

TASO evidence submission: Children's social care

Submission to House of Commons Education Select Committee.

January 2024

Written evidence submitted by the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) on 15 January 2024.

Education Select Committee.

Inquiry: Children's social care

Who we are

- The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) aims to eliminate equality gaps in higher education.
- We are an independent hub for higher education professionals to access research, toolkits, and evaluation guidance.
- TASO is an affiliate What Works Centre, and part of the UK Government's What Works Movement. This means that TASO is committed to the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of high-quality evidence about effective practice in widening participation and student outcomes.

The evidence in this submission is taken from the following TASO report:

- [Supporting access and student success for learners with experience of children's social care](#)

Notes on the evidence:

- The evidence in this submission focuses on the impact of children's social care on educational outcomes exclusively in UK higher education.
- The submission refers to 'care-experienced' as including all those who have, or have had, experience with children's social care before they turned 18.
- The scope includes those who have, or have had, a Child in Need Plan, or a Child Protection Plan, as well as those who are, or have been, in care.
- Learners with a Child in Need Plan solely as a result of having a disability are not reflected in the evidence referred to in this submission.

INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

How can children's social care impact a child's educational or long-term outcomes and ways to improve outcomes for care leavers?

Higher education outcomes for care-experienced learners:

- People with experience of children's social care are underrepresented in higher education and have significantly poorer education and life outcomes than the general population on average.¹
- Access to higher education is much lower for care-experienced young people.
- In 2018-19 only 13 per cent of pupils who were looked after continuously for 12 months, or more entered higher education compared to 43% of all other pupils.²
- Full and part-time students who have experienced being in care have lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students who have not experienced being in care.³
- Comparing full-time students who were care-experienced [data from the Office for Students](#) reveals⁴:
 - The continuation rate for 2019-20 entrants who were care-experienced was 5.3 percentage points lower than those who had not experienced being in care (87.1 per cent compared with 92.4 per cent).
 - The completion rates of 2016-17 entrants who were care-experienced was 9.6 percentage points lower than those who had not experienced being in care (79.6 per cent compared with 89.2 per cent).
 - The attainment rate of 2020-21 qualifiers who were care-experienced was 12.9 percentage points lower than those who had not experienced being in care (70.6 per cent compared with 83.6 per cent).

What works to improve HE outcomes for care-experiences learners

- In 2021, TASO conducted [an evidence review](#) to understand the existing evidence around widening participation activities targeted at learners with experience of children's social care and how best to support their progression to, transition through and success in, higher education (HE).
- The project consisted of a literature review and interviews with staff and experts across the non-profit, post-secondary education and education policy sectors.

¹ Office for Students (2022) [Topic briefing: care-experienced students and looked after children](#).

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Office for Students (2022) [Student characteristics data: Student outcomes](#)

- The review found very few studies that have robustly evaluated the efficacy of activities targeted at individuals in HE with experience of children’s social care in the UK.
- Only one UK-based study in the review identified the causal impact of activities designed to boost HE access and success for this student group.
- The lack of consistent definition and data linkage between local authorities, schools and HE providers prevents researchers and practitioners from evaluating and understanding the longitudinal impact of interventions to address the needs of these learners.

Promising areas of evidence and practice:

- Early interventions that leverage close collaborations between children’s social care services, educational providers and pastoral/social networks have been identified as areas with limited but promising evidence to support care-experienced learners.⁵
- One potentially promising area of activity for pre-16 intervention is the involvement of virtual schools. A virtual school is a group of education and social care professionals within a local authority who are responsible for the coordination of education services to care-experienced children and young people within their local authority area.⁶
- For example, there is promising correlational evidence to support [Go Higher West Yorkshire’s innovative training programme](#), co-developed with virtual schools and designed to equip key influencers to support young people’s informed decision-making.⁷
- There is some limited but promising causal evidence on integrated, early interventions that focus on building resilience and social capital, based on studies in Sweden and the US, but there is currently a lack of evaluations of similar interventions in the UK.⁸
- Both our literature review and interviews with key stakeholders found there is likely value in having a single point of contact within an HE provider who can help learners navigate the institution and access the support they need. A designated member of staff that is solely focused on supporting care-experienced groups pre-application to post-graduation seemed to be correlated with higher progression and success rates for care-experienced students in HE.

Recommendations:

- To ensure effective allocation of support for care-experienced learners in HE, more causal studies investigating the impact of higher education provider’s activities on the aspirations, enrolment and success of care-experienced learners is needed.

⁵ Hume, S., Matic, J & Styrnol, M (2021) [Supporting access and student success for learners with experience of children’s social care](#), p.3

⁶ Ibid, p.11

⁷ Aldridge, N., 2020. West Yorkshire [Go Higher: CARE TO GO HIGHER CPD: Equipping Key Influencers of care-experienced Young People](#).

⁸ Hume, S., Matic, J & Styrnol, M (2021) [Supporting access and student success for learners with experience of children’s social care](#), p.27

- There is a need for more robust research on the impact of virtual schools on care-experienced learners' aspirations, progression and success in HE.
- HE providers need to work more closely with external staff in local authorities and virtual schools to facilitate closer channels of communication and to upskill involved parties on synergies and potential areas for collaboration in their respective work.
- Care-experienced students are more likely to enter HE as mature learners and not have standard entry qualifications. HE providers should ensure that staff and activities that support mature learners are better linked up with staff and activities that support care-experienced learners, and vice-versa, and evaluate these efforts where possible.
- More research is needed on the effectiveness of designated members of staff within HE providers and their impact on the retention and success rates of care-experienced learners.
- More research is also needed on the link between care experience and mental health, and its impact on access and success in HE.
- The lack of easily available, consistent data and data definitions is a major barrier to robust impact evaluation of the effect of widening participation activities on care-experienced learners. The Department for Education and its delivery bodies should place a greater emphasis on facilitating an inclusive understanding of definitions and a more consistent and easily available tracking of care-experienced individuals and their outcomes over time and between the school, college and the higher education sectors.
- The inclusion of care-experienced learners' voices in the conception, dissemination and interpretation of research projects is strongly recommended.