are from the 2022 New Applicant Decisions Survey (September 2021 - June 2022), taking responses from UK applicants aged 24 and under who did not share that they were care-experienced in their application.

“

I'm looking forward to moving out and kind of putting my old life behind me.

“

I look forward to becoming a skilled professional and contributing to my chosen industry, making an impact and being a positive influence on the world.

In Section One, we saw this focus on career outcomes reflected in the courses care-experienced applicants choose. The role HE plays in social mobility for those from a care background should not be underestimated, and it should be a key element in any guidance about their next steps. Given their older age profile and career-related motivations, the introduction of the **Lifelong Loan Entitlement** (LLE) may offer additional pathways and opportunities for care-experienced individuals to achieve their ambitions through better funding and greater flexibility.



GETTING READY TO GO TO UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE

More than three quarters (77%) were planning to start their undergraduate studies straight after leaving school or college in autumn 2022. 6% were applying a year after they had left and 11% more than one year after leaving. Only 6% had deferred entry to 2023 or were planning to do so. The most common reason given for delaying entry to HE was related to mental health and wellbeing, with reasons including a desire to earn money, unsettled circumstances, and not having the right grades for their course or needing to sit additional qualifications.

“

I wanted to go to a uni that was diverse so it would be easier to blend in with everyone else.

We asked applicants which factors they took into consideration when choosing accommodation:

Which factors do applicants rate as important when choosing their first year accommodation ¹⁹					
	Value for money	Overall cost	Facilities on offer	Quality of accommodation	Bills included
Care-experienced applicants	77%	76%	74%	73%	73%
Non-care-experienced applicants ²⁰	88%	85%	75%	75%	83%
	Location	Reviews	Studios atmosphere	Outdoor space	Living with other first year students
Care-experienced applicants	67%	56%	53%	49%	44%
Non-care-experienced applicants	83%	58%	37%	41%	61%

¹⁹The proportions listed are the proportion of applicants who rated a factor as 'Extremely important' and 'Very important'.

²⁰Proportion of UK 2022 applicants aged 24 and under who did not share that they were care-experienced in their application – data taken from the UCAS Applicant Accommodation Survey 2022.

Figure 14: Most and least important factors when choosing accommodation – comparison of 2022 applicants sharing a care background in the UCAS application compared to 2022 UK applicants aged 24 and under with no background in care



For some care-experienced students, accommodation is a crucial factor in deciding where to study. For those without a family to return to during vacation periods, year-round accommodation (and assistance with additional costs) is a necessity, and this is frequently included in the support packages offered by many universities and colleges, and through scholarships such as those offered by the **Unite Foundation**. More than two thirds (67%) of respondents were planning to move into accommodation for their first year, and the vast majority (90%) already had their plans in place: 41% intended to stay in university-operated halls of residence and 13% planned to live in private accommodation; 21% advised they had their own accommodation and would not be moving away; 7% reported that their university or college was arranging their accommodation; and 4% had been awarded a scholarship package through a third party organisation (e.g. Unite Students) that included accommodation.

The most important considerations were related to financial aspects: value for money (77%) and overall cost (76%), which we also see for non-care-experienced applicants (88% and 85% respectively) – we cannot underestimate how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting all applicants' concerns and priorities this year²¹. When asked whether they had any concerns about starting university or college, 69% of care-experienced applicants reported that they were concerned about their finances. 54% also reported being concerned about managing their mental health and wellbeing, and 48% were concerned about making new friends at university or college.

Care-experienced students rate the location of accommodation lower than non-care-experienced applicants (67% compared to 83%) but place more importance on a studious atmosphere (53% compared to 37%); this is particularly important for applicants who had been in care between the ages of 11 and 16 (51% compared to 46% of those who had been in care aged 17-18). Recently, students on the Unite Foundation's Scholarship **reported** that the scheme had removed stress and anxiety and allowed them to focus on their studies.

Housing fragility is a key area of concern for care-experienced students – the Unite Foundation has **found** that secure accommodation can help improve educational outcomes for students on their scholarship scheme. 40% of respondents told us they had already considered their second-year accommodation plans, with 41% planning to enter private accommodation, and 22% intending to stay in university halls of residence.

²¹ Note: the UCAS Applicant Accommodation Survey 2022 was taken in October 2022 – three months after the UCAS Care-Experienced Student Survey 2022 (July 2022), when concerns about the cost-of-living crisis may have been more pronounced, and this should be taken into consideration when looking at this data.

SHARING CARE EXPERIENCE IN THE UCAS APPLICATION

Applicants' reasons for sharing their care background in the application:



41% saw no reason not to



37% knew this was the way to let universities know they needed support



29% thought they had to share this information



24% knew they were eligible for the guaranteed offer and wanted the university to take this into account (Scottish applicants only)



20% were encouraged to by their teacher or adviser

We were pleased that the majority of applicants (91%) felt comfortable or neutral about sharing their care background in the UCAS application, indicating that they understand why we ask this question, and how the information is used. Some students were keen to express their confidence in sharing their care background:

"I'm proud to be a foster kid and want to prove that we're not all stereotypical misbehaving teenagers."

"I know that my background doesn't affect my learning ability and it doesn't make me a worse student because I was in care."

Those who responded to the survey did ultimately share their care background, so we need to be mindful of those who did not feel comfortable to do so. Some applicants explained why they had doubts:

"I didn't want to be viewed as 'incapable' or less able than my counterparts who have no experience of being in care. I didn't want to be seen as less worthy of a place or offer."

"I have never shared to anyone that I have been in care because I don't feel comfortable. However, being in care is something that the uni needs to know and if there is support that I am entitled to because I am care-experienced, I'm okay to share that with them."

Figure 15: Summary of responses to the question, 'Which of the following, if any, are reasons why you chose to share your care background in the UCAS application?'



We were glad to receive feedback from one respondent about the UCAS application questions which, “...do not probe into very personal feelings, they are respectful and clearly mindful that some respondents will have some things that they are not willing to share”. However, some improvements are still needed: despite an update to the help text giving more details on what we mean by ‘in care’, some confusion remains around who can share or what ‘counts’, as well as differences across the devolved nations:

“As an English student going to a Scottish uni, I was in an awkward position where Scotland recognises me as care-experienced but England doesn’t, however I still ticked the box as I felt it would be lying to say no.”

UCAS aims to empower students to make informed decisions on their next steps which are right for them – including the support they receive to access and be successful in HE. We are committed to working with the HE and secondary education sectors, and other trusted organisations, to promote a culture of ‘positive disclosure’ in which all applicants feel confident to make the right choices for their needs, and to feel comfortable asking for support.

“

I didn’t mind sharing my experience. I was more shocked than anything because I didn’t know about the help I could have received.

ANNEX A:

RESEARCH METHODS

This report uses a range of data sources to examine the experiences of care-experienced students and their expectations of higher education.

As part of the UCAS application form, applicants are invited to share if they are care-experienced. Section One uses data taken from the UCAS application to analyse the intersectionality of care experience with other applicant characteristics. Unless otherwise specified, this analysis is performed on UK applicant data from 28 days after JCQ results day in the 2022 application cycle. This cycle point historically includes over 90% of applicants expected in any cycle.

Section Two uses responses from the UCAS Care-Experienced Student Survey 2022, which was sent out in July 2022 to a sample of UK applicants aged 24 and under who had applied during the 2022 cycle, and opted to share they had experience in care in their UCAS application. In total, 570 applicants responded to the survey, however only 500 of those confirmed that our supplied definition of care experience applied to them, and hence continued on to tell us about their experiences in education to date, of making their higher education decisions, and their expectations for university or college. Their responses were weighted up to represent the entire population of UK applicants from the 2022 cycle who shared care experience in their UCAS application, accounting for differences in response rates observed in different characteristic groups, including gender, age, and ethnic group.

Due to the proportion of survey respondents who stated that our supplied definition of care experience did not apply to them, and hence negating their answer in the UCAS application to the same question, we may infer that our figures for care-experienced applicants are overcounting; however, we include all applicants who shared this information in their application in our analysis.



ANNEX B:

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

All young people leaving care are entitled to local authority support up to and including age 25, but there are differences in how this is applied around the UK, and the definitions and terminology around care experience and care leavers also vary. The key differences for each UK nation are summarised in our [HE provider good practice briefing for care-experienced students](#).

In all data and resources, UCAS uses the broader term 'care experience' to be fully inclusive of the range of care settings an applicant may have encountered, such as:

- ▶ living with foster carers
- ▶ living in a residential children's home
- ▶ being looked after at home under a supervision order
- ▶ living with friends or relatives in kinship care – either through a formal arrangement (e.g. a Special Guardianship order) or an informal arrangement without local authority support

We do not exclude applicants with earlier or shorter experiences of care or those who do not receive support from the local authority – this may include those who left care through adoption and those who are now above the age limit for statutory support. We recognise the role of the university or college in taking forward the conversation directly with the applicant in order to understand their context and support needs.

For the purposes of this report, we use the term 'care experience' as default, with any deviation reflecting the language used by third party organisations or governments in their research or data.

The HESA care flag

The HESA care flag was updated in 2021 to reflect the different categories of care across the UK, including:

- ▶ Care leaver
- ▶ Care-experienced
- ▶ Self-declared care experience but not confirmed
- ▶ No experience of care

Full details of the new care flag can be found on the [HESA website](#).

UCAS



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