



# Open Doors, Open Minds

Is the care system helping looked-after children progress into further and higher education?

**Published March 2012 by The Who Cares? Trust**

The Open Doors, Open Minds project was kindly funded by The Clothworkers Foundation

# Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>SECTION ONE</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What the numbers say - an analysis of current statistics on educational performance of looked-after children and care leavers in England</b>	
End of school	10
Further education and beyond	14
<b>SECTION TWO</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>What those in the know say – the views of young people in and leaving care and those who work with them</b>	
Key findings	16
Introduction	17
Aspirations	18
Information underload	30
Stepping into the void – the impact of confidence on progression	35
Different, but not special	36
Conclusion	37
Summary of recommendations	38
<b>SECTION THREE</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>The first term – an analysis of the impact of Government policies</b>	
Key findings	40
Pupil Premium	42
16-19 Bursary – EMA’s lesser known cousin	46
Tuition fees – not doing what they said on the tin	50
Conclusions	61
Summary of recommendations	61
<b>APPENDIX ONE</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Methodology of the online survey</b>	
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>69</b>

# Executive summary

Open Doors, Open Minds was a project run by The Who Cares? Trust in 2011/12 which explored the barriers that prevent young people in and from care pursuing and completing courses of study in further and higher education.

This policy report considers how, despite significant improvements in legislation and statutory guidance, culture and practice across the care system does not consistently support high levels of achievement in education for young people in and from care. The current Government inherited this system, and has declared its intention to secure improvement in the education of looked-after children.

The evidence which we have found during Open Doors, Open Minds is that three key Government policies have theoretically delivered more financial support for looked-after children and care leavers. However, the implementation of these schemes has, at best, confused young people and those who work with them and at worst needlessly created new barriers to learning.

## **WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY – AN ANALYSIS OF CURRENT STATISTICS ON EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS IN ENGLAND (PAGES 10 – 15)**

The latest available data shows that, on average, looked-after children do not achieve as well at school as their peers. However, it

also shows that, generally, there is a positive relationship between the length of time a child has spent in care, the stability of their placements and their performance at school.

Looked-after children are more likely than their peers to have some kind of special educational needs (SEN). When looked-after children with SEN are compared to other children with SEN they still do poorly.

Information on how well looked-after children and care leavers do when they go to college and university is limited. The data that is available shows that they are five times less likely to go to university than other young people aged 19. There is no data collected on how well care leavers achieve at college or university. We also do not know how many care leavers enter university later in life.

## **WHAT THOSE IN THE KNOW SAY – THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AND LEAVING CARE AND THOSE WHO WORK WITH THEM (PAGES 16 – 39)**

During the course of the Open Doors, Open Minds project, we spoke to young people in and from care and the professionals who work with them. We did this through a series of telephone interviews, focus groups and an online survey of over 300 people (see Appendix One for more details). We asked them how being in care impacts on the education of looked-after children and care leavers. The main things they told us are below.

- ▶ Those working with and caring for young people do not consistently do enough to raise their aspirations about their future education.

Young people often said that there were one or two people who had high hopes for them, but they felt that not everyone shared these hopes. We asked professionals about aspirations and found they were more likely to hold positive views of the young people they worked with than they did for looked-after children and care leavers generally. This could be seen as part of a wider trend of blaming 'the system' for the lack of aspiration.

Efforts have been made over the last 15 years to create a system based around the concept of corporate parenting. These do not appear to have been fully successful with regards to education. Two key roles, Virtual School Headteachers and Independent Reviewing Officers, need to be strengthened to ensure that aspirations for looked-after children and care leavers are fostered and championed.

- ▶ There is a lack of knowledge about choices and the support available to looked-after children and care leavers.

Some young people told us that they do not have the right information to make choices about their education. They said that they would be most likely to talk to a carer or key

worker for help and least likely to talk to a careers adviser.

Professionals working with them said that they felt that young people did not have enough information about funding available to them to support their education. They also felt that they, as professionals, did not have enough information.

- ▶ Those working directly with looked-after children and care leavers are less likely to say they have sufficient information than those in more senior positions.

It was worrying to find that foster carers and social workers were among the most likely to say that they did not have enough information on education as these were the professionals whom many young people said they would turn to for help. Training could be effective in resolving this issue, however we found that over half of professionals working with looked-after children and care leavers had not received any training relating to education in the last three years.

- ▶ A lack of self-confidence can hamper progress into further and higher education.

For any young person, entering college or university carries elements of risk, uncertainty and perhaps fear. We found that care leavers themselves, and those who worked with

them, expressed concerns about a lack of self-confidence to cope with this.

- ▶ Careful consideration needs to be given to the construction of support for looked-after children and care leavers in order to avoid any unintended negative consequences of targeting support to care leavers.

There is a concern among young people that care can be stigmatising. This stigma needs to be considered when planning services. Systems which provide support specifically for looked-after children and care leavers, but in doing so identify them as such to their peers, may be less likely to succeed than those which are delivered more sensitively.

## THE FIRST TERM – AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES (PAGES 40 -63)

There are barriers which have developed within the system over time and these are hard to trace to individual decisions or policies. In the final section of this report we explore the impact of three recent Government policies – the Pupil Premium, 16-19 bursary and new tuition fee arrangements – on looked-after children and care leavers' progress through further and higher education.

### Pupil premium

We found a low level of awareness of the Pupil Premium among professionals who work with looked-after children and care leavers. Only half of the professionals we spoke to had definitely heard of it and only a quarter said they knew a lot about it.

One of the problems which emerged during Open Doors, Open Minds was that the Pupil Premium did not effectively engage those with day to day responsibility for the care of looked-after children. There are other models of funding education for looked-after children which offer a better way of generating a connection between carers and the education of looked-after children.

### 16-19 Bursary

After the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) the Government announced that a replacement, the 16-19 Bursary, would be available in its place. This would be guaranteed to looked-after children and care leavers and would be worth £1,200 (more than the maximum entitlement under EMA). We found that a lack of information and a fragmented approach to implementation were limiting the effectiveness of this policy.

### Rising tuition fees

The Government decided to triple the amount universities are allowed to charge undergraduate students to a maximum of £9,000 per year. Efforts were made to ensure that this rise would not deter vulnerable young people from progressing into higher education. Care leavers were among the priority groups identified for support.

Open Doors, Open Minds identified a wide variation in the support provided by universities. An analysis of Access Agreements showed that the top universities were less likely than other universities to say that they provided support for care leavers. We also found that a lack of data about recruitment and retention of care leavers prevented some universities from setting meaningful targets.

In December 2011, we compiled and published

*The H.E. Handbook*, a directory of all English universities' current provision, in an attempt to get a better sense of what support is available to care leavers at university. Using this data we established that rising tuition fees had not helped create a consistent level of support for care leavers.

A third of the young people we spoke to told us that they wanted to go to university. However, the information available to them does not make it easy for them to achieve this ambition. There was a low level of awareness of the National Scholarship Programme (additional funding to help vulnerable groups attend university, for which care leavers are a priority).

## CONCLUSION

Over its first 18 months in power, the Coalition has introduced three policies which all have the potential to confuse young people, and those who work with them, and therefore reduce the chances of looked-after children and care leavers going onto further and higher education.

All three of these policies (the Pupil Premium, 16-19 Bursary and new student finance arrangements) suffer from the same problem: theoretically they deliver more support to care leavers, but the Government has failed to help young people and those on the frontline understand this.

All three policies share two other attributes:

1. They direct slightly more money into support for looked-after children and care leavers.

2. They leave the implementation to local bodies (be that schools, colleges or universities).

This combination appears to have created a confusing picture on the ground and is a direct result of a conscious localism agenda. The fragmentation this creates is harmful to looked-after children and care leavers as it exacerbates the already existing postcode lottery.

There is a need to bring clarity to present arrangements. Greater information for young people and those that work with them is a minimum requirement. However, the Government must go further to ensure that some consistency is centrally directed. This should involve strengthening guidance, supporting appropriate structures and the collection of better data on the progress of looked-after children and care leavers in further and higher education.

It is not enough simply to abandon care leavers to the whims of localism; the Government must do more to ensure that they have a fair chance of progressing through further and higher education.

# Introduction

Open Doors, Open Minds was a project run by The Who Cares? Trust in 2011/12 which explored the barriers that prevent young people in and from care pursuing and completing courses of study in further and higher education. It aimed to help professionals make the changes needed to ensure that being in care does not mean failing in education.

The project published a guide for young people to help them find their way through some of the barriers that can prevent them from reaching further and higher education. We worked with a group of care leavers to make sure that the guide was as relevant and usable as possible. They gave ideas for content, style and design as well as directly contributing to some sections. The guide is available from: [www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk](http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk).

We began work on this policy report in April 2011 by looking at current legislation, practice and the views of young people in and from care and the professionals who work with them.

This report focuses on the care system in England, but, as recent debates in other parts of the United Kingdom<sup>[1]</sup> show, Section Two has wider ramifications.

Over nine months the Trust conducted desk-based research, interviews and focus groups. We also conducted an internet survey of over 300 people, including nearly 100 looked-after children and care leavers, to develop an understanding of what further and higher education is like for young people in and from care.

This policy report considers how, despite significant improvements in legislation and statutory guidance, culture and practice across the care system does not consistently support high levels of achievement in education for young people in and from care.

The current Government inherited this system, and has declared its intention to secure improvement in the education of looked-after children. In a recent speech Tim Loughton MP, the minister with responsibility for the care system, said:

**'We need to look at and address the broader and deeper underlying causes of why last year, just 460 – or one in 14 – care leavers were at university, and fewer than a third were at college.**

**By challenging and overcoming the wider, entrenched poverty of ambition for young people in care.**

**And by making sure that the state does far better to equip them for life, work and study after they leave care and take their first tentative steps into adulthood.'** <sup>[2]</sup>

Since coming to power in May 2010, the Government implemented new approaches to funding for these young people at school, college and university.

The evidence which we have found during Open Doors, Open Minds is that these policies have theoretically delivered more financial support for looked-after children and care leavers.

However, the implementation of these schemes has, at best, confused young people and those who work with them, and at worst needlessly created new barriers to learning.

### **DEFINING 'PROFESSIONALS'**

In this report we talk about 'professionals' and by this we mean all those who have a role in improving the educational achievement of looked-after children and care leavers. We have therefore included foster carers in this group.

However, we are conscious that there is significant debate about whether foster carers are or should be professionals. We are making no judgement about this debate by including them in this group, but do so to allow a simple division between 'young people' and 'professionals'.

# Section One

## What the numbers say - an analysis of current statistics on educational performance of looked-after children and care leavers in England

### END OF SCHOOL

Looked-after children do worse at school than their peers. There have been recent improvements in England in the performance of pupils at Key Stage 4 (GCSE performance at aged 16), but these have not been matched by similar improvements for looked-after children.

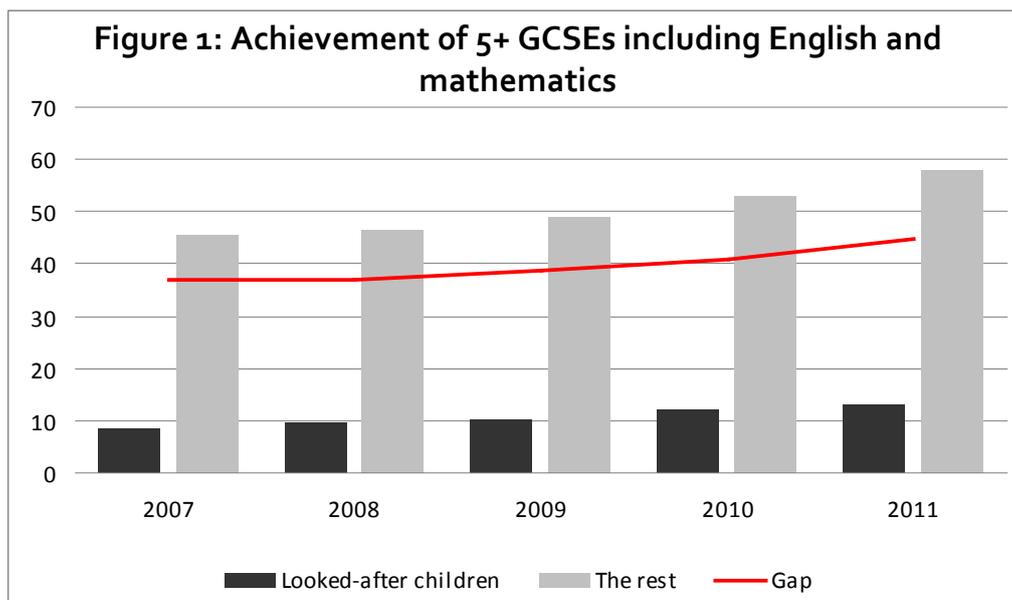
The latest statistics reveal that only 13% of looked-after children achieved five A\*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics compared to 58% of their peers. **The gap between looked after children and their peers has widened by eight percentage points in the last five years** (see Figure 1).

There are a number of factors which can affect the educational achievement of looked-after children. They can act as barriers to, or promoters of, educational achievement. Several of the major factors are identified below.<sup>[3]</sup>

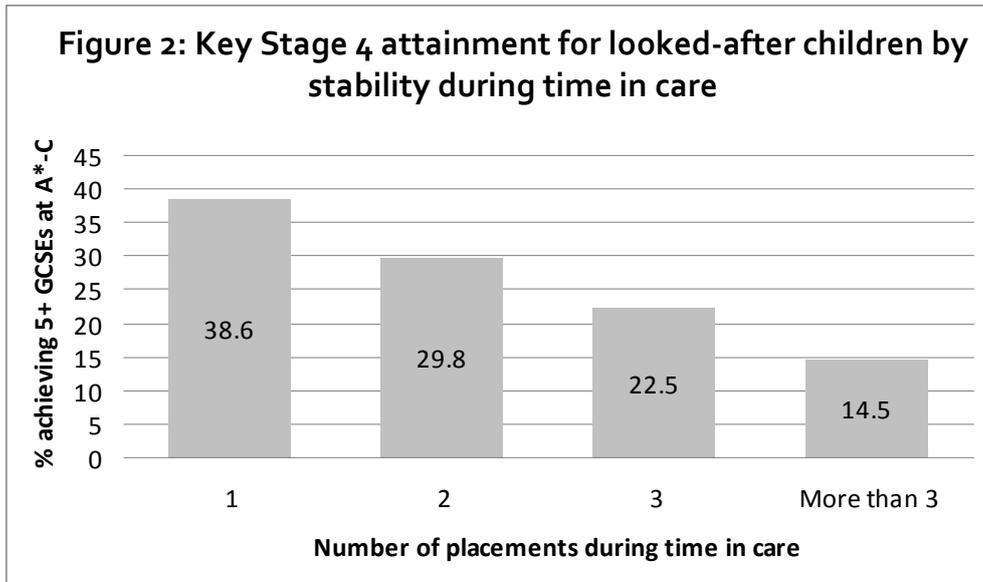
### Placement stability

Data shows that placement stability can have a positive impact on the likelihood of looked-after children reaching the expected standard for their age by the time they leave school (see Figures 2 and 3).

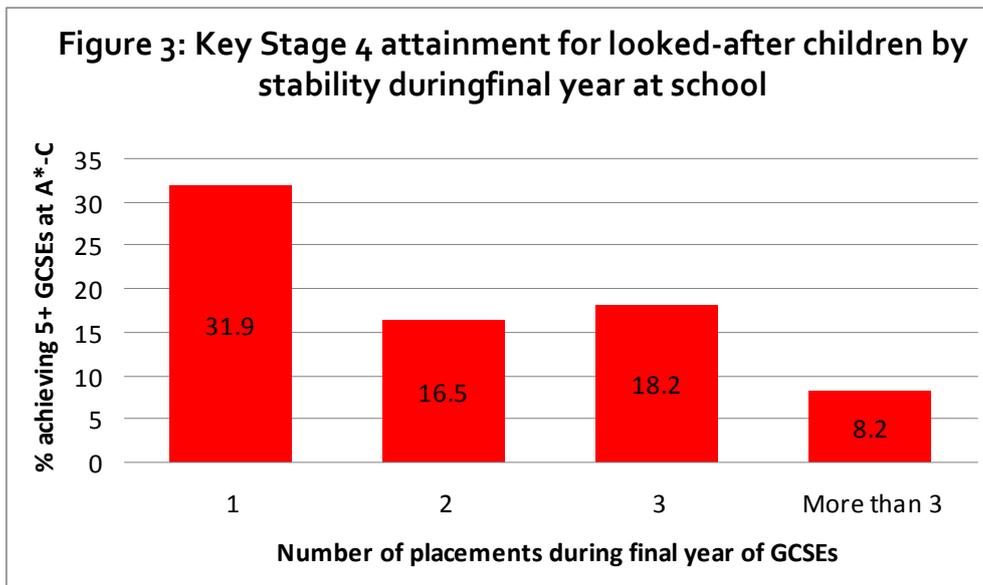
It is clear that a high number of placement moves, both over the course of their time in care and in their final year of GCSEs, can have a damaging effect on the likelihood of a child achieving five or more GCSEs.



Source: SFR30/2011, Outcomes for children looked after as at 31 March 2011, Department for Education (14th December 2011)



Source: Raising the aspirations and educational outcomes of looked after children: a data tool for local authorities, Department for Education July 2011



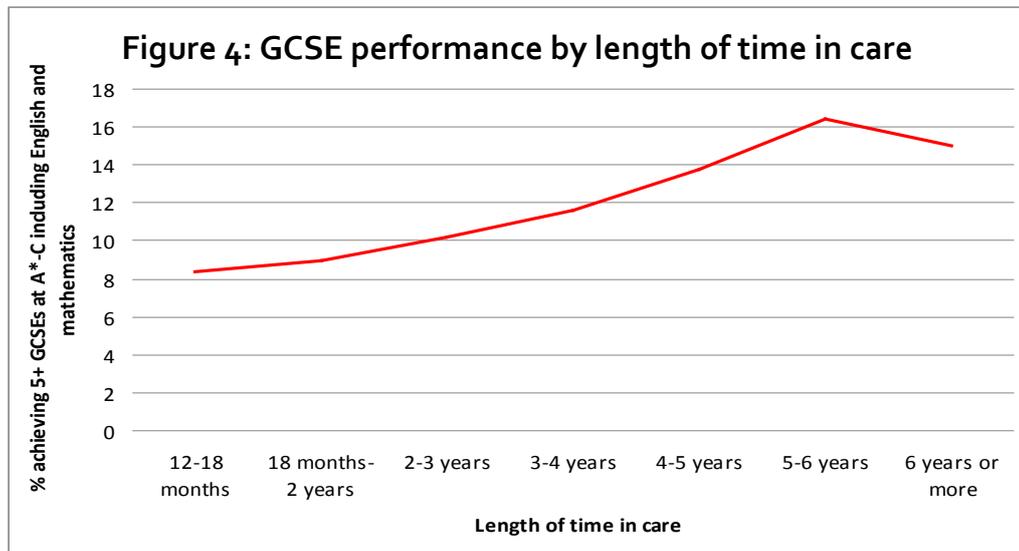
Source: Raising the aspirations and educational outcomes of looked after children: a data tool for local authorities, Department for Education July 2011

**Length of time in care**

Data shows that the longer a child is in the care system, the more likely they are to achieve when compared to those who have been in the care system for a shorter period (see Figure 4).

While the number reaching the expected standard by the time they leave school is still far behind their peers, there is some cause for optimism that the care system can have a positive impact on educational achievement.

**The gap between looked after children and their peers has widened by eight percentage points in the last five years**



Source: Raising the aspirations and educational outcomes of looked after children: a data tool for local authorities, Department for Education July 2011

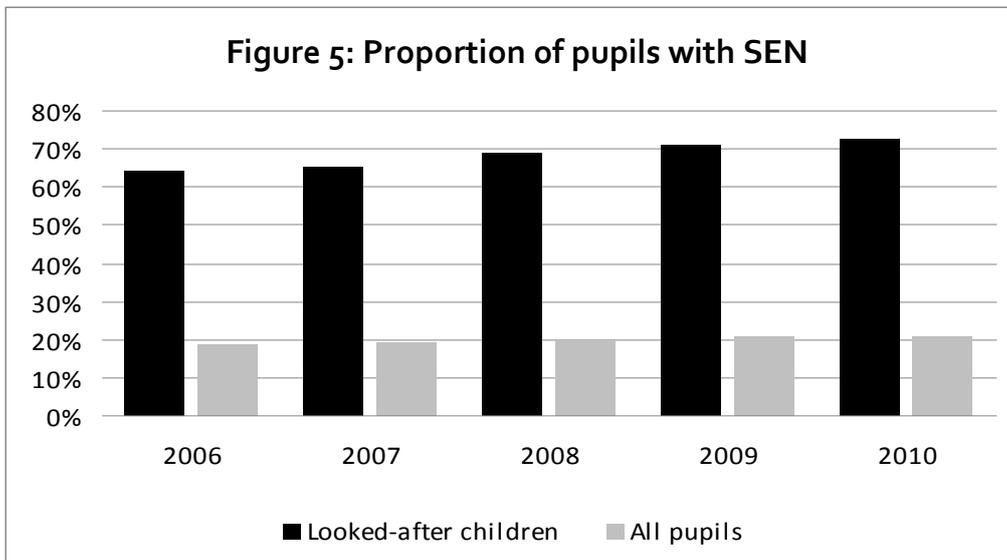
### Special educational needs

More looked-after children receive support for special educational needs (SEN) than other children. Over the last five years, the proportion of looked-after children with SEN has risen faster than the proportion of their peers with SEN (see Figure 5).

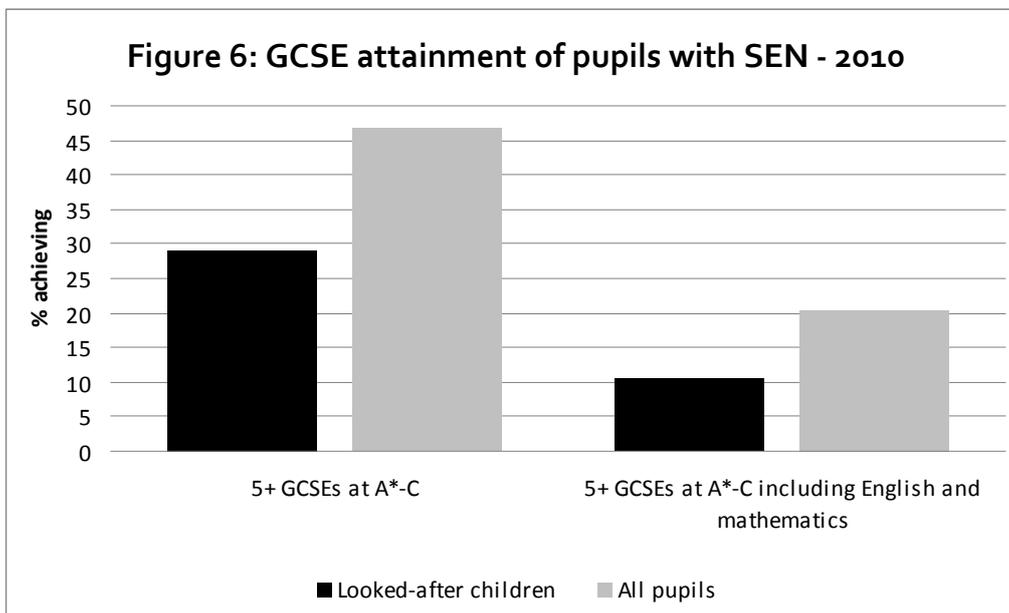
On average, pupils with SEN perform less well than their peers. In 2010 20.2 % of pupils with SEN achieved the expected level at Key Stage 4, compared to 66.2% for those with no special educational needs. <sup>[4]</sup> The higher prevalence of SEN among looked-after children could suggest that they will always be less likely than their peers to achieve five or more GCSEs at A\*-C. Therefore the wide gap between achievement levels could be seen as unavoidable.

However, to counter this view, it is important to compare the attainment of looked-after children with SEN with other pupils with SEN. The available data shows that among pupils with SEN, looked-after children have lower attainment than their peers (see Figure 6).

This brief summary of the available statistics on the education of looked-after children shows that there is a greater chance that they will leave school with fewer GCSEs at A\*-C than their peers. Even where looked-after children experience stable, long term placements they achieve less well than their peers. The impact of this low achievement can be seen as they move from school into further and higher education.



Source: OSR20/2011, Children with Special Educational Needs: an analysis - 2011, Department for Education (October 2011) and SFR38/2010, Outcomes for children looked after as at 31 March 2010, Department for Education (16th December 2011)



Source: Raising the aspirations and educational outcomes of looked after children: a data tool for local authorities, Department for Education July 2011

## FURTHER EDUCATION AND BEYOND

It is difficult to say with certainty how often care leavers enter further and higher education, at what stage in their life and how well they achieve when they are there. This is because of limitations in the currently available statistics on progression into further and higher education for care leavers.

The data we do have shows that, the year after leaving school, 18% of looked-after children will be unemployed (see Figure 7). By the time they are 19, one-third (33%) of care-leavers are not in education, employment or training.<sup>[5]</sup> This compares with 21.5% of all 19-24 year olds in the third quarter of 2011.<sup>[6]</sup>

**Care leavers are also less likely than their peers to be in higher education at 19.** In 2009/10, 36% of all 18/19 year olds in England were attending higher education institutions<sup>[7]</sup>; in the same year only 7% of care leavers aged 19 were in higher education (see Figure 8).

Between 2007 and 2010 the percentage of care leavers in higher education remained virtually static. Over the same period the overall proportion of 18/19 year olds in higher education rose from close to 33% to 36%.

The available data does not allow direct comparison between care leavers and the rest of the population on their achievement post-16.

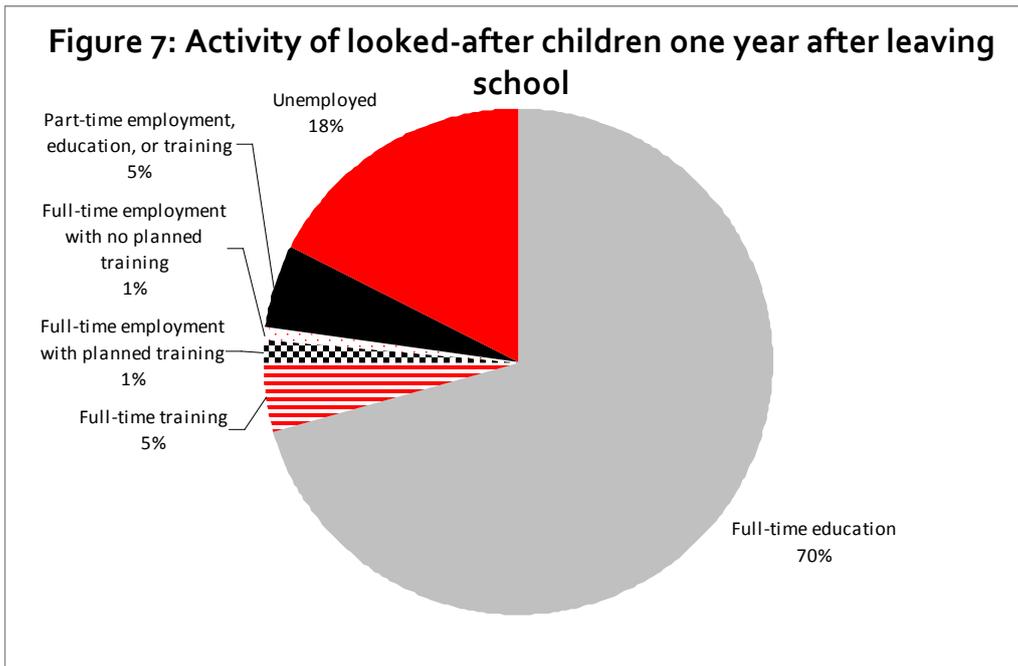
Local authorities' duty to support care leavers in education extends until their 25th birthday, yet no official statistics are collected on how many young people are supported or how well they achieve. This is unfortunate because, as we have seen above, looked-after children are less likely to do well at school. It is therefore

likely that it will take care leavers longer to reach the standards needed to enter further and higher education. Without information on the education of care leavers up to the age of 25, it is difficult to gauge the true picture of how many of them reach further and higher education and the effect of local authority support. The data also does not allow us to consider how many care leavers take up second chance learning (i.e. go back to college or university for a second time). We are therefore recommending that:

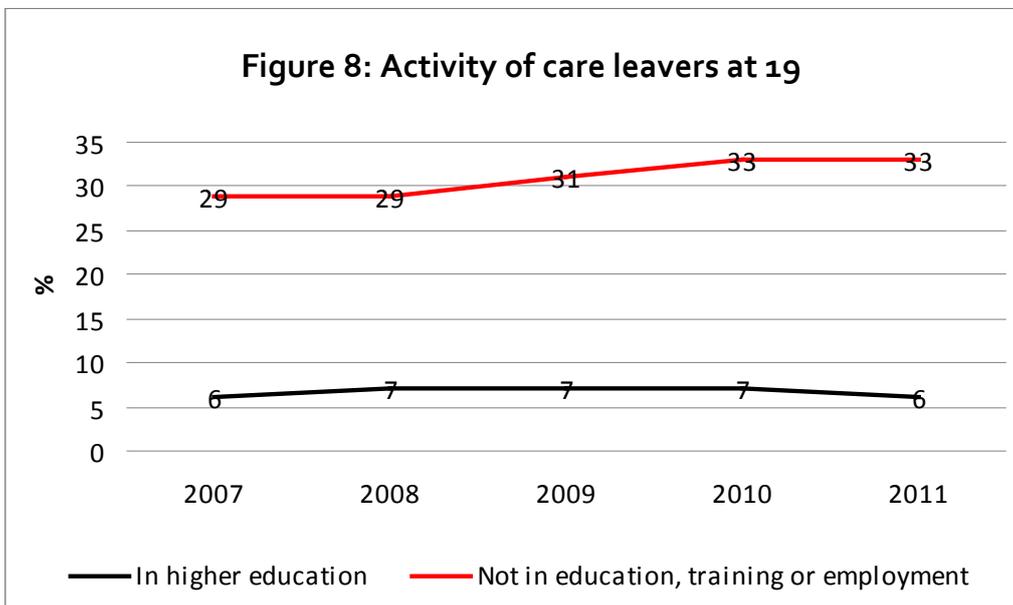
# 1

**THE GOVERNMENT EXPLORES WAYS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES TO OFFER A PICTURE OF THE NUMBER OF CARE LEAVERS WHO ATTEND FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION BY THE TIME THEY ARE 25.**

The information that exists shows us that looked-after children and care leavers are significantly less likely than their peers to go into further or higher education. The next section explores the views of young people in and from care, as well as the professionals who work with them, about barriers which may prevent them from going onto further and higher education and the type of practice which enables them to.



Source: SFR30/2011, Outcomes for children looked after as at 31 March 2011, Department for Education (14th December 2011)



Source: SFR21/2011 Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2011

**Care leavers are less likely than their peers to be in higher education at 19**

# Section Two

## What those in the know say – the views of young people in and leaving care and those who work with them

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Those working with and caring for young people do not do enough to raise their aspirations about their future education.
- ▶ There is a lack of knowledge about choices and the support available to looked-after children and care leavers.
- ▶ Those working directly with looked-after children and care leavers are less likely to have sufficient information than those in more senior positions.
- ▶ A lack of self-confidence can hamper progress into further and higher education.
- ▶ Careful consideration needs to be given to the construction of support for looked-after children and care leavers in order to avoid any unintended negative consequences of targeting support to care leavers.

## INTRODUCTION

During the course of the Open Doors, Open Minds project, we spoke to young people in and from care and the professionals who work with them. We did this through a series of telephone interviews, focus groups and an online survey of over 300 people (see Appendix One for more details). This section brings together their views on how being in care impacts on the education of looked-after children and care leavers.

The statistics in Section One show that looked-after children and care leavers are more likely than their peers to leave school with low achievement and less likely to go onto further and higher education. Speaking to those who know the care system best, it seems that some of the causes of this low achievement may be systemic.

Central Government has long been clear about its expectations for looked-after children. The duty to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children is enshrined in law (Children Act 2004) and the most recent guidance from the responsible department is crystal clear.

'Local authorities as their 'corporate parents' should demonstrate the strongest commitment to helping every child they look after, wherever the child is placed, to achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can. This includes supporting their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.'<sup>[8]</sup>

This expectation is not consistently reflected in practice. People we spoke to told us of a system where too often looked-after children and care leavers:

- ▶ Are not filled with aspiration by those who care for and work with them
- ▶ Are not provided with sufficient information on their choices and the support available to them
- ▶ Lack the self-confidence to progress to further and higher education
- ▶ See negative associations with being singled out.

This section looks at these issues in detail. They have not emerged because of a specific policy, either at a national or local level; neither have they appeared recently. They are long-standing cultural issues in the care system which will take sustained, long term effort to address.

## ASPIRATIONS

**Going into further and higher education is an act of aspiration.** Whether you are going to university to secure your long term future or going to college simply to keep yourself busy, staying in education means you've thought about what comes next. You have made a choice today about what you might achieve tomorrow. However, for looked-after children and care leavers this is not always straightforward.

**'Looked after children that I have worked with tend not to have any aspirations for the future. Many of them are disengaged with education and have no interest in education. They are focused on their current situation and often have many issues to deal with that, for them, have priority over education.'**

[Education outreach consultant for looked after children] <sup>[9]</sup>

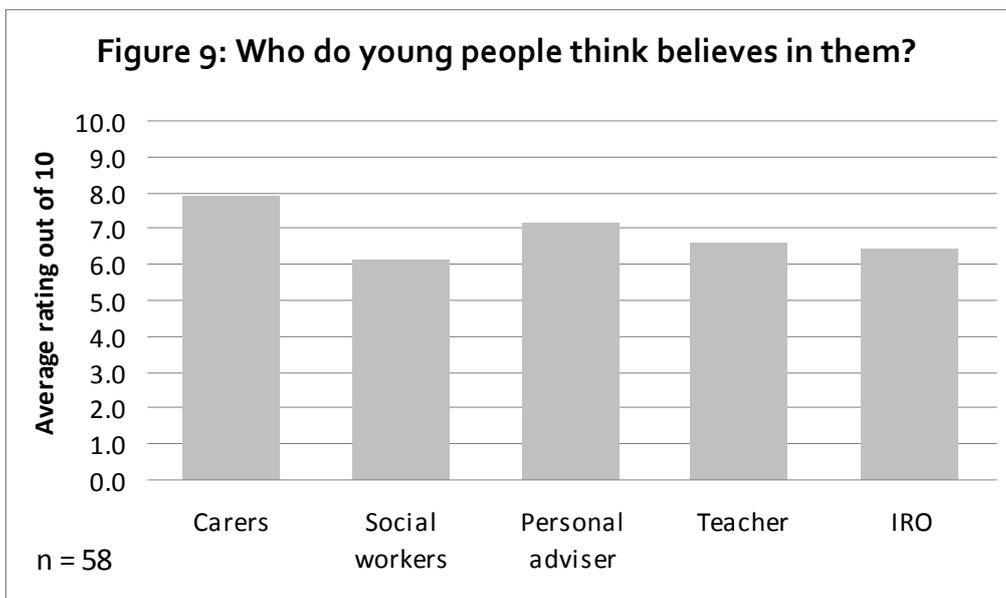
### Young people's views

Most young people may have this aspiration fostered by their parents, yet looked-after children and care leavers are supported by a system that does not seem to provide this consistently. One young person told us:

**'No one is different from each other, just because we come from a different background doesn't mean that they should expect any less. We may not live with our families, but we're entitled to the same education.'** <sup>[10]</sup>

As part of the online survey, we asked young people who they felt believed in them. They were asked to rank people who worked with them from one (this person doesn't/didn't believe in me at all) to ten (this person believes/d in me and challenges/d me to do more all the time).

**Going into further and higher education is an act of aspiration.**



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

Those working with and caring for looked-after children and care leavers have a clear role to play in instilling aspirations and supporting their hopes. In an ideal world, all young people would give all those working with them a high score in response to this question. However, Figure 9 shows that young people too often do not feel this way about the people working with them.

It is notable that young people saw primary carers (either foster carers or residential workers) as having the highest level of aspiration for them. Looking at the data by age group shows that the younger the respondent was, the more likely they were to see their social worker or personal adviser as believing in them (See Figure 10).

Many of the young people who completed our survey said that while at least one person they worked with had high aspirations for them, there was at least one professional who did not. Table 1 (overleaf) gives a sample of the

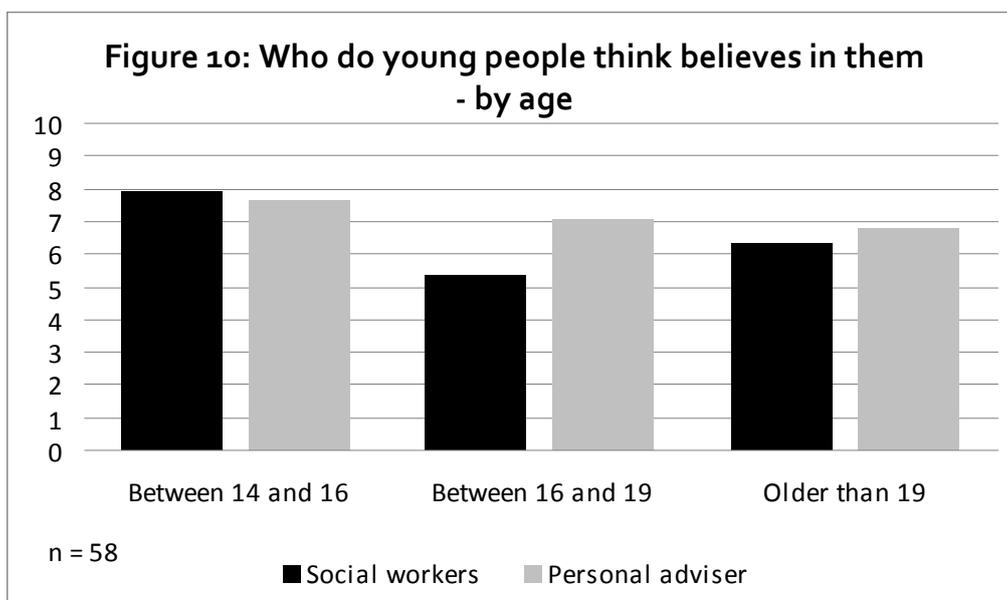
responses which demonstrates this point .

Overall, we asked 80 young people this question and for 18% of them (14 young people) there was a gap of seven or more points between the person they graded the highest and the person they graded the lowest. This seems to indicate both the importance of individual professionals to looked-after children and care leavers, as well as the inconsistency of aspiration young people perceive from those working with them.

**Professionals' views**

We asked professionals related questions about the aspirations which they and their colleagues had for looked-after children and care leavers.

We started by asking whether they felt the looked-after children and care leavers they worked with had high hopes for their future education.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

**Table 1: We asked young people who believed in them. A score of ten indicated that 'this person believes in me and challenges me to do more all the time' and one indicated that 'this person doesn't believe in me at all'. The following responses are a sample of those we received.**

ID	My carer/s	My social worker	My personal adviser	My teacher	My IRO
1	10	5	N/A	6	9
22	10	1	2	9	8
29	10	7	8	9	N/A
36	5	9	10	8	N/A
37	10	9	2	1	N/A
42	10	8	N/A	7	9
55	5	N/A	10	9	6
61	10	9	8	6	1
69	10	1	4	2	3

Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

Table 2 shows that, overall, just over half of respondents agreed that looked-after children they worked with had high hopes. Social care professionals (social workers, social work team managers and personal advisers) were among the least likely to believe that looked-after children they worked with had high hopes for the future.

We also asked professionals to tell us about whether looked-after children and care leavers generally had high hopes for their future education. Professionals tended to believe that the young people they worked with were more likely to have high hopes for their future than looked-after children and care leavers generally.

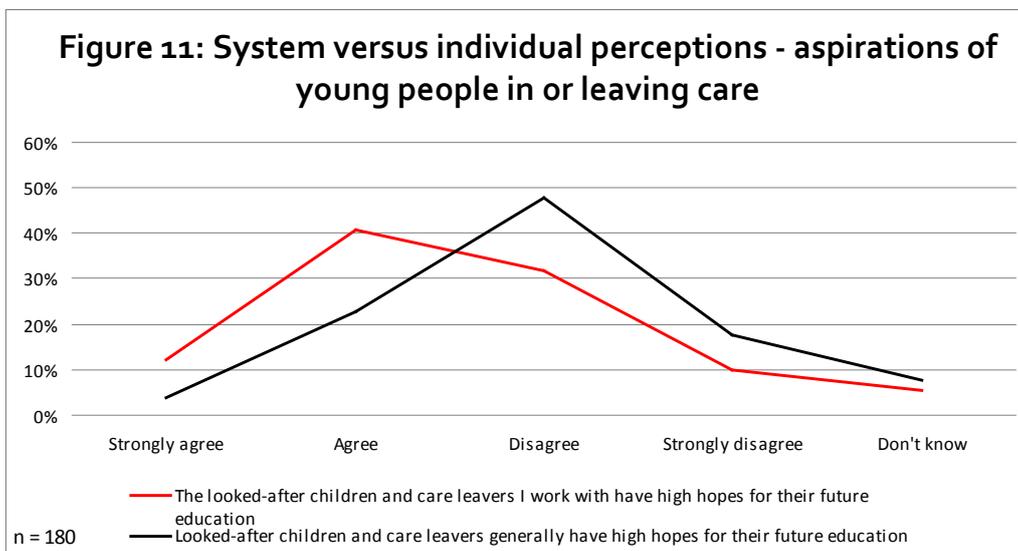
**Table 2: We asked professionals whether they agreed with the statement 'The young people I work with have high hopes for their future education'.**

	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Not sure
Designated member of staff for looked-after children or care leavers	67.7%	26.5%	5.9%
Foster carer	40.0%	53.3%	6.7%
Other	53.7%	41.5%	4.9%
Personal Adviser in a leaving care team	33.3%	53.3%	13.3%
Senior Manager	45.5%	45.5%	9.1%
Social Work Team Manager	44.4%	55.6%	0.00%
Social Worker	41.4%	55.2%	3.5%
Teacher / Tutor	64.3%	35.7%	0.00%
Virtual Headteacher	100.0%	0.00%	0.00%
ALL RESPONDENTS	52.8%	41.8%	5.5%

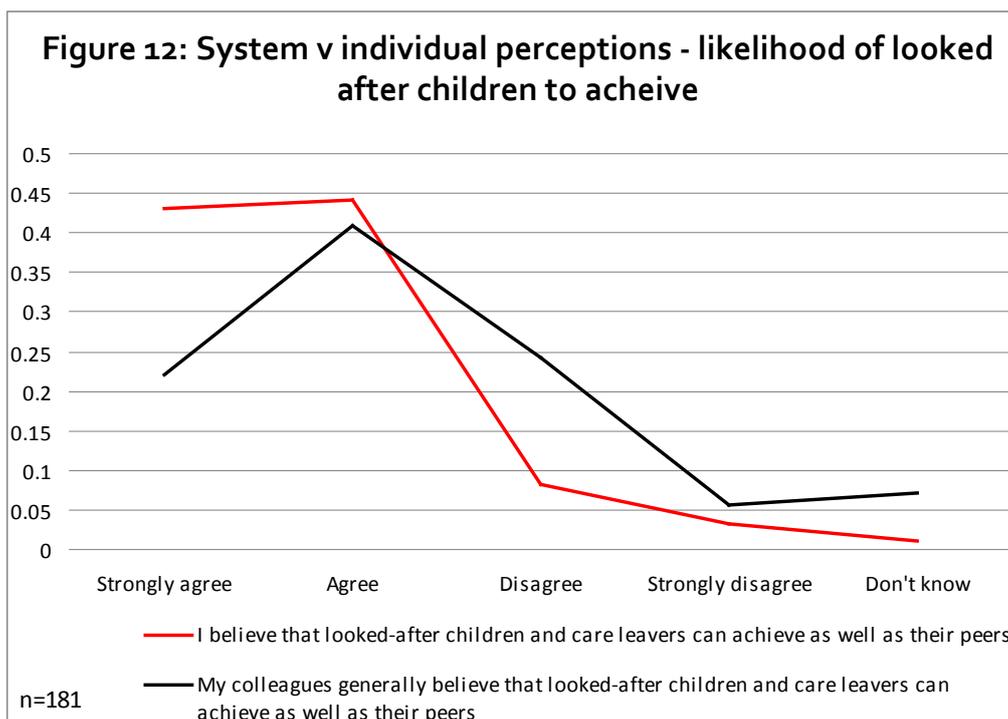
Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

We found a similar trend when we asked whether looked-after children could achieve as well as their peers. **Professionals were more likely to say that, while they personally believed looked-after children could do as well as their peers, their colleagues did not** (see Figures 11 and 12 ).

**Professionals were more likely to say that, while they personally believed looked-after children could do as well as their peers, their colleagues did not**



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

Both of these graphs seem to suggest that professionals had a more positive view of both themselves and the young people they worked with directly than they did of their colleagues and the wider population of looked-after children and care leavers. Our sample suggests that professionals may believe that it was somehow the wider system that was the problem; that others were to blame. This was echoed in focus groups and other interviews we conducted during Open Doors, Open Minds.

**‘Aspiration depends on the young person. Those who speak up are helped, those who don’t are left behind.’**

[Virtual School Headteacher] <sup>[11]</sup>

**‘The education system has let these children down badly before they even enter the care system and the care system then takes the blame.’**

[Social Worker] <sup>[12]</sup>

**‘The system makes a mockery of the term ‘corporate parenting’. Would we treat our own kids the way looked-after children are treated by the system at times? There is no consistency. A bad social worker, foster carer or teacher can ruin the future of a looked-after child.’**

[Looked After Children Education Service outreach worker] <sup>[13]</sup>

The evidence provided during this project has suggested that blame for low aspirations is placed on the intangible ‘system’. Yet we know from young people that it often only takes one individual to form a supportive relationship for them to do well (see above, Table 1). We heard about young people’s positive experiences of being encouraged about

their education in a focus group.

**‘My carer...says that she doesn’t mind what I do, but doesn’t want me to waste what I’ve got.’**

**‘My carer does care about school and what I achieve.’** <sup>[14]</sup>

However, in the same focus group, there were also examples of negative approaches towards young people’s education:

**‘I showed staff the grade Bs and A in IT I got today and didn’t get the impression they were bothered.’** <sup>[105]</sup>

It is crucial that all young people in and from care are supported and encouraged by those people caring for them and working with them.

This is not a new challenge. Over the last 15 years, the Government has consistently identified aspiration and support as a key barrier to success.

Since 1998, and an open letter from MP Frank Dobson to lead members <sup>[16]</sup>, the importance of leadership has been identified as central to achieving a culture of high aspiration. The following quotes come from guidance from central government in that period.

**‘Carers are not expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient support and encouragement at home for learning and development.’** <sup>[17]</sup>

**‘Those involved in corporate parenting have lower aspirations for, and expectations of, young people in public care, both in terms of achievement and behaviour.’** <sup>[18]</sup>

**‘The [Director of Children’s Services] should ensure that services support good parenting from everyone involved in the child’s life, raise the aspirations of looked after children and provide the support they need from mainstream and targeted services.’ [19]**

It is clear that central Government has long recognised that tackling this cultural malaise requires local authorities to take a lead, both at a senior management level and in the individual management of children and young people’s cases. The plethora of guidance which has been published indicates that it is not a lack of legislation which is to blame.

We must therefore look to other areas, like enforcement and local authority practice, for answers.

Local government has taken some steps towards sector-led improvement. The Centre for Excellent Outcomes (C4EO), a local government-funded improvement body, emerged from this recognition of the need for local authority self-improvement. It has taken some steps towards developing good practice in relation to looked-after children through its ‘vulnerable children’ strand of work. It is encouraging that, through C4EO, the local government sector is currently seeking to publish validated examples of excellent practice in corporate parenting, including the raising of education standards.<sup>[20]</sup> These examples, if taken up by all local authorities, have the potential to lead to great improvements in practice. C4EO also leads the way on peer support and through this can potentially spread this good practice widely.

However, sector-led improvement is voluntary. **There is always a risk that the best authorities will continue to move forward**

**while others will coast or fall back.**

Challenging those local authorities that cannot or will not take up best practice is the role of central Government and inspection agencies.

Ofsted currently inspects all local authorities’ services for looked-after children at least once every three years. The latest data shows the importance of continuing to challenge local authorities. Of the 81 local authorities which has a looked-after children inspection between August 2009 and October 2011, 38% were judged to provide a ‘satisfactory’ or worse service in terms of Enjoying and Achieving (which looks at educational services for looked-after children).<sup>[21]</sup> This clearly shows that sector-led improvement is not yet delivering the high standards of service we should expect for looked-after children and care leavers.

We are therefore recommending that:

## 2

**OFSTED SHOULD PUBLISH AN ANNUAL THEMATIC REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES WITH THE LOWEST EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN HAVE TAKEN UP BEST PRACTICE IN CORPORATE PARENTING.**

## 3

## THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION SHOULD INTERVENE RAPIDLY IN ALL LOCAL AUTHORITIES WHERE EDUCATION ATTAINMENT FOR LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN IS CONSISTENTLY POOR.

The importance of leadership is not restricted to senior managers and lead members. There are two further leadership positions which have a key role to play in ensuring that looked-after children and care leavers are supported and that all those working with them have high aspirations for their future performance. These are Virtual School Headteachers and Independent Reviewing Officers. Our research has shown that the capacity of both of these posts to be effective may be under threat in local authorities across the country.

### Virtual School Headteachers

An evaluation of the Virtual School Headteacher pilots clearly pointed towards their effectiveness in improving the educational performance of looked-after children.<sup>[22]</sup>

Responses to our survey suggest that virtual schools are undertaking excellent practice across the country, but that there have also been cutbacks in the level of service provided. We asked whether there had been any changes in the level of support available for looked-after children in respondents' local area in the last 12 months. Figure 13 shows that there is a mixed picture.

In places where support has improved, the work of the virtual school was a constant theme:

'[The] virtual school has employed additional staff.'

'[The] structure and support of our virtual school goes from strength to strength.'

'Relationships and working strategies are continually developed between the Virtual School and the 16+ team'.

'[Improvements include] the growth of the virtual school Kent... stronger multiagency links between Connexions, VSK, Catch22 and designated members of staff in FE/HE.'

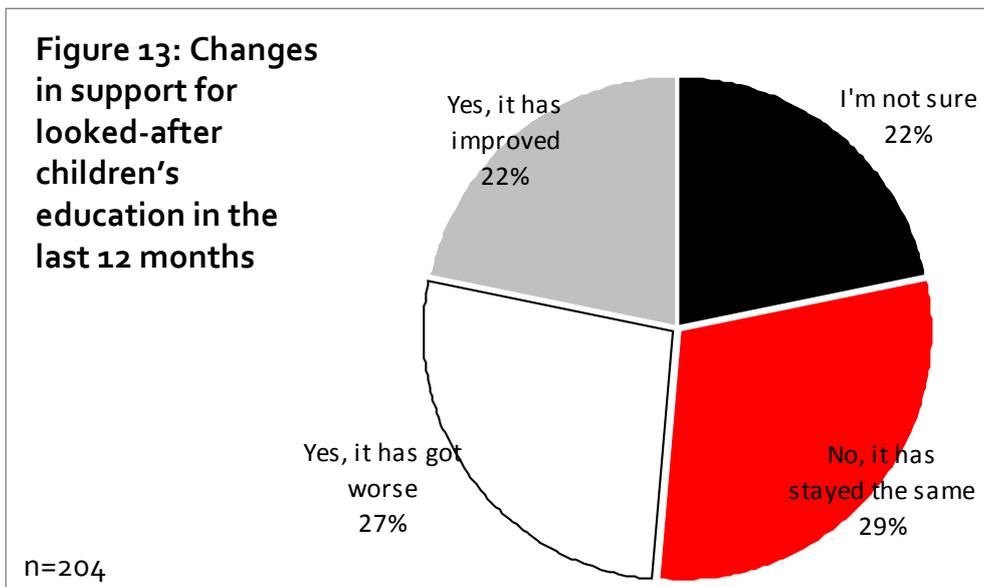
<sup>[23]</sup>

### However, we also received evidence of a reduction in support provided by virtual schools and the restructure, and even removal, of Virtual School Headteachers.

In one instance a virtual headteacher had their role expanded to include all vulnerable children, greatly diluting their focus. In other areas we heard of reductions in the budget of virtual schools leading to redundancies for peripatetic tutors, outreach workers and other members of looked-after children's education teams. One virtual headteacher told us they were:

'doing more work than you can physically handle.'<sup>[24]</sup>

The variety of practice with regards to Virtual School Headteachers is a significant concern given the evidence of their effectiveness. Current statutory guidance<sup>[25]</sup> suggests that local authorities have these posts in place, but this guidance does not seem to have been



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

sufficient to protect these roles during recent budget cuts. We are therefore calling for the Government to pass legislation requiring all local authorities to appoint a Virtual School Headteacher. We are recommending that:

# 4

**THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BRING FORWARD LEGISLATION THAT REQUIRES LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO APPOINT A VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER WITH SOLE FOCUS ON LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN.**

This recommendation will obviously require additional investment. Given the funding which has been made available over the last decade,

it is right that the Government should seek to reassure itself of the value of this by measuring increases in the educational achievement of looked-after children. However, year-on-year measures of looked-after children's educational performance should be used with caution.

Measuring the performance of looked-after children in Year 11 in individual local authorities can be difficult. For many local authorities the average number of looked-after children taking GCSEs in a given year is smaller than a secondary school class. This means that changes in performance which occur, year on year, can seem to indicate wild variation. For example, in Barnet the percentage of looked-after children achieving five or more GCSEs at A\*-C rose from 28% in 2009 to 36% in 2010 and then fell back to 19.4% in 2011. Similarly, in Gateshead the percentage fell from 39.1% to 30% between 2009 and 2010 and then rose to 48.5% in 2011. In both of these boroughs, around 25 looked-after children were eligible to sit GCSEs each year.

In order to give local authorities a reasonable

chance to secure improvement and for cohort size to have less of an impact we are recommending that the Department for Education seeks to reinvigorate regional networks of Virtual School Headteachers and holds these responsible for standards. These regional groups should be held to account for improving looked-after children and care leaver achievement and should receive funding based on their success.

In order to give a fair picture of the performance of the networks, the Department for Education should seek to measure against three main impact indicators:

- ▶ The overall performance of looked-after children and care leavers at Key Stage 4 and 5
- ▶ The gap between looked-after children and care leavers and their peers
- ▶ The performance of looked-after children who have been in the care system for more than two years.

These measures would help regional networks to focus on the performance of looked-after children and care leavers as they progress through from school to further education and also enable them to track the impact of the care system itself. We are therefore recommending that:

## 5

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION MAKES SEED FUNDING AVAILABLE TO RE-INVIGORATE REGIONAL VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER NETWORKS AS A CRUCIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR SHARED LEARNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BEST PRACTICE.**

## 6

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION WORKS WITH REGIONAL GROUPS OF VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS TO AGREE CHALLENGING IMPROVEMENT TARGETS FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF EACH REGION'S LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN. MEETING THESE TARGETS SHOULD BE LINKED TO FUTURE GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR REGIONAL NETWORKS.**

### Independent Reviewing Officers

During the course of Open Doors, Open Minds, we explored the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in providing aspiration and challenge. IROs are responsible for chairing looked-after children’s review meetings. Recently published statutory guidance <sup>[26]</sup> is clear about the role of the IRO in relation to education. It states that, during review meetings, they should address:

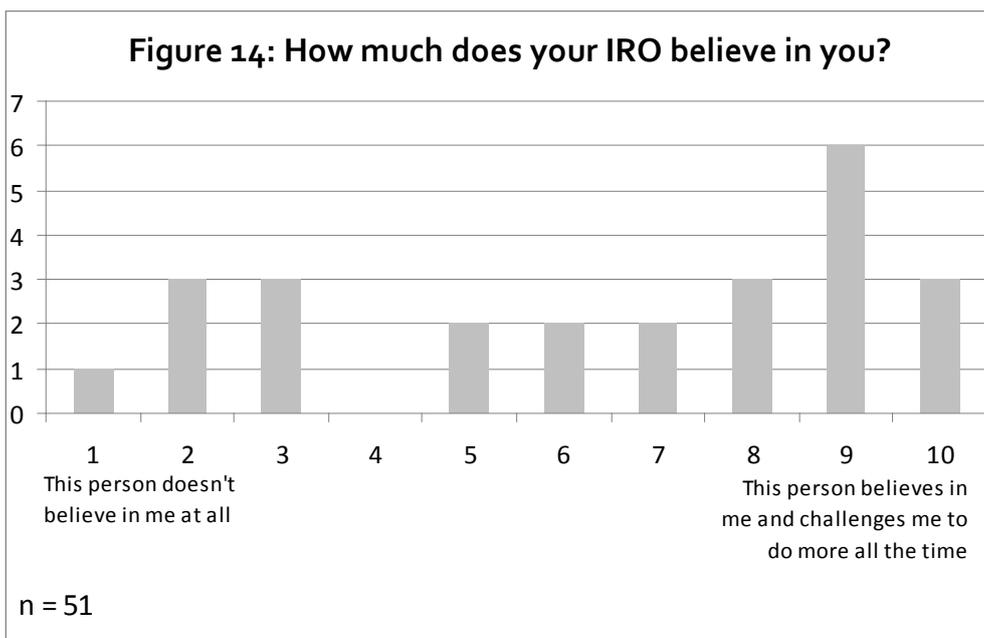
**‘The child’s educational needs, progress and development and whether any actions need to be taken or are likely to become necessary before the next review, in order to ensure that the child’s educational needs are met and not neglected (this should include consideration of the current [personal education plan])’.** <sup>[27]</sup>

**The IRO could be central to improving the educational attainment of looked-after children.** They have the power to challenge decisions made about looked-after

children, they can require PEP meetings to be held and have a role in monitoring cases between reviews. They could play a powerful role in ensuring that educational performance of looked-after children is a high priority and that all those working with looked-after children are playing their part in supporting their achievement. Most importantly, they can challenge social care teams to provide the resources that looked-after children need to do well in school.

However, we asked 51 young people about their IRO and they had mixed views of the quality of aspiration which IROs had for them (see Figure 14). Perhaps more worryingly, half of those young people said they did not have an IRO.

Without an effective and aspirational IRO, looked-after children are being let down. Local authorities must work harder to ensure that IROs have the skills, time and respect to fulfil their role. There is some concern among IROs that rising caseloads do not allow this to happen.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

**'Despite the requirements of the IRO handbook (caseloads from 50 to 70) many IROs are working with much larger caseloads than this. It is obviously the case that to give proper attention and scrutiny to local authority plans...it is essential that IROs are not subjected to unreasonable caseloads.'**

[28]

If IROs are to act as champions for looked-after children successfully, they need to have the time and skills to do so. Caseload and stability is therefore essential for IROs to fulfil their role effectively. We believe that the Government has an opportunity to achieve this through the Munro Review implementation process. We are therefore recommending that consideration of IRO capacity is included in the forthcoming national dataset for social care.

**7**

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE NEW NATIONAL DATASET FOR SOCIAL CARE INCLUDES MEASURES OF IRO CASELOAD AND TURNOVER.**

IROs will be at their most effective in raising educational performance if they are well informed about best practice. IROs are social workers by training and therefore are unlikely to have received extensive training on best practice in relation to raising educational performance for looked-after children. They can and should call on experts, like Virtual School Headteachers, but there will always

be a need for them to have reasonable knowledge of effective practice themselves. We are therefore calling for all IROs to access nationally accredited training programmes, funded by local authorities, on raising education attainment for looked-after children.

**8**

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION SHOULD COMMISSION A NATIONALLY ACCREDITED TRAINING COURSE ON THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN, WHICH INCLUDES EXPECTED RATES OF PRACTICE AND EFFECTIVE PROGRESS, FOR ALL INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS. ATTENDANCE AT THIS COURSE SHOULD BE FUNDED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES.**

Awareness and knowledge of IROs' role in relation to education of looked-after children also needs to improve among both leaders and young people. A tool for achieving this is the annual IRO report. This report should include specific mention of education and be presented in person to the Lead Member for children's services and the local Children in Care Council. We are therefore recommending that:

# 9

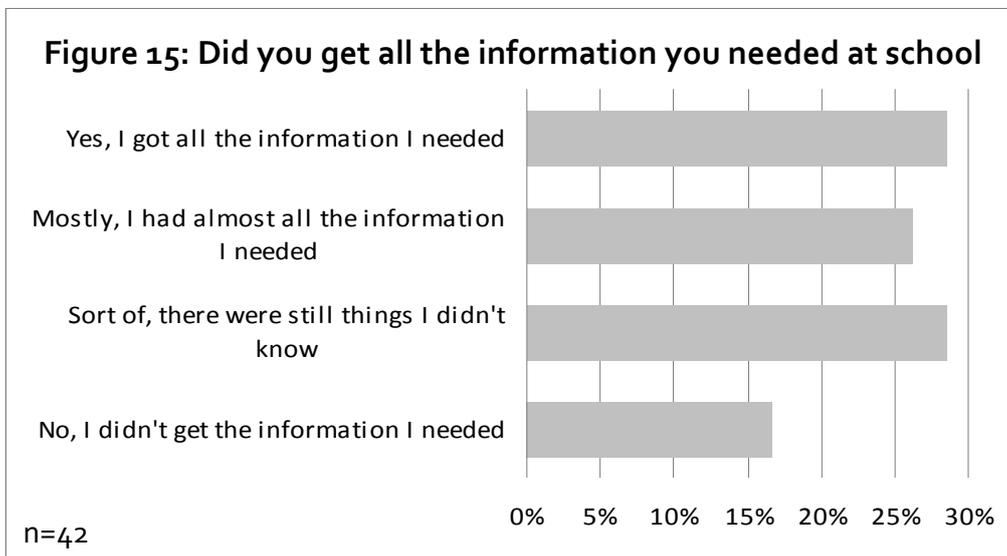
**LEAD MEMBERS  
AND CHILDREN IN  
CARE COUNCILS  
RECEIVE AN UPDATE  
ON EDUCATION  
PERFORMANCE OF  
LOOKED-AFTER  
CHILDREN AS PART  
OF THE IRO ANNUAL  
REPORT.**

## INFORMATION UNDERLOAD

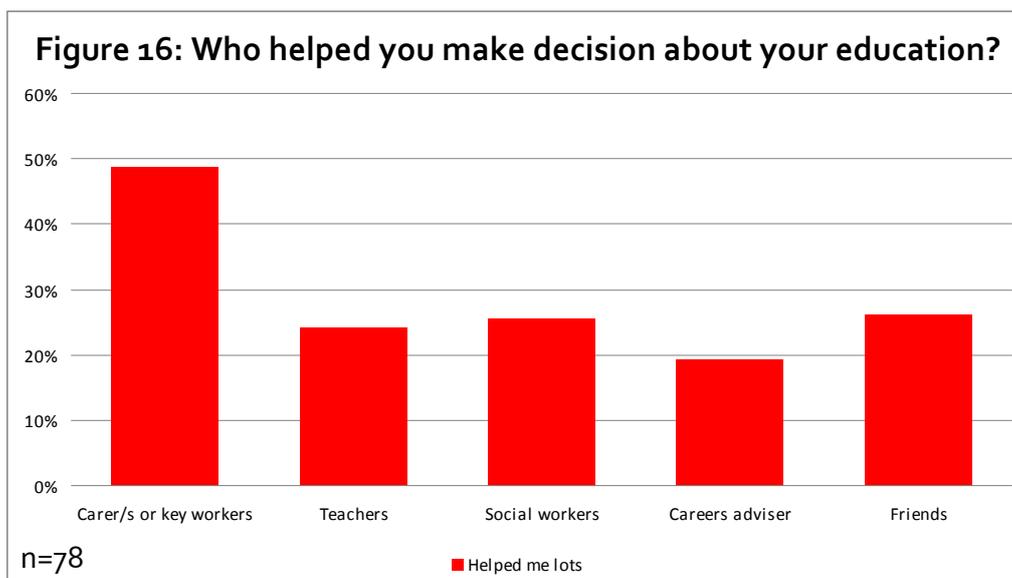
Looked-after children and care leavers need to be supported by those who work with them to make choices today about what they might achieve tomorrow. However, our research suggests that for too many young people, and the professionals who work with them, the information needed is not available to them. We asked 42 young people who had been in care about the information they received about

their further and higher education choices when they were at school (see Figure 15) .

**The results show that almost half (45%) of these young people were not provided with enough information during their time in school.** This is a worryingly large proportion, especially as recent cuts are resulting in a reduction in services, like Connexions, which provided information for young people.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

We asked young people about who helped them when they had to make choices (see Figure 16). We found that they were most likely to have received help from their carers or key workers. These were the professionals who we found were most likely to say they did not have enough information to help young people make decisions (see below). The young people we spoke to were least likely to say that a careers adviser had provided them with advice about their education.

The professionals we spoke to concurred with young people’s views that they have too little information and that they were unlikely to find help from a careers professional. Table 3 shows that, in relation to funding changes in both further and higher education, professionals believed that the vast majority of young people were not receiving enough information.

Many professionals told us of their concerns about the right kind of information reaching care leavers. For example, a designated member of staff for looked-after children and care leavers said:

**‘[They don’t get] clear and exact information about the support, in relation to their financial and personal needs, they will receive/are entitled to each year they are attending university.’** <sup>[29]</sup>

We asked professionals about the amount of information they generally had access to. Table 4 (overleaf) shows that, overall, two-thirds of respondents told us they did not have enough information (i.e. said they either ‘could do with a little bit more information’ or ‘don’t have anywhere near enough information’).

This lack of information among professionals is worrying, but there were a number of particularly concerning highlights.

- ▶ Teachers and social workers were most likely to say they didn’t have enough information.
- ▶ Foster carers were most likely to say ‘I don’t have anywhere near enough information’.

It is also interesting to note that senior managers were 50% more likely than all respondents to say they had ‘just the right amount of information’. It is unclear whether this is because they have access to greater amounts of information than those lower in the hierarchy or because they feel they need less information.

**Table 3: We asked professionals whether young people had enough information about changes to EMA and HE funding changes.**

	Changes to EMA	HE funding changes
Maybe	34%	39%
No	54%	55%
Yes	12%	6%
Responses	198	186

Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

We asked professionals whether they had received training on the education of looked-after children in the last three years. Figure 17 shows that over half of those working with looked-after children and care leavers had not received this kind of training in the last three years.

We compared whether professionals had received training with their answer on the level of information they had. Figure 18 shows the results of this analysis. It is clear from these results that professionals who have received training are more likely to say they have the right information than those who have not.

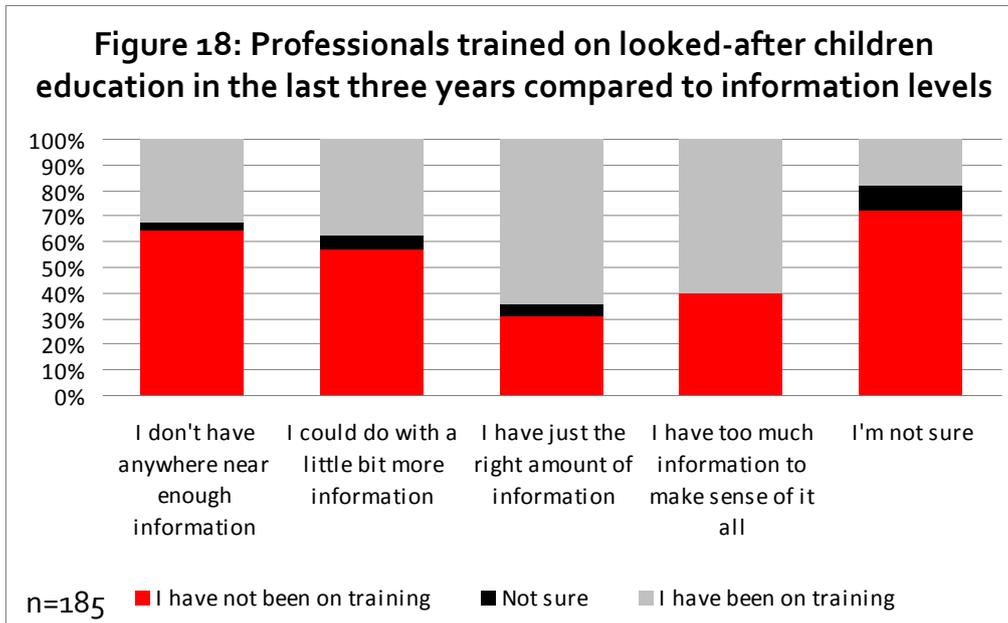
**Table 4: We asked professionals whether young people had enough information about changes to EMA and HE funding changes.**

	N=	Foster carer	Personal Adviser in a leaving care team	Senior Manager	Social Worker	Designated member of staff for looked-after children or care leavers	Teacher / Tutor	Other	All responses
I have too much information to make sense of it all		0%	13%	0%	3%	6%	0%	2%	5%
I have just the right amount of information		7%	20%	36%	10%	29%	21%	26%	23%
I could do with a little bit more information		40%	67%	18%	57%	49%	57%	52%	49%
I don't have anywhere near enough information		33%	0%	27%	23%	14%	21%	12%	17%
I'm not sure		20%	0%	18%	7%	3%	0%	7%	6%

Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey. Professionals groups where fewer than 10 people responded are not included.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey. Professionals groups where fewer than 10 people responded are not included.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey. Professionals groups where fewer than 10 people responded are not included.

This suggests a positive endorsement of the value of providing training in this area. It is worth noting that among the relatively small number of professionals who said they had too much information, 60% had been on training. It is therefore important that training provided by local authorities is well planned and focused.

There were also noticeable differences in the level of training provided to different professional groups.

It is very concerning that those working on the frontline, providing day-to-day care and support to looked-after children and care leavers, are the least likely to have received training. The Government published the Virtual School Headteacher Toolkit in 2010. This said that:

**‘The virtual school also has a quality assurance role, which includes: ensuring that training and/or guidance**

**is provided to all key players.’** <sup>[30]</sup>

It included a specific reference to ensuring that designated teachers received training on a regular basis. Responses to our survey from ‘designated members of staff for looked-after children and care leavers’ suggested that 51% of them had not received such training in the last three years. <sup>[31]</sup> The impact of recent funding cuts on Virtual School Headteachers (see p. 24) makes it less likely that they will be able to rectify this situation. Yet the information from our survey suggests that this training can be incredibly helpful.

It is important that steps are taken to ensure that training on the education of looked-after children and care leavers is in place for all professionals. A senior manager at a large children’s charity told us that one of the major barriers to looked-after children and care leavers’ progression into further and higher education was:

**‘A lack of training for teachers to help them understand the needs of looked after children (from teacher training onwards).’ [32]**

However, it must be recognised that training can be expensive at a time of widespread budget cuts. If regional networks of Virtual School Headteachers were established, they would enable collaboration between local authorities to deliver economies of scale on training to reduce the overall costs. We are therefore recommending that:

**10** | **LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THROUGH THE REGIONAL NETWORKS OF VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS, SHOULD COLLABORATE TO COMMISSION TRAINING ON THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS, FOCUSED ON FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS.**

## WHO GETS THE MOST TRAINING?

### Top three – received the most training

- ▶ Social work team manager
- ▶ Virtual headteacher
- ▶ Advocate

### Bottom three – received the least training

- ▶ Residential worker
- ▶ Social worker
- ▶ Foster carer

## STEPPING INTO THE VOID – THE IMPACT OF CONFIDENCE ON PROGRESSION

**‘Lots of young people don’t believe in themselves and lack confidence; this applies to lots of young people in care.’** <sup>[33]</sup>

For any young person, entering college or university carries elements of risk, uncertainty and perhaps fear. The process is made easier if they have people to discuss this with and to help reassure them. The likelihood is that a care leaver will be in independent living by the time they make the decision to go to university and will be coping with risks around accommodation and finances that other young people their age may not.

Throughout Open Doors, Open Minds, we found that **care leavers themselves, and those who worked with them, expressed concerns about a lack of self-confidence.** A designated care leavers’ officer at a university told us that:

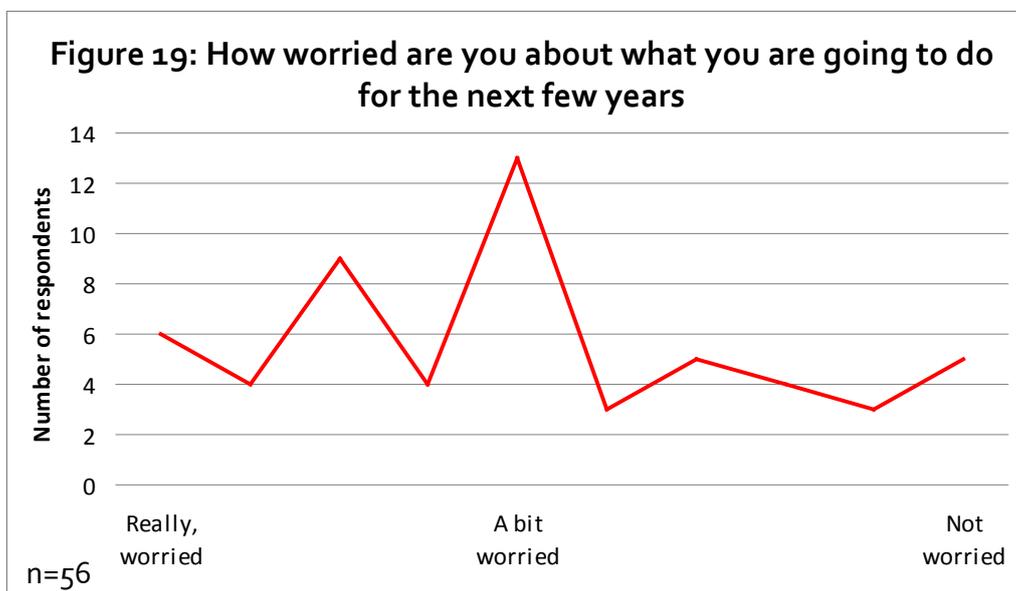
**‘Care leavers who do make it to university tend to be ones that are more confident.’** <sup>[34]</sup>

This confidence is not something which is easy to foster or to quantify. We asked young people to tell us how worried they were about the next few years. Figure 19 shows that the majority of respondents were ‘a bit worried’ about the next couple of years, but there were other young people with greater worries.

The experiences of young people prior to entry into care and the support and aspirations of those caring for them once they enter the system undoubtedly have an impact on their confidence. It is clear that more needs to be done to inculcate confidence in young people from care. We did not specifically ask young people about what may help, but there were some indications that mentoring and outreach support would be helpful in this respect. One care leaver at university, who was involved in the steering group for university provision for care leavers, told us that:

**‘Peer support from older care leavers has had a positive impact on new (care experienced) students. In fact numbers of care leavers wanting to support their peers have risen quite considerably in the last couple of years.’** <sup>[35]</sup>

Some universities offer this kind of support, but it could be made more widely available (see page 35 for more information on what universities offer).



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

## DIFFERENT, BUT NOT SPECIAL

There is a concern among young people that care can be stigmatising. In one focus group we conducted this came out as a really strong message. Young people told us that:

**'I was taken out of my lesson by my designated teacher for extra maths lessons; I didn't want to do them because then people knew I was in care.'**

**'[During exams] you are left in the hall for an extra 20 minutes, you stand out!'**

[36]

These concerns should be considered when planning the development of provision for looked-after children and care leavers. Systems which provide support specifically for looked-after children and care leavers, but in doing so identify them as such to their peers, may be less likely to succeed than those which are delivered more sensitively.

These concerns were echoed in a piece of research conducted for the AimHigher West Area Partnership. This highlighted the problem further education colleges had in identifying care leavers and the unwillingness, in some cases, to deliver differentiated provision for them. [37]

There will remain a challenge for institutions in dealing with these issues. **Every looked-after child and care leaver they work with will have a different relationship with the care system.** Some will want to leave it behind and others will have no problem discussing it. It is incumbent on the institution to ensure that it has well-trained, sensitive staff in post who can work with looked-after children and care

leavers and that it gives these staff sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of the young people they are working with.

## CONCLUSION

The care system has the ability to make a positive difference to young people's lives, including their education. It has the potential to provide a place of stability and security which can mitigate the effect of prior negative experiences and allow young people to thrive. Too often though, this was not the experience of the looked-after children and young people we spoke to.

They experienced a system where some people working with them had high aspirations for them, but not everyone. Aspirations are vital for engaging young people in further and higher education, but both young people and the professionals working with them recognised this was not being systematically delivered.

Young people in and from care are given limited amounts of information to make choices. Those professionals closest to them are also likely to say that they do not have enough information or receive training. These two forces are creating a vicious cycle of misinformation.

These are systemic concerns. Open Doors, Open Minds did not uncover them for the first time, but it did affirm their continued existence. Central Government has a role to play in tackling these problems. It must create a framework in which it is easier and more cost efficient for local authorities to make local change. Where local change does not occur then it must be prepared to intervene.

However, the key to securing improvement is at a local authority level. The gap between the local authorities achieving the best and the worst outcomes for looked-after children and care leavers is far too wide. Those at the top

have a lot to teach those at the bottom. Sector-led organisations like C4EO, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association have vital roles to play in spreading best practice and encouraging self-improvement.

Leadership at a local level is not simply a task for Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members. Open Doors, Open Minds found evidence that Virtual School Headteachers and Independent Reviewing Officers, who have vital leadership roles, were not currently fulfilling their potential, either through lack of prominence or the impact of funding cuts. This cannot be allowed to continue if improvements are expected for looked-after children and care leavers.

**Every looked-after child and care leaver they work with will have a different relationship with the care system**

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government explores ways of collecting information from local authorities, colleges and universities to offer a picture of the number of care leavers who attend further and higher education by the time they are 25.
2. Ofsted should publish an annual thematic report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the local authorities with the lowest educational attainment for looked after children have taken up best practice in corporate parenting.
3. The Department for Education should intervene rapidly in all local authorities where education attainment for looked-after children is consistently poor.
4. The Government brings forward legislation that requires local authorities to appoint a Virtual School Headteacher with sole focus on looked-after children.
5. The Department for Education makes seed funding available to re-invigorate regional Virtual School Headteacher networks as a crucial opportunity for shared learning and the development of best practice.
6. The Department for Education works with regional groups of virtual school headteachers to agree challenging improvement targets for the performance of their region's looked-after children. Meeting these targets should be linked

to future Government funding for regional networks.

7. The Department for Education should ensure that the new national dataset for social care includes measures of IRO caseload and turnover.
8. The Department for Education should commission a nationally accredited training course on the education of looked-after children, which includes expected rates of progress and effective practice, for all independent reviewing officers. Attendance at this course should be funded by local authorities.
9. Lead Members and Children in Care Councils receive an update on education performance of looked-after children as part of the IROs annual report.
10. Local authorities, through the regional networks of Virtual School Headteachers, should collaborate to commission training on the education of looked-after children and care leavers, focused on frontline professionals.

# Section Three

## The first term – an analysis of the impact of Government policies

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Three key Government policies in relation to looked-after children and care leavers (Pupil Premium, 16-19 Bursary and rising tuition fees) suffer from the same problem: theoretically they deliver more support to care leavers, but the Government has failed to help young people and those on the frontline understand this.
- ▶ Pupil Premium funds are not well known. Half of the professionals responding to our survey had not heard of them.
- ▶ The benefits of the Pupil Premium have been diminished by being introduced at the same time as a general reduction in the overall package of support for looked-after children.
- ▶ There has been a lack of information reaching young people and professionals on the 16-19 Bursary.
- ▶ Guidance to colleges has led to an unnecessarily varied approach to providing the 16-19 Bursary from college to college.
- ▶ Prioritisation of care leavers in guidance on access agreements by the Government has not resulted in all universities prioritising their needs.
- ▶ There are variable levels of support offered to care leavers by universities across England, with universities with the Buttle Quality Mark likely to offer most support.

## INTRODUCTION

In Section Two we explored a range of systemic barriers to educational achievement for looked-after children and care leavers. These barriers have developed within the system over time and are hard to trace to individual decisions or policies.

This section considers three recent Government policies and the impact they have had on looked-after children and care leavers' progress through further and higher education.

At the beginning of the current Government's time in office, the minister with responsibility for looked-after children and care leavers told the National Care Leavers' Week conference that there are:

**'quite simply, some very urgent systemic changes that need to be made to ensure that children in care have access to a good education.'** <sup>[38]</sup>

A year later, at the same conference, the minister said that through three major changes in funding – the Pupil Premium, 16-19 Bursary and new tuition fee arrangements – the Government had provided:

**'extra support at every stage of their education.'** <sup>[39]</sup>

This had placed:

**'children in the care system at the front of the queue for special support.'** <sup>[40]</sup>

This section explores how effective the implementation of those policies has been and their potential for helping looked-after children and care leavers achieve more in school and progress into further and higher education.

It looks at young people's and professionals awareness of the policies and considers the difference in knowledge between those who work on a day-to-day basis with looked-after children and care leavers and others in the system.

Throughout the section we explore the wide variation in practice which has come as a result of the Government's localism-based approach to policy implementation. We look at examples of the effect this has had, particularly at differences in the support which universities are offering to care leavers, and consider what steps should be taken to ensure greater consistency for looked-after children and care leavers.

## PUPIL PREMIUM

**‘Schools will have the freedom to spend the Premium, which is additional to the underlying schools budget, in a way they think will best support the raising of attainment for the most vulnerable pupils.’ [41]**

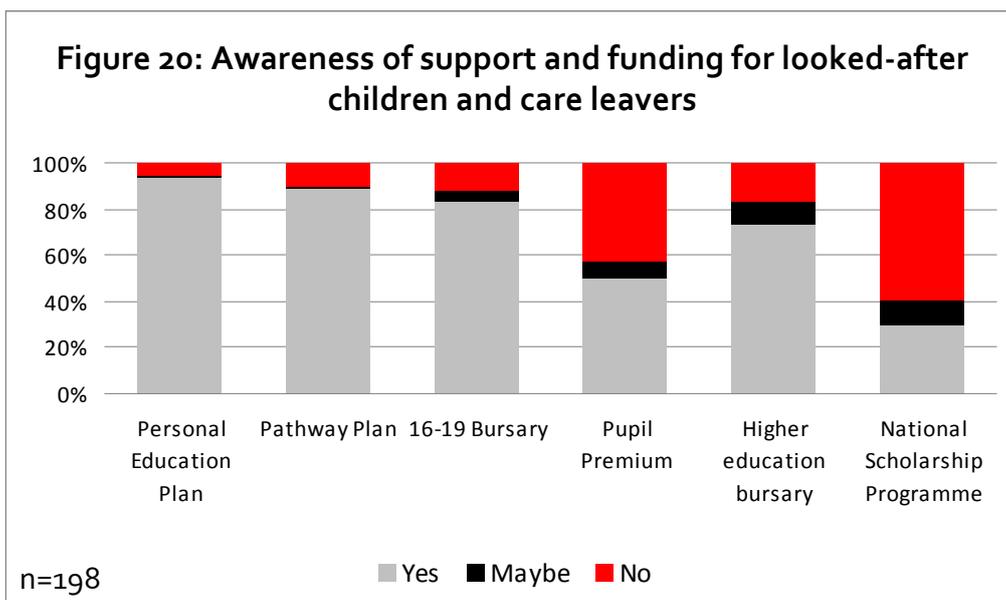
The Pupil Premium is an additional payment made to schools to support vulnerable pupils. Looked-after children are a target group for this funding. In 2012/13, schools will receive £600 for every looked-after child (who has been in care for more than six months) on their school roll. This money is distributed via local authorities.

We asked professionals from a range of backgrounds whether they had heard of a number of key support processes and funding routes for looked-after children and care leavers. Figure 20 shows that there is good awareness of the key planning documents – personal education plans and pathway plans. However, there is a lower awareness of funding

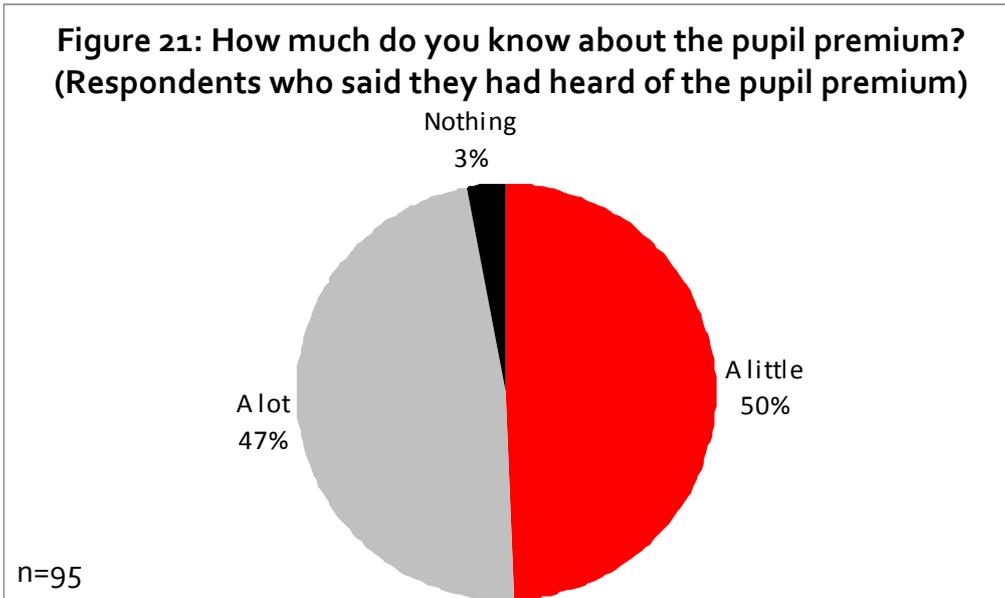
available to looked-after children and care leavers. **In particular, awareness of the Pupil Premium is very low: only 50% of professionals responding to the survey had heard of it.**

We asked those professionals who had heard of the Pupil Premium how much they knew about it. Less than a half of them said that they knew ‘a lot’ about it (see Figure 21). Overall, this means that, of the 200 professionals who we spoke to, only 25% of them said that they had both heard of the Pupil Premium and that they knew a lot about it.

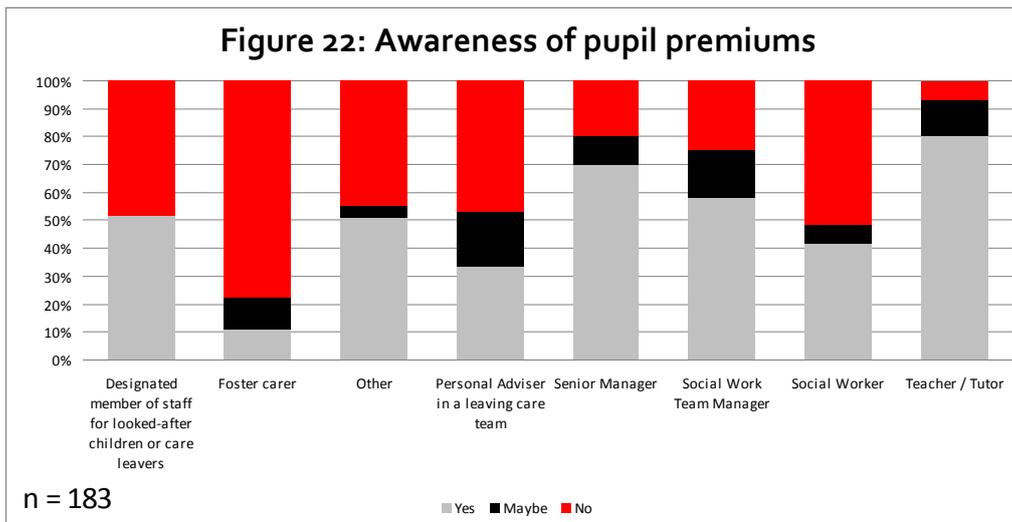
We found that awareness of the Pupil Premium varied by professional background. Figure 22 shows that the highest awareness was among senior managers and teachers. The lowest awareness was among foster carers, personal advisers and social workers. This repeats the pattern found in Section Two (see page 31), where those with individual responsibility for the care of looked-after children and care leavers have the least amount of knowledge/information about support that is available to them.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

Responses we received in focus groups and to the online survey suggested that, along with a low level of awareness, there were questions about how consistently effective use of the Pupil Premium was. In particular, concerns were raised that it was not as helpful as the Personal Education Allowance (PEA) [42] had been. One virtual headteacher told us that the process for invoicing schools on a termly basis meant that:

**‘schools are not all asking for it or sending the right info’.** [43]

An education worker in a looked-after children team, told us that:

**‘the removal of the personal education allowance in favour of the Pupil Premium is a step back. In some schools they are using it creatively and individually targeted for a young**

person. But in too many schools it is being used for whatever project the school management team decide, with little or no direct impact on the young person. Whereas with PEA we were able to respond quickly and directly to the individual needs. It also had great flexibility and was easy to administer’.

[44]

These concerns were expressed alongside worries about the wider impact of restrictions in local authority expenditure.

‘The cuts to LA funding have meant that children in care and care leavers are not getting the same financial support as before to go to university. Funding for laptops and ICT has disappeared and some care leavers in FE/HE can't access the internet at home.’

[Teacher] [45]

‘cuts to local authorities mean less funding to students. They used to get approximately a £10,000 package of support, but now is half that amount.’

[Social Worker] [46]

**The introduction of the Pupil Premium should be seen, by itself, as a positive step for looked-after children.** It delivers £600 for every looked-after child directly into the education system. However, the picture we have found during our research is not as universally positive.

The introduction of the Pupil Premium was coupled with a change in the overall package of support for looked-after children. Professionals told us that, in some areas, this was due to the removal of the requirement to provide the PEA and a general reduction in funding for looked-after children’s education.

The Government has promoted the value of the Pupil Premium as additional funding targeted directly at looked-after children. However, it has been introduced as the overall package of financial support available for looked-after children changed and professionals, particularly those with individual responsibility for care and support, have been left unaware of this flagship policy.

**The Pupil Premium will not be an effective tool for raising standards unless those with direct experience of the needs of looked-after children have a direct say in how they are supported.** The lack of knowledge of the Pupil Premium among frontline workers and the evidence we heard of schools using the money for non-targeted purposes within school, suggests that there may be a need for greater involvement of foster carers and key workers in children’s homes in using this money.

The Fostering Achievement scheme in Northern Ireland provides an interesting model of practice which tries to create this direct link between foster carers and looked-after children’s education.

**The Pupil Premium will not be an effective tool for raising standards unless those with direct experience of the needs of looked-after children have a direct say in how they are supported.**

## FOSTERING ACHIEVEMENT

Fostering Achievement has been run by the Fostering Network Northern Ireland since 2006. It is funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), who provide approximately £1.4 million a year. The contract has just been renewed for another 5 years from 2012.

Fostering Achievement provides a model of practice which creates a direct link with foster carers so that they become actively involved in helping to decide how the educational needs of the young people in their care should be addressed.

The project directly equips and supports foster carers in Northern Ireland, so that they are better placed to help those children and young people in their care to gain a sense of achievement, realise their potential and make their dreams come true.

The scheme provides educational credits for fostered children and young people aged 0 to 18 who have been in care for three months or more. The educational credits are used to provide goods and/or services for the foster home from approved suppliers.

Fostering Achievement views education in its broadest sense and promotes learning and development in a variety of ways. The goods and services provided through the scheme include things like:

- ▶ tuition
- ▶ driving lessons
- ▶ computers and software
- ▶ activities such as swimming, horse riding or sports activities
- ▶ musical instruments
- ▶ sports equipment
- ▶ arts and crafts materials
- ▶ educational play equipment

The amount of money available annually through educational credits varies depending on the age of the child. In 2010/2011 credits available ranged from £250 for 0 to 5 year olds to £800 for those aged 16 years or over.

Fostering Achievement also provides additional events, initiatives (including the Letterbox Club and group activities), advice and training for foster carers.

More information can be found at:  
[www.fosteringachievement.net](http://www.fosteringachievement.net).

Pupil Premium funding, and the support that local authorities themselves currently provide, could be used as funding to support a programme in England similar to Fostering Achievement. This would involve foster carers and key workers directly in making decisions about the education of looked-after children. This may have benefits by providing tailored support for looked-after children and will also engage carers in the job of raising aspirations and championing the value of education. We are therefore recommending that:

# 11

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION IDENTIFIES A PILOT GROUP OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES WHICH WOULD BE WILLING TO TRIAL USING PUPIL PREMIUM FUNDING IN LINE WITH THE FOSTERING ACHIEVEMENT MODEL.**

## 16-19 BURSARY – EMA’S LESSER KNOWN COUSIN

The Education Maintenance Allowance (or EMA) was introduced in 2004. It provided up to £30 per week to 16-19 year olds in full-time further education. In December 2010, the Government announced its decision to abolish the EMA saying:

**‘In these tough economic times, we simply do not have the luxury of being able spend hundreds of millions on a programme that doesn’t see results in return for the majority of the money spent.’** <sup>[47]</sup>

In June 2011 the Government announced that, while the EMA would not exist, a replacement, the 16-19 Bursary would be available in its place. This would be guaranteed to looked-after children and care leavers and would be worth £1,200. This is more than the maximum entitlement under EMA. This decision has had implications for looked-after children and care leavers. We are concerned with its effect on them and not the wider issue of the removal of EMA for all students.

Guidance on the new 16-19 Bursary was published by the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) in June 2011.<sup>[48]</sup> It said that:

- ▶ Young people in care and care leavers will be eligible to receive a Bursary of £1,200 a year.
- ▶ In order for young people to benefit from the 16-19 Bursary they must present their further education institution with

appropriate evidence. The guidance to colleges said that this could be ‘written confirmation of the young person’s current or previous looked-after status from the local authority which looks after them or provides their leaving care services’

- ▶ Bursaries should be used to help young people pay for the costs related to participation
- ▶ Bursaries may also be paid ‘in kind’ e.g. a transport pass or chef’s whites.

There were two main concerns which young people and professionals told us about the implementation of this guidance: variety of approach and a lack of information.

### Variety of approach

The YPLA guidance gave further education institutions responsibility for determining the conditions for bursaries. **This meant that two colleges, at different ends of the same local authority, could offer wildly different support to care leavers.** The YPLA did not issue guidance until June and this meant that further education institutions had little time to consult with local authorities on the best way to implement the scheme locally. A personal adviser in a leaving care team told us:

**‘The new 16-19 Bursary does not work. Colleges do not understand this vulnerable group and local authorities are better placed to support young**

people with this money. We have had to supplement the Bursary where colleges have been unorganised and have created barriers to accessing this money. In some cases, large amounts of money are being issued which is often not appropriate.’ [49]

There were also concerns that the new approach could have created an unnecessarily stigmatising process for young people in and from care.

‘To get the replacement EMA funding young people have to declare to colleges that they are in care or a care leaver and most young people do not want to share this information as the majority of young people feel stigmatised by, and are highly sensitive about, the ‘in care’ and ‘looked after’ labels.’

[Personal Adviser in a Leaving Care team] [50]

It would be helpful for colleges and local authorities if guidance was published sooner in order for sensible co-ordination of local approaches to be put in place. This co-ordination would also allow further education institutions to develop a sensitive approach to identifying young people eligible for the Bursary. This must include a dialogue with looked-after children and care leavers. Children in Care Councils may offer a useful forum for this in each local authority. Therefore we are recommending that:

**12**

**THE YOUNG PERSON'S LEARNING AGENCY PUBLISHES GUIDANCE ON THE 2012/13 16-19 BURSARY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

**13**

**THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING AGENCY GUIDANCE EXPLICITLY RECOMMENDS THAT COLLEGES WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THEIR LOCAL AUTHORITY, INCLUDING THE CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL, TO DECIDE THE BEST WAY LOCALLY TO DELIVER THE 16-19 BURSARY FOR LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS.**

#### **Lack of information**

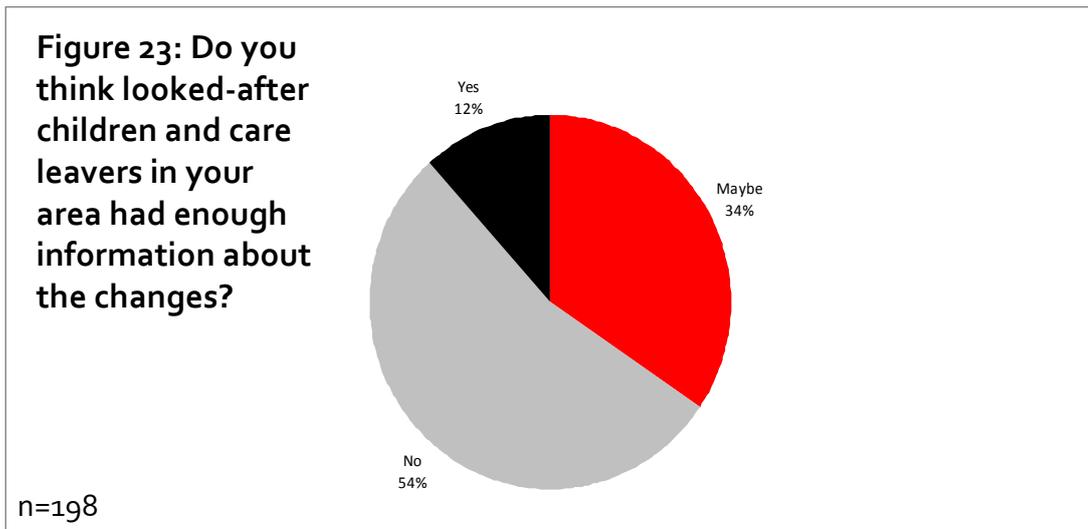
Unlike the Pupil Premium there is a relatively high level of awareness among professionals of the new 16-19 Bursary - 76% of professionals who completed our survey said they had heard about the changes to the EMA. However, very few professionals thought that looked-after children and care leavers in their local area had had enough information about the changes. Figure 23 shows that only 12% of professionals thought that young people in their area had enough information about the changes.

The professionals' views of the information provided to young people were borne out in our conversations with looked-after children and care leavers. One young person told us that:

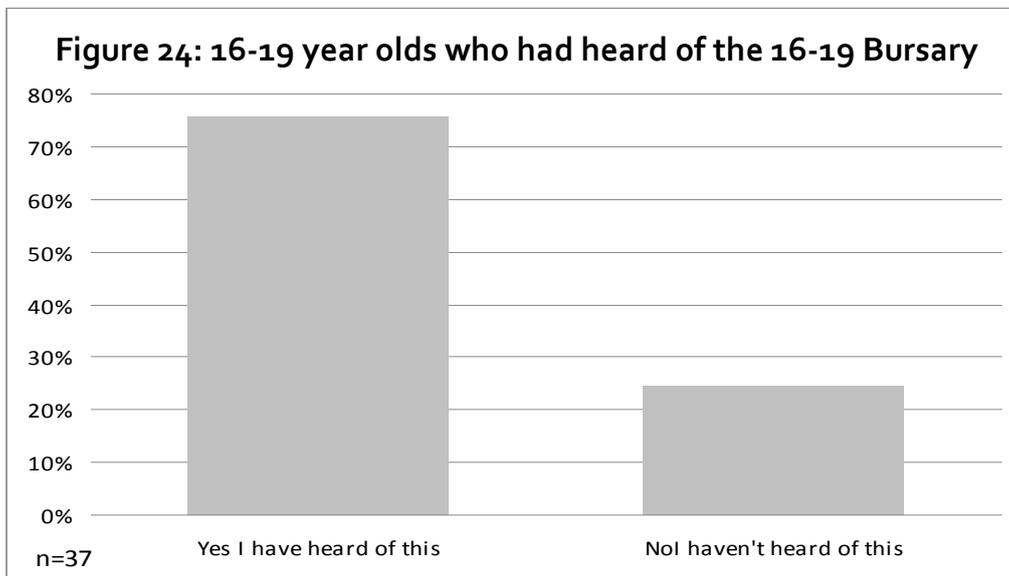
‘I am 16 in 12 days and I don't know what I can expect!’ [51]

We asked 37 16-19 year olds, who were in or leaving care, whether they had heard of the 16-19 Bursary. Figure 24 shows that recognition was reasonably high, but that one in four of the care leavers we spoke to were still not aware it existed.

Part of this lack of awareness may be attributable to the late announcement of the funding. We hope that further education institutions, local authorities and central Government will be in a much better position to promote awareness of the scheme this year.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

Local authorities have a duty to provide care leavers with details of the support they will offer them while they are in full-time education. We believe it would be more helpful to care leavers if it were combined with a statement of what support is available from local colleges and further education institutions. We are therefore recommending that:

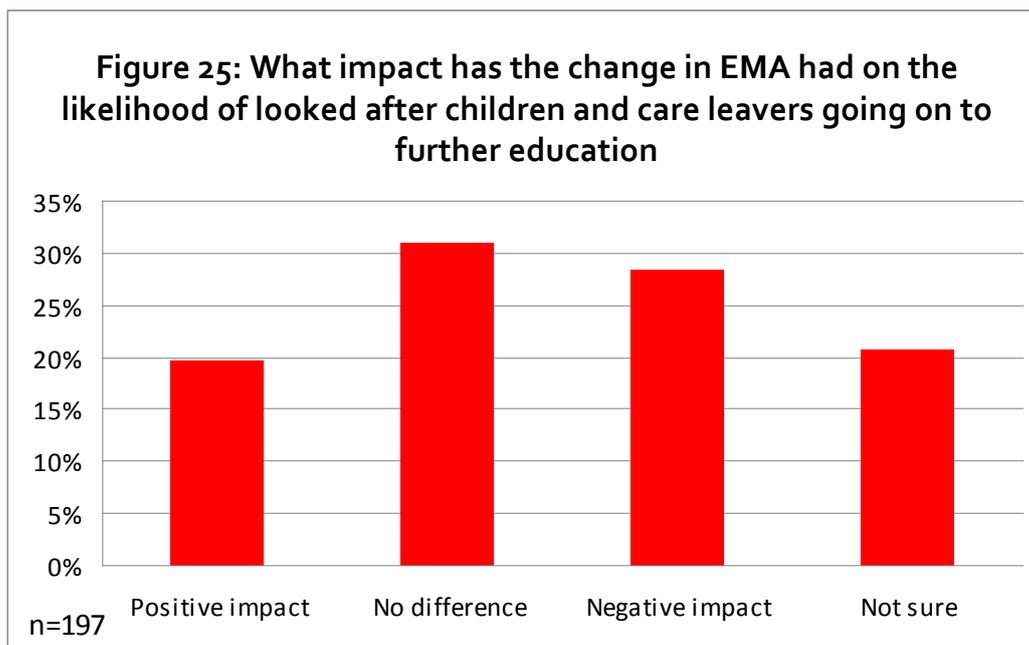
# 14

**LOCAL AUTHORITIES PUBLISH THEIR EDUCATION FUNDING POLICY FOR CARE LEAVERS ONLINE ON AN ANNUAL BASIS, INCLUDING THE SUPPORT WHICH IS AVAILABLE THROUGH FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THEIR AREA.**

Like the Pupil Premium, the 16-19 Bursary delivers more money for looked-after children and care leavers and therefore has the potential to be a positive step forward. However, when we asked professionals what the overall effect of the change from EMA to 16-19 Bursary would be on the likelihood of looked-after children and care leavers going on to further education there was a mixed response (see Figure 25).

Those who thought it could have a positive impact focused on the fact that there was more money available to looked-after children and care leavers, whereas those who thought it would have a negative effect tended to talk about confusion and complications.

If the YPLA gives local authorities and further education institutions good notice of what the requirements for the 16-19 Bursary will be, if organisations co-ordinate their approaches and if they work hard enough on getting the right information to young people and professionals, then the 16-19 Bursary could have a positive impact on young people in and from care.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

## TUITION FEES – NOT DOING WHAT THEY SAID ON THE TIN

In 2010, the Government decided to triple the amount universities are allowed to charge undergraduate students to a maximum of £9,000 per year. The Government made efforts to ensure that this rise would not deter young people from vulnerable groups progressing into higher education. One of the vulnerable groups identified was young people leaving care.

As part of Open Doors, Open Minds, we have been working with universities to identify what support is available for care leavers and how consistently that support is offered. We also asked young people and professionals for their views on care leavers progressing to higher education. This section analyses what the new funding arrangements mean for the support available to care leavers and the likelihood of care leavers going onto higher education in the future.

### Access agreements

Access agreements are a key mechanism for ensuring that universities have support in place for vulnerable groups. Universities that wish to charge more than £6,000 per year had to agree a document with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) that set out how they would improve access by under-represented groups and the progress they intended to make in each academic year.

In February 2011, the Government published guidance to the Director of Fair Access laying out its expectations for improvements, which specifically included care leavers in the list of under-represented groups.

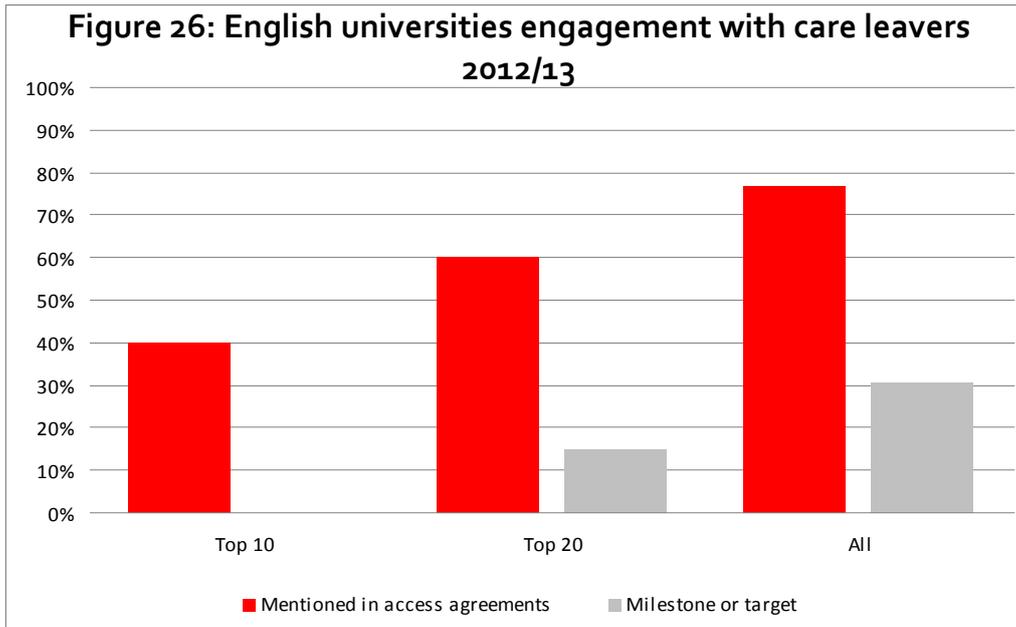
OFFA published guidance to universities that required universities to produce access

agreements that included:

- ▶ expenditure on additional access measures
- ▶ additional access measures including (where applicable):
  - ▶ outreach
  - ▶ student retention and success
  - ▶ financial support for students (including support under the National Scholarship Programme)
- ▶ targets and milestones
- ▶ monitoring and evaluation arrangements
- ▶ provision of information to prospective students.

These access agreements were made publicly available in May 2011. We analysed the access agreements for 91 English universities to see whether they mentioned care leavers and whether they set a specific target for increasing their participation. Figure 26 shows the results of this analysis (we used the Guardian League Table for the rankings).

**Our analysis showed that while three-quarters of universities mentioned care**



The Who Cares? Trust analysis of access agreements based on data published by the Office for Fair Access

**leavers in their Access Agreements, only 30% set any kind of target.** The figures for the top 10 English universities showed that none had set targets for increasing participation and that only 40% had mentioned them in their Access Agreements.

The lack of universities including the number of care leavers at their university and their targeted improvements in recruitment and retention may indicate that this data was not readily available to them.

This analysis was simple and only looked at whether care leavers were mentioned; it made no judgement on the quality of support. For some universities it was clear that a great deal of specific support was available, for others it was just part of a generic offer. The following examples show that there are worryingly wide discrepancies in universities' understanding of what a care leaver is.

**'Students who are 18-21 year old care leavers, who have been in public care for a minimum of three years and under the parental responsibility of the**

**local authority'.** <sup>[52]</sup>

**'Students entering higher education at the university who have a former relevant care leaver status. This being those young people who are under 25 years old and who were 'looked after' by the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and which ended after the age of 16 (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000).'**' <sup>[53]</sup>

**'Students who were in local authority care prior to starting their University course.'** <sup>[54]</sup>

From our analysis it seemed that universities were either failing to meet the Government's expectations or that the Access Agreements were not a true picture of the support available. One university lead for care leavers told us:

**'Access Agreements don't have everything in, they are short documents produced by people at the top of the uni who don't necessarily know what is going on day to day.'** <sup>[55]</sup>

This is a concern given the emphasis that the Government is placing on these documents. We are therefore recommending that:

15

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS STRENGTHENS THE EXPECTATIONS FOR ACCESS AGREEMENTS IN 2013/14 TO REQUIRE ALL UNIVERSITIES TO FOCUS ON THE NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS.**

16

**OFFA PUBLISHES CLEAR INFORMATION ON WHO CARE LEAVERS ARE AND WHAT SUPPORT MAY BE APPROPRIATE IN GUIDANCE FOR UNIVERSITIES ON ACCESS AGREEMENTS FOR 2013/14.**

17

**HIGHER EDUCATION STATISTICS AUTHORITY (HESA) PUBLISHES DATA ON THE NUMBER OF CARE LEAVERS ACCESSING EACH UNIVERSITY.**

### **Support offered to care leavers at university**

In several regions in England, collated guides of the support available from universities to care leavers existed. Two excellent examples were published by two separate networks of higher education professionals who work with care leavers. <sup>[56]</sup> These helpfully contained much greater detail of the support which was available to care leavers than Access Agreements, but only covered some of the English universities.

We therefore decided to collate the support which was available to care leavers in all English universities. This was published in December 2011 in *The H.E. Handbook*. <sup>[57]</sup> The information collected for this handbook allowed us to conduct a more detailed analysis of the support that is available to care leavers in English universities.

#### **MISSION GROUPS**

The analysis of support offered is disaggregated by different mission groups. Mission groups are networks of universities who collaborate to share best practice and represent the views of the sector. They are: Russell Group, 1994 Group, Million +, University Alliance and GuildHE (there are also a small number of non-aligned universities). We also included in this analysis a comparison between those universities which hold the ButtleUK Quality Mark for Care Leavers and those who do not.

We identified a minimum offer that we felt care leavers might reasonably expect from a supportive higher education institution. This has formed the basis of our analysis and is set out in Table 5.

**Table 5: The minimum offer identified during analysis of returns for *The H.E. Handbook***

Area of support	Type of support
<b>OUTREACH:</b>	An easy-to-find, dedicated web page for care leavers with contact details, information on support and useful links. Dedicated outreach activities for care leavers or priority access to outreach activities for care leavers e.g. summer schools, open days and taster sessions.
	Pre-application guidance – advice on application, including help with writing the personal statement, and/or drop-in events to offer guidance with UCAS applications.
	Pre-entry correspondence with applicants who identify as care leavers on their UCAS forms to make them aware of the support available to help with their transition into university life.
<b>FINANCE:</b>	Dedicated funding for care leavers, including priority access to bursaries, the National Scholarship Programme and the Access to Learning Funds. Targeted financial advice ensuring that care leavers secure all the funding available to them.
<b>ACCOMMODATION:</b>	The offer of 365 days per year accommodation.
<b>WELFARE:</b>	A dedicated Officer with responsibility for care leavers.

We analysed how many universities offer this support based on replies from 84% of higher education institutions in England. This analysis is therefore representative, but not exhaustive.

We asked all further education institutions planning on offering degree level courses in 2012/13 for the same information. We received fewer replies to this enquiry. As we do not have a representative sample of FE institutions, they have not been included in the summary below (details of the support offered by those FE institutions who kindly did reply have been included in *The H.E. Handbook*).

Our request for information asked institutions to categorise their support under outreach, finance, accommodation and welfare. Within these categories the response was free format, i.e. they were not asked 'do you provide all year accommodation?' and expected to reply 'yes' or 'no'. These results are therefore not responses to direct

questions regarding specific services, but instead reflect what the individual respondent in each institution chose to highlight in their response. It is possible that an area of support that we have focused on here was inadvertently omitted from the institution's reply, with the result that there may be greater provision in some categories than the replies we received suggests.

With the above qualification, Table 6 details the level of support that is currently available to care leavers across all universities.

Outreach provision is generally quite strong with 75% of all institutions who replied offering activities dedicated to care leavers. There are a disappointing number of institutions with a dedicated website offering information on the support they offer to care leavers and **very few institutions (just 7%) make use of the declaration of care leaver status available from the applicant's UCAS form to make contact with them and direct them towards support.**

Financial support is generally quite strong, with 77% of institutions offering some form of bursary, although there is significant variation both in the level of bursary support and the combination of cash and fee-waiver (see overleaf). Despite this level of financial support, dedicated financial advice for care leavers is not widely available, with only 26% of institutions who replied offering this support.

We looked at the responses from each of the Mission Groups to identify if there were differences in practice across these groups (see Table 7).

There were clear differences in the level of support offered by each university grouping.

Russell Group universities were strong in outreach and financial support, but weaker on accommodation and welfare. The University Alliance stands out as offering the highest overall level of support, with a very high proportion of institutions holding the Buttle Quality Mark.

The level of financial support offered to care leavers varied by Mission Group. Universities in the Russell Group and Guild HE group offered the highest average support per annum. However, as Table 8 shows, **the impact of financial support was broadly to make the cost of all universities similar for care leavers – on average being around £7,500 to £8,000 per annum.**

**Table 6: Percentage of universities offering elements of the identified minimum offer - overall**

Type of support	Percentage of institutions offering
Dedicated website	46%
Priority access, dedicated activities	75%
Application guidance	41%
Pre-entry correspondence	7%
Bursary	77%
Financial advice	26%
365 days accommodation	68%
Dedicated officer	57%

**Table 7: Percentage of universities offering elements of the identified minimum offer - by mission group**

	Russell Group	1994 Group	Million +	University Alliance	Guild HE	Not Aligned
Dedicated web site	36%	31%	50%	82%	31%	36%
Priority access, dedicated activities	93%	69%	78%	76%	62%	71%
Application guidance	64%	19%	44%	41%	38%	43%
Pre-entry correspondence	7%	13%	6%	0%	8%	7%
Bursary	86%	88%	78%	82%	62%	64%
Financial advice	21%	25%	22%	35%	15%	36%
365 days accommodation	57%	63%	67%	88%	69%	64%
Dedicated officer	36%	38%	67%	82%	54%	57%
Buttle QM holders	79%	44%	61%	94%	38%	57%

**Table 8: Financial support and average cost offered by mission groups**

	average bursary per annum	average fee waiver per annum	Total financial support per annum	Estimated average cost per student after allowance for financial support <sup>[58]</sup>
University Alliance	£2,013	£4,281	£6,293	£7,935
Million +	£1,500	£3,054	£4,554	£8,129
Russell Group	£1,000	£3,000	£4,000	£7,404
Guild HE	£1,577	£4,500	£6,077	£7,736
1994 Group	£1,094	£0	£1,094	£7,723
Not Aligned	£958	£750	£1,708	£7,929
<b>TOTAL AVERAGE</b>	<b>£1,357</b>	<b>£2,597</b>	<b>£3,954</b>	<b>£7,809</b>

Following the publication of its own research into the needs of care leavers in universities in 2005 <sup>[59]</sup>, Buttle UK developed a quality mark for universities. In order to receive this, universities had to demonstrate their commitment to care leavers. Our analysis showed that while there

was discrepancy between the support provided by individual holders of the quality mark, overall they provided a better level of support than universities which do not have the quality mark (see Table 9).

**Table 9: Comparison of offer by universities holding the Buttle Quality Mark and other universities**

	Holders of the Buttle Quality Mark	Universities which do not hold the Buttle Quality Mark
Dedicated web site	67%	9%
Priority access, dedicated activities	86%	56%
Application guidance	41%	41%
Pre-entry correspondence	5%	9%
Bursary	83%	68%
Financial advice	24%	29%
365 days accommodation	88%	35%
Dedicated officer	71%	32%

There is disparity between the support that care leavers receive from universities. Universities need to benchmark the offer they provide and to ensure that this is attractive to care leavers. We are therefore recommending that:

## 18 | THE WHO CARES? TRUST AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS WORK WITH CARE LEAVERS TO ESTABLISH WHAT THE MINIMUM OFFER FROM UNIVERSITIES SHOULD BE.

The Aim Higher partnerships which existed before recent funding cuts would have offered ideal opportunities for universities to undertake this activity. Some partnerships have reformed with new names: Kent and Medway Young People Leaving Care Strategy Group and South West London Aim Higher. Other smaller groups have also emerged, like SalfordCAN. These are valuable networks with a wealth of experience; however they do not have the finances or capacity to form a national structure for sharing good practice. We therefore recommend that:

## 19 | THE DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS ESTABLISHES A NATIONAL BODY FOR SHARING GOOD PRACTICE IN RELATION TO UNIVERSITY SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS.

### Young people and professionals' views of the new arrangements

We asked young people about their future plans. There was a reassuring confidence among many of them. Many young people were confident about their future career and had a clear sense of the job that they wanted (see Figure 27).

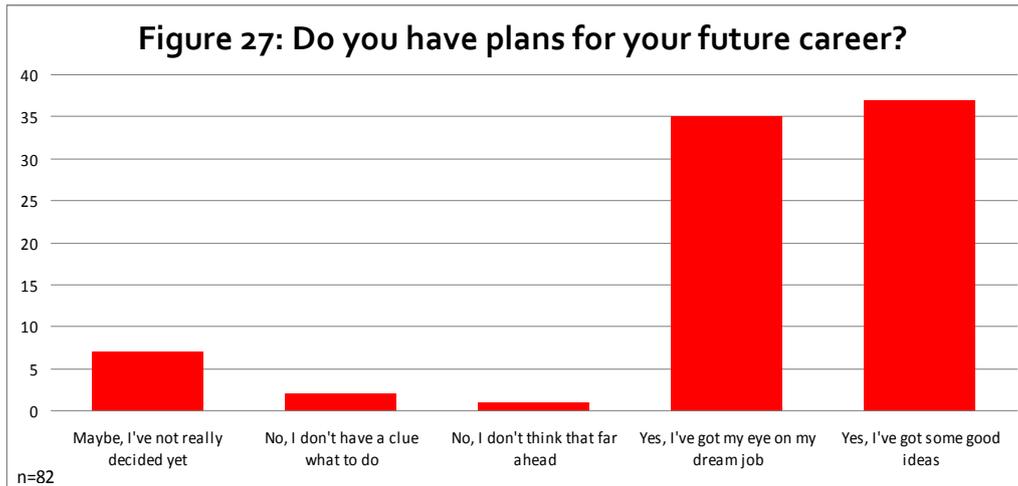
We found that a larger number of looked-after children and care leavers wanted to go on to university than currently make it there. **In fact the percentage of looked-after children and care leavers who wanted to go to university is almost as high as the proportion of their peers who actually go** (see Figure 28). This seems to indicate that there is an untapped potential for participation in higher education among looked-after children and care leavers.

The National Scholarship Programme (NSP) is a central part of the policy the Government put in place to ensure that higher tuition fees did not mean lower participation in higher education among care leavers. It offers a £3,000 package to vulnerable students in their first year. This is part funded by Government and part funded by the university. It can be offered as mixture of cash bursary, cheaper accommodation or a fee waiver. Evidence we gathered shows that there was little awareness of this support. We asked 36 care leavers whether they had heard of the programme and 16% (six) of them had. <sup>[60]</sup>

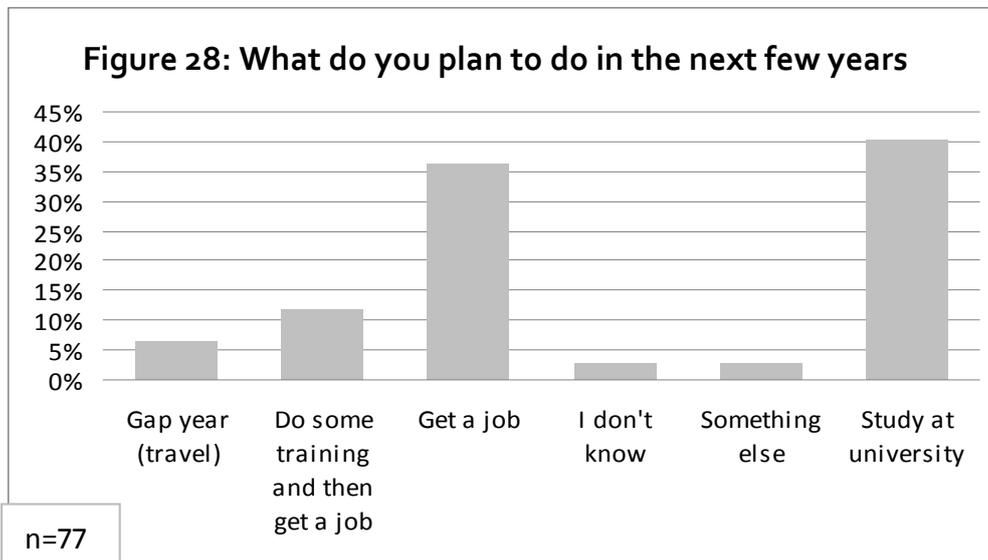
Professionals we spoke to were unlikely to be aware of the NSP. We found that only 29% of professionals had heard of the programme. <sup>[61]</sup> There were varying levels of knowledge among professional groups. Education staff were, on average, more likely to know about the NSP than their colleagues. The groups with the lowest level of awareness were social workers

and foster carers. It is notable that personal advisers, those who should be helping care leavers access higher education, had the largest proportion of respondents who said they 'maybe' had heard of the NSP.

**Overall, two-thirds of respondents to our survey indicated that they knew nothing about the National Scholarship Programme.** Most troublingly, 75% of personal advisers, and all the foster carers who responded, knew nothing about the programme (see Figure 29).



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

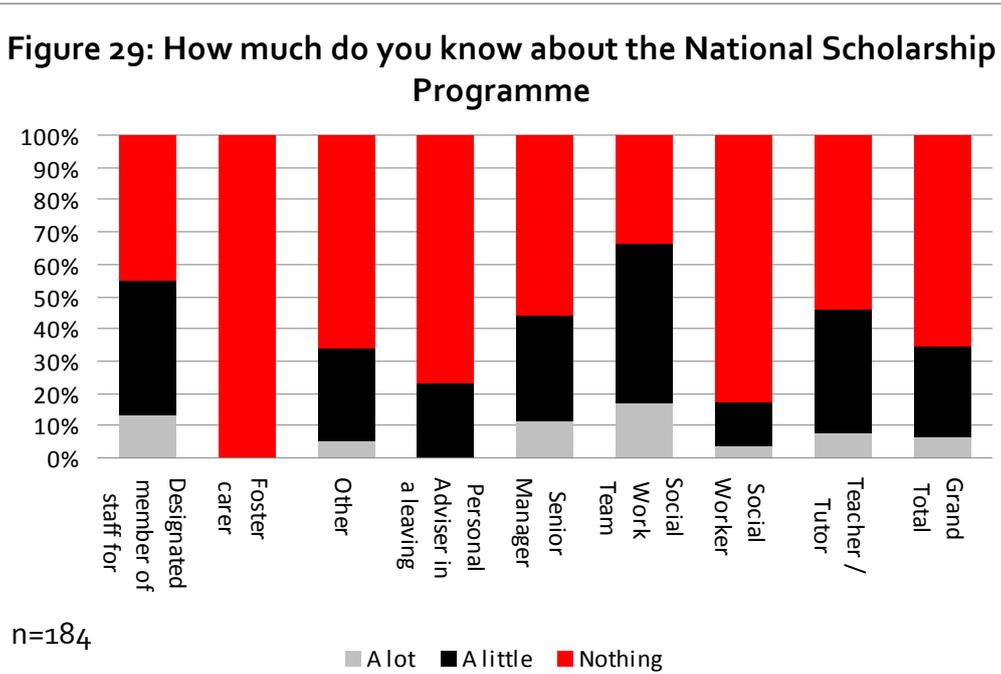


Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

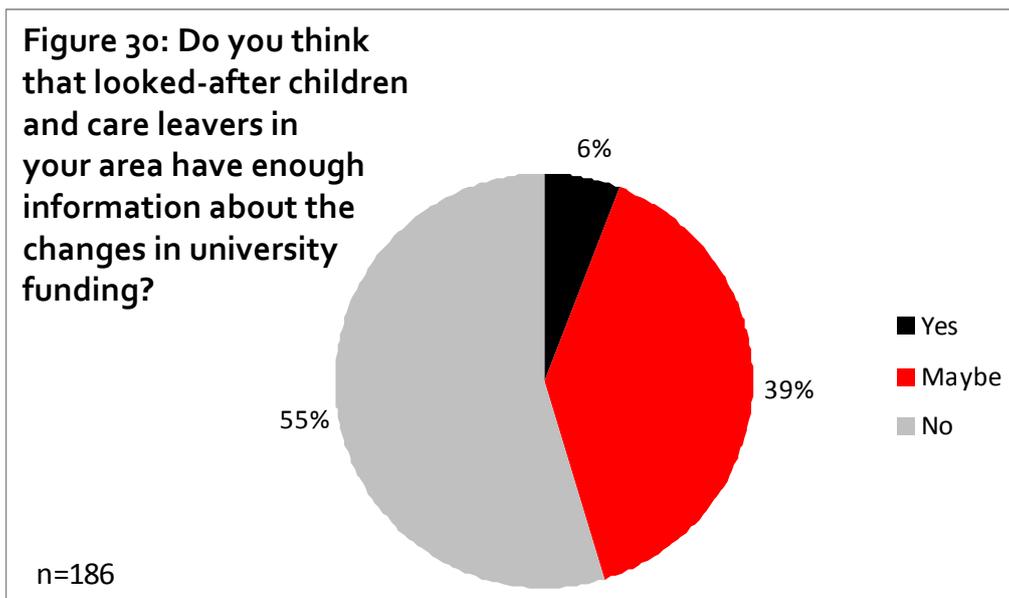
**The percentage of looked-after children and care leavers who wanted to go to university is almost as high as the proportion of their peers who actually go.**

This low awareness of the support available is concerning. The NSP could provide vital support to a care leaver in their first year at university and contributes towards the financial support that many universities offer (see page 55).

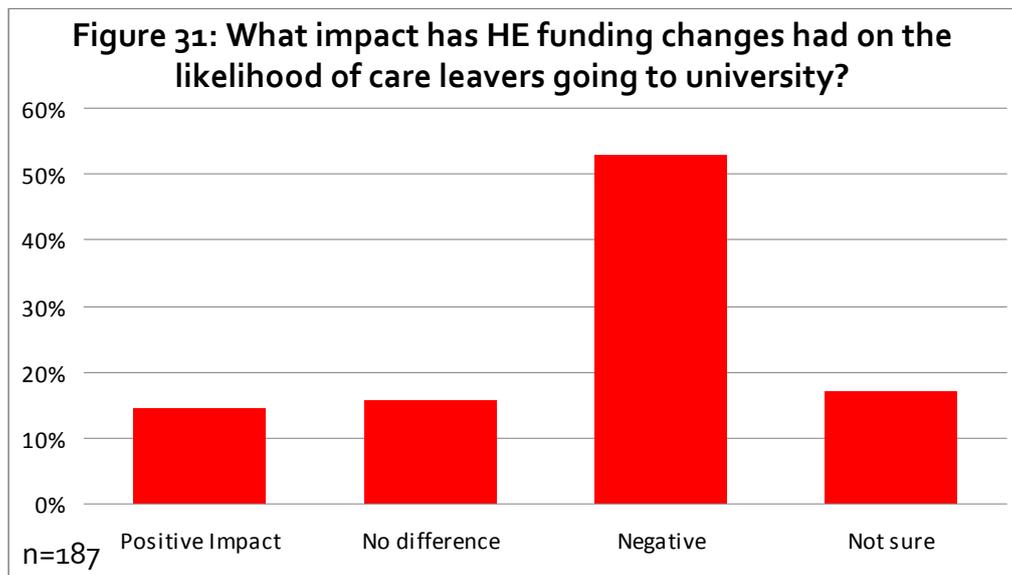
Professionals we spoke to thought that young people had not had enough information about the changes to tuition fees and that the changes meant that it was less likely that care leavers would end up at university (see Figures 30 and 31).



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.



Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey.

One professional responding to the survey encapsulated the problems which arose during the implementation of the tuition fee rise.

**‘I am aware that there is support out there for young people wanting to go to university who are care-leavers. This information is not made readily available, compared to the information that tuition fees have trebled; which has been constantly in the news. This news has been very off putting for the young people I have spoken to who are thinking about going to university in the future.’** <sup>[62]</sup>

Our analysis suggests that there is good support available for care leavers at many universities and many of the young people we spoke to had ambitions to go to university (see Figure 28). **Yet the divide between their ambitions and reality remains wide.**

The funding arrangements that are now in place have the potential to provide additional support to care leavers. However, our evidence

suggests that the Government has failed to make young people who may wish to go to university aware of the support there is available. There has also been a failure to convince those working with care leavers that the changes are a positive thing for them.

The shadow of spending cuts can also be seen in this area. A number of professionals we spoke to were unhappy that Connexions funding had been removed. A designated member of staff for looked-after children and care leavers said:

**‘[The] Connexions service is no longer available which affects all students, but particularly LAC who need the extra support.’** <sup>[63]</sup>

Other areas of spending cuts, which were raised as issues for care leavers, included the Care to Learn grant and the changes to student finance arrangements which means that those without discretionary leave to remain now have to pay higher tuition fees. These issues affect small groups of care leavers, but can potentially have

a dramatic impact on their ability to go onto university. <sup>[64]</sup>

If the Government is to ensure that higher tuition fees do not lead to lower rates of participation in higher education among care leavers then more must be done to ensure that looked-after children and care leavers, and the professionals who work with them, are aware of the support that exists. We are therefore calling for:

**20**

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS TO PRODUCE TAILORED MATERIALS FOR LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS AND TO MAKE THEM AVAILABLE THROUGH STUDENT FINANCE WEBSITES.**

**21**

**LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO WORK IN COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL UNIVERSITIES/ UCAS TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION AND ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE, FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS AND CARERS ABOUT THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO CARE LEAVERS THROUGHOUT HIGHER EDUCATION.**

**22**

**UNIVERSITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WHO CARES? TRUST'S H.E. HANDBOOK TO PROVIDE A SINGLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR ALL CARE LEAVERS ON SUPPORT AVAILABLE AT UNIVERSITIES IN ENGLAND.**

## CONCLUSIONS

The Government has expressed its commitment to ensuring that looked-after children can do better at school and that more of them go on to further and higher education. Yet over the first 18 months in power, the coalition has introduced three policies which all have the potential to confuse young people, and those who work with them, and therefore damage the chances of looked-after children and care leavers.

All three of these policies (the Pupil Premium, 16-19 Bursary and new student finance arrangements) suffer from the same problem: theoretically they deliver more support to care leavers, but the Government has failed to help young people and those on the frontline understand this.

All three policies share two attributes:

1. They direct slightly more money into support for looked-after children and care leavers.
2. They leave the implementation to local bodies (be that schools, colleges or universities).

This combination appears to have created a confusing picture on the ground and is a direct result of a conscious localist agenda. This creates fragmentation which is harmful to looked-after children and care leavers as it exacerbates the already existing postcode lottery.

In late 2010, the Deputy Prime Minister

disputed the notion of postcode lotteries, saying:

**'Opponents of localism brandish the phrase 'post code lottery' to dramatize differences in provision between areas.'**

**'But it is not a lottery when decisions about provision are made by people who can be held to democratic account. That is not a postcode lottery - it is a postcode democracy.'** <sup>[65]</sup>

Yet for looked-after children and care leavers this 'postcode democracy' is a fallacy. These young people have neither the element of choice about where they are taken into care nor the mechanism for recourse that could turn decision making about the support they receive into a democracy. Instead they are forced to understand a world in which every institution offers something different; a world in which 'entitlements' look different depending on where you go to college or university.

There is a need to bring clarity to present arrangements. Greater information for young people and those that work with them is a minimum requirement. However, the Government must go further to ensure that some consistency is centrally directed. This should involve strengthening guidance, supporting appropriate structures and the collection of better data on the progress of looked-after children and care leavers in further and higher education.

It is not enough simply to abandon care leavers to the whims of localism; the Government must do more to ensure that they have a fair chance of progressing through further and higher education.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.** The Department for Education identifies a pilot group of local authorities which would be willing to trial using Pupil Premium funding in line with the Fostering Achievement model.
- 12.** The Young Person's Learning Agency publishes guidance on the 2012/13 16-19 Bursary as soon as possible.
- 13.** The Young People's Learning Agency guidance explicitly recommends that colleges work in partnership with their local authority, including the children in care council, to agree the best way locally to deliver the 16-19 Bursary for looked-after children and care leavers.
- 14.** Local authorities publish their education funding policy for care leavers online on an annual basis, including the support which is available through further education institutions in their area.
- 15.** The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills strengthens the expectations for Access Agreements in 2013/14 to require all universities to focus on the needs of care leavers.
- 16.** OFFA publishes clear information on who care leavers are and what support may be appropriate in guidance for universities on Access Agreements for 2013/14.

17. Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) publishes data on the number of care leavers accessing each university.
18. The Who Cares? Trust and other organisations work with care leavers to establish what the minimum offer from universities should be.
19. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills establishes a national body for sharing of good practice in relation to university support for care leavers.
20. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills produces tailored materials for looked-after children and care leavers and makes them available through student finance websites.
21. Local authorities work in collaboration with local universities/UCAS to provide sufficient information and advice to young people, frontline professionals and carers about the support available to care leavers throughout higher education.
22. Universities participate in The Who Cares? Trust's *H.E. Handbook* to provide a single source of information for all care leavers on support available at universities in England.

# Appendix One

## Methodology of the online survey

The findings of the Open Doors, Open Minds project were based on research conducted between April 2011 and January 2012. The main methods of information gathering are detailed below:

- ▶ Desk research
- ▶ Interviews with professionals
- ▶ Focus groups with young people and professionals
- ▶ Online survey.

The results from the online survey form the basis for many of the arguments put forward in this report.

The Who Cares? Trust produced two online surveys for this project: one for professionals and one for young people. We made these surveys publicly available and promoted them through:

- ▶ Our website: [www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk](http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk)
- ▶ E-newsletters which were sent to looked-after children and leaving care teams, virtual headteachers and other interested

stakeholders

- ▶ Professional networks.

The Who Cares? Trust has undertaken a number of online surveys in the past and we have found that it is important to offer incentives for completion in order to maximise participation. We therefore ran a prize draw for both the professionals and the young people's survey.

The surveys contained a number of optional and mandatory questions. This has meant that the number of respondents for each question varied. Tables 10 and 11 below show the overall response rates by age (for the young people's survey) and profession (for the professionals' survey).

Wherever we have included data from this survey, we have included the number of respondents who answered the question.

We analysed the response rates and the method of promotion to consider any bias that may have been introduced in the surveys.

For the young people's survey, we found that respondents were more likely to be female (69% of respondents) and more likely to have been in the care system for over four years (61% of respondents). We felt that this over-representation would not have a demonstrably negative impact on the ability of respondents to give informed answers to the questions we asked.

Compared to the care system as a whole, greater numbers of young people responding to our survey lived in independent or supporting living arrangements (46% of respondents). However, this reflected the age profile of respondents to the survey.

For the professionals’ survey we found that we had too few responses from advocates, residential workers and Virtual School Headteachers to draw valid conclusions from this data.

The use of an online survey also means that there is a greater chance that those people who responded to the survey were those who were engaged in the issue and would therefore be more likely to have a positive or negative view

of the changes. However, this was unavoidable given the timescale and resource available to support the project.

The results of the survey should be treated with caution given the sample size. This is not a population study and does not necessarily reflect the views of all looked-after children, care leavers or professionals. However, the sample size appeared to be large enough to give some early indication of the way in which policies are affecting barriers to further and higher education for looked-after children and care leavers.

Further academic research in this area would add to our understanding.

**Table 10: Age breakdown of respondents to young person’s online survey**

Age of respondent	Number of respondents
Between 14 and 16	21
Between 16 and 19	37
Older than 19	42
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 11: Profession breakdown of respondents to professional’s survey**

Role	Number of respondents
Advocate	4
Designated member of staff for looked-after children or care leavers	37
Foster carer	23
Personal Adviser in a leaving care team	17
Residential worker	4
Senior Manager	12
Social Work Team Manager	12
Social Worker	33
Teacher / Tutor	15
Virtual Headteacher	7
Other	49
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>213</b>

# Endnotes

## SECTION ONE

- 01.** See also Scottish Parliament 'Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children' [www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/41975.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/41975.aspx)
- 02.** Tim Loughton to the Frank Buttle Trust Conference, January 2011
- 03.** For more on the educational achievement of looked-after children see Vulnerable Children Knowledge Review: Improving Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children and Young People, C4EO (2010)
- 04.** Special Educational Needs Information Act: An Analysis 2011, Department for Education (October 2011)
- 05.** SFR21/2011 Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2011
- 06.** OSR 25/2011, NEET Statistics - Quarterly Brief, Department for Education (November 2011)
- 07.** Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, HEFCE, January 2010

## SECTION TWO

- 08.** Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010)
- 09.** Response to The Who Cares? Trust online survey
- 10.** The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 11.** Interview with The Who Cares? Trust
- 12.** Response to The Who Cares? Trust survey
- 13.** Ibid.
- 14.** Focus group with The Who Cares? Trust
- 15.** Ibid
- 16.** Quality protects: transforming children's services: the role and responsibilities of councillors, an open letter by Frank Dobson to lead members (September 1998) [www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4007153](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4007153)
- 17.** A Better Education for Children in Care, Social Exclusion Unit, 2003. P. 20
- 18.** Guidance on the Education of Young People in Public Care, DfEE/DH, 2000 P.16
- 19.** Promoting the education achievement of looked-after children, Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, DCSF, 2010. P.11
- 20.** Request for practice examples for children in Public Care including Adoption, Permanency planning and Fostering, C4EO, December 2011
- 21.** Local authority children's services inspections and outcomes, Ofsted, December 2011
- 22.** David Berridge, Lorna Henry, Sonia Jackson and Danielle Turney, Looked After and Learning - Evaluation of the Virtual School Head pilot, (DCSF) (2009)
- 23.** Responses to The Who Cares? Trust survey
- 24.** Response from Virtual School Headteacher in The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 25.** Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children:

Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010)

- 26. IRO Handbook: Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children, (DCSF) 2010
- 27. Ibid p. 20.
- 28. National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers response to the Family Justice Review, June 2011
- 29. Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey
- 30. Virtual School Head Toolkit, DCSF, March 2010 p.7 <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/v/virtual%20school%20head%20toolkit.pdf>
- 31. Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey
- 32. The Who Cares? Trust online survey response
- 33. The Who Cares Trust focus group
- 34. The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 35. The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 36. The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 37. Chris Leonard, Care Leavers in Further Education – The Lost Cohort, AimHigher West Partnership

### SECTION THREE

- 38. Tim Loughton to the National Care Leavers' Week conference, October 2010
- 39. Tim Loughton to National Care Leavers' Week conference, October 2011
- 40. Ibid
- 41. Written Ministerial Statement, Pupil

Premiums 2012-13

- 42. Personal Education Allowance, or PEA, was a sum of £500 which was available to local authorities to support the education needs of looked-after children. The requirement for local authorities to provide this was removed around the time of the introduction of the Pupil Premium. Some local authorities have retained this, but others have not.
- 43. Response during The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 44. The Who Cares? Trust online survey
- 45. Ibid
- 46. Ibid
- 47. Department for Education, press comment, 15th December 2010, [www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a0070607/the-department-comments-on-the-ema](http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a0070607/the-department-comments-on-the-ema)
- 48. 16-19 Bursary Fund – Guide for 2011/12, Young Person's Learning Agency, June 2011
- 49. The Who Cares? Trust online survey response
- 50. Ibid
- 51. The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 52. Royal Holloway Access Agreement 2012/13
- 53. University of Winchester Access Agreement 2012/13
- 54. University of Essex Access Agreement 2012/13
- 55. The Who Cares? Trust focus group
- 56. NorthCLASS which includes universities in the North of England and EMCLASS which includes universities in the East Midlands.
- 57. [www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/hehandbook](http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/hehandbook)
- 58. Based on average costs for courses at

those institutions. Published by the Office for Fair Access.

**59.** Sonia Jackson, Sarah Ajayi and Margaret Quigley, *By Degrees: Going to University from Care*, Institute of Education (2005)

**60.** Data from The Who Cares? Trust online survey

**61.** Ibid

**62.** Response to online survey

**63.** Ibid

**64.** For more on the impact of changes to student finance for those with discretionary leave to remain see Refugee Children's Consortium briefing note – [www.refugeechildrenconsortium.org.uk/images/RCChighereducation.pdf](http://www.refugeechildrenconsortium.org.uk/images/RCChighereducation.pdf)

**65.** [www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/23/nick-clegg-hugo-young-text](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/23/nick-clegg-hugo-young-text)

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people and organisations who contributed to the development of this report. The findings and conclusions are all our own.

- ▶ The Clothworkers Foundation
- ▶ Steering Group Members – Min, Musama, Moussa, Aicha, Kevani and Edward
- ▶ The Who Cares? Trust Participation Group
- ▶ Members of the focus group in Cheshire West and Chester – Katie, Jodie, Jaz, Tara and Kim Brooman
- ▶ Members of the focus group in Salford, particularly Arron Pile
- ▶ Sarah Hurrell, Will Calver and other members of the YPCLE Strategy and Operational Groups
- ▶ EMCLASS
- ▶ NorthCLASS
- ▶ Brian Roberts and TJ Trambadia
- ▶ Khatija Hafesji
- ▶ Susan Mueller, Buttle UK



© Copyright The Who Cares? Trust, March 2012

Registered charity No: 1010518

A company limited by guarantee

Registered in London number: 2700693

VAT Reg No: 577-8530-91