

Care experience report: webinar questions

1. **If 3/5 of young people are not receiving info about being care experienced at university, who do they say they would like to provide that info to them? School? Foster carer?**

Nicola Turner: The survey found that, in school, 35% of respondents received help from their UCAS or careers adviser to apply to university as a care-experienced student, but about half turned to their form tutor (49%) for advice. Other key staff were subject teachers (28%) and Heads of Year (23%). This may be linked to the findings that 31% did not discuss their care background with anyone at school unless they had to, and 26% only discussed it with staff members who already knew about their circumstances. If their careers or UCAS adviser had no previous relationship with the student, it is very possible that they were unaware that they would have benefitted from additional support or information. Outside of school, they were most likely to seek help from family members (47%), followed by local authority workers (35%) and foster carers (29%).

Fiona Ellison: I would reiterate my point about hearing from other young people like them. That's been the consistent theme from the Unite Foundation's This is Us podcast: thisisusatuni.org/podcast/

2. **The definition of care experience is very broad. Can the data and survey findings be broken down by duration of care experience and statutory care leaver? It would be interesting to see the differences.**

Emily Bennett-Cox: Due to low numbers we were unable to break down the survey findings by duration of care, but we did ask applicants at what point(s) they were in care, and used these responses to explore some of the findings. For example, we found 35% of those who were in care between the ages of 11 and 16 reported that they had moved schools at least once, as did 35% of those in care between the ages of 17 and 18. Again, due to low numbers, there were limited questions for which this breakdown was viable.

3. **LGBTQ+ students were highlighted as a further indication of a barrier to HE - can I ask more about data on a correlation between LGBT+ students and access or success at HE?**

Nicola Turner: Our data shows that care-experienced applicants are 79% more likely to identify as LGBT+ (22% vs 12% of non-care-experienced applicants). Last year we released our first Next Steps report – available at www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/lgbt-freshers-looking-forward-being-open-and-out-university-new-ucas-research-shows. As with our care experience report, we surveyed applicants and also explored the UCAS data more closely to understand more about the applicant behaviours and challenges for this group. Overall, being LGBT+ is not a barrier to entry but the intersectionality with other characteristics can present hidden challenges. For example – and similarly to our care-experienced cohort – we found a clear over-representation of LGBT+ applicants sharing a mental health condition and/or disability (30% compared to 12% of non-LGBT+ applicants), and our student mental health report (<https://www.ucas.com/file/513961/download?token=wAaKRniC>) found some LGBT+ groups are around six times more likely to share a mental health condition. LGBT+ applicants

are also more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with 17% from POLAR4 quintile 1 areas (compared to 13% who did not share an LGBT+ identity).

Emily Bennett-Cox: The LGBT+ report also explored applicants are feeling about their next steps; we found that, although 12% of LGBT+ applicants reported having a negative experience in school or college (not an insignificant amount), this rises to 17% when looking at trans students independently, the majority of which cited bullying as the main reason for their negative experience. We also found that trans students are less likely to achieve top grades in their post-16 qualifications, and less likely to apply to higher tariff providers than non-LGBT+ applicants, highlighting the fact that there is a way to go before trans students have an equal experience in applying to HE.

4. The POLAR quintile data - assuming this is done on foster carer home or residential care, is this something that will be a real indication of disadvantage, as we don't know how long they have been at that address and if it can truly have had an impact

Fiona Ellison: Absolutely spot on around the robustness of looking at POLAR quintile data and care leavers – especially those who have multiple placements. It's a helpful understanding and comparator (if using quintile 5) around educational disadvantage, but not in any robust way.

Nicola Turner: We were very mindful of this when we looked at this particular dataset and made sure to caveat this point in the report. Nonetheless, we felt it was important to note an over-representation of care-experienced applicants in quintile 1 (18% vs 13% of non-care-experienced applicants), and an under-representation in quintile 5 (22% compared to 29% of non-care-experienced applicants). As our report covers the full range of care experience, as opposed to only looked-after children and care-leavers, it provides a broader context for all these applicants.

5. Is it possible to see regional splits, particularly around the four nations? With the introduction of legislation regarding care experienced students in 2015 Scottish colleges and universities have massively increased the personalised support, including the introduction of named contacts for applicants and students, so it would be useful to see these findings with that filter applied.

Nicola Turner: UCAS was involved with the Commission on Widening Access in Scotland and we continue to work closely with Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council. We were particularly pleased to see the increased transparency for care-experienced applicants around minimum entry requirements through the Guaranteed Offer – and the early indications of success – and one of the recommendations in the report advocates for this approach to be reflected across the UK to ensure greater consistency and transparency for care-experienced applicants.

Emily Bennett-Cox: Although not mentioned in the report itself, we did feel it was important to include a breakdown of care-experienced applicants by country of domicile in the supporting data files that were published alongside the report – all of which can be found here: www.ucas.com/about-us/news-and-insights/ucas-reports/next-steps-what-experience-students-care-background-education-report.

Fiona Ellison: It's definitely important to acknowledge the support in Scotland is considerably better, and the role of [The Promise](#) should help to improve things for young people.

6. It's striking that 3/5 of your respondents didn't get any personalised advice or support at school and these were the ones who went on to apply! Clearly that's a factor on the lower numbers coming to university?

Fiona Ellison: In short yes! If students are getting tailored support at school, and let alone their personal advisors (who have a role through the leaving care teams) then there is absolutely more to do!

Nicola Turner: Certainly the research shows that young people have been getting generic advice about careers and education but the crucial aspect is the information about support to get there. We have to remember that our research is based on those people who ultimately decided to apply – we don't know about those who felt that the obstacles were just too high to overcome. Without knowing about dedicated support (particularly around financial and practical elements like bursaries and accommodation), many young people are likely to disregard HE and apprenticeships as a viable option before they even get to the point of research, so we need to ensure they know about what's available to them much, much sooner – even if we start talking to young people in Year 12, we will already have lost some pupils post-GCSE, particularly if lower attainment has been perceived as a barrier. We're already making in-roads into connecting to leaving care teams and organisations supporting foster carers to try and address this information gap.

7. If we rely on one trusted data set, do we risk missing some of the nuance? Like kinship care. Or some circumstances being given more weight than others by HEIs?

Fiona Ellison: I think there are a range of data points we need to look at to build a more holistic and robust picture of participation in higher education to support students getting into, and then staying, at university. This report from UCAS is a great start, and the new flag from HESA looking at different types of care will help.

Nicola Turner: It's a challenge, and it is unlikely there will ever be one trusted dataset we could (or should) solely rely on. As we know, care experience is multi-layered and nuanced, different definitions exist between UK nations, HE providers are autonomous and have individual policies, and different agencies collect this data for different purposes. In addition, there are overlaps, such as with estrangement – particularly with kinship care (both formal and informal) – for which UCAS now collects data (starting with 2023 entry). As such, UCAS endeavours to be as broad and inclusive as possible because we believe our responsibility is to 'start the conversation' that allows the important student-provider relationship to develop in which individual needs are accounted for – and extending beyond care experience to include mental health and disability needs, for example.