NNECL
empowering care experienced learners

Championing Futures?

Localised patterns in higher education participation for young care-experienced learners in England

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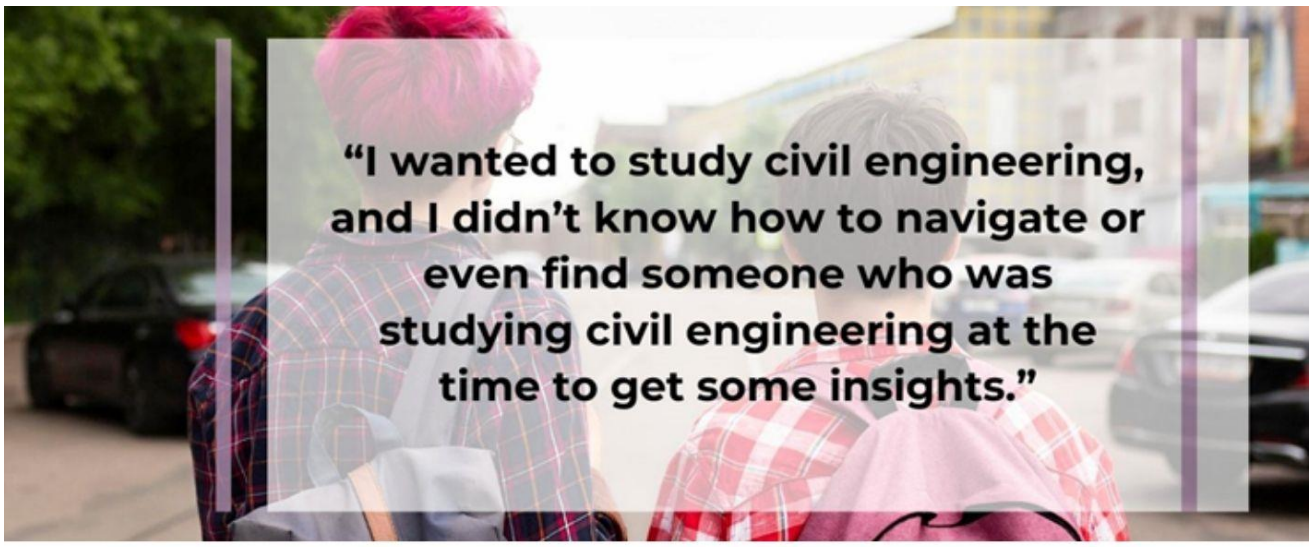

Who is NNECL?

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers is an award-winning, not-for-profit organisation working across the UK. We support, connect and empower a community of practitioners who share our overarching ambition: for more young people from care backgrounds, or who are estranged, to consider, access and flourish through apprenticeships, further and higher education, and into fulfilling careers that sustain them for life.

Established in 2018, NNECL is the only charity solely dedicated to transforming care leavers' educational attainment. We have over 100 organisations in active membership, including universities and colleges, foster agencies, local authority leaving care teams, virtual schools and charities. Through our membership and strategic partnerships, we are proud to reach a community of more than 800 professionals who participate in our events and benefit from our regular policy and practice updates - so they can best support the 5,000+ care experienced and estranged learners attending their institutions.

NNECL is unashamedly ambitious for all children in care and care leavers. We want a future where poor practices no longer leave people with care backgrounds without the opportunities needed to thrive into adulthood and enjoy the security of a sustaining career. We lean into the excellent work already in place and boldly work with the sector to enable significant, lasting change - and to drastically improve care experienced children's educational outcomes.

Our mission is to create educational environments where care leavers thrive.

Championing Futures: Localised patterns in higher education participation for young care-experienced learners in England

Neil Harrison, University of Exeter

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Note: This work was undertaken in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service using data from ONS and other owners and does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or other data owners.

Foreword

Many of us who work alongside young people with care experience know what a privilege that is. Every day, we see their resilience, their capability, and their determination, not only to succeed in education, but to go on to lead fulfilling, ambitious and independent lives. Higher education should be part of that story for many more of our young people than it currently is. It represents more than academic achievement; it opens the door to opportunity, networks, stability and genuine choice in adulthood. Ensuring that young people with care experience can step confidently into that space is central to our role as champions of both their education and their futures.

This report invites us to reflect on how close we are to that ambition. It presents a national picture of higher education participation among young people with care experience, highlighting both the progress that has been made and the distance still to travel.

Overall participation remains too low, at around 13%. However, what stands out most is the degree of variation across the country. Where a young person lives, continues to shape their likelihood of progressing into higher education. London, for example, stands apart with higher rates, while many areas continue to work hard to close the gap. From my perspective, as a Virtual School Head, this is a reality that plays out regularly in practice. I too often come across young people with the ability to succeed in higher education who do not ultimately get there, not because they lack potential, but because the pathway does not feel clear, accessible or realistic. I am reminded of a young person with strong Key Stage 4 attainment and a clear pathway into higher education. However, as they approached post-18 decision-making, uncertainty around accommodation, financial support and the consistency of the professional network around them led them to step away from university, opting instead for a more immediate, but less ambitious route. There was no single point of failure. Rather, it was the cumulative effect of small gaps in planning, communication and joined-up support. Their experience illustrates how progression can be lost at the point of transition, even where attainment suggests it should be secured.

This report reinforces something many of us will recognise attainment matters enormously, but it is not the whole story. Even young people with similar levels of attainment can experience very different outcomes depending on their local context and the support surrounding them. This variation is not inevitable, it reflects the impact of local systems, expectations and the coherence of our collective offer.

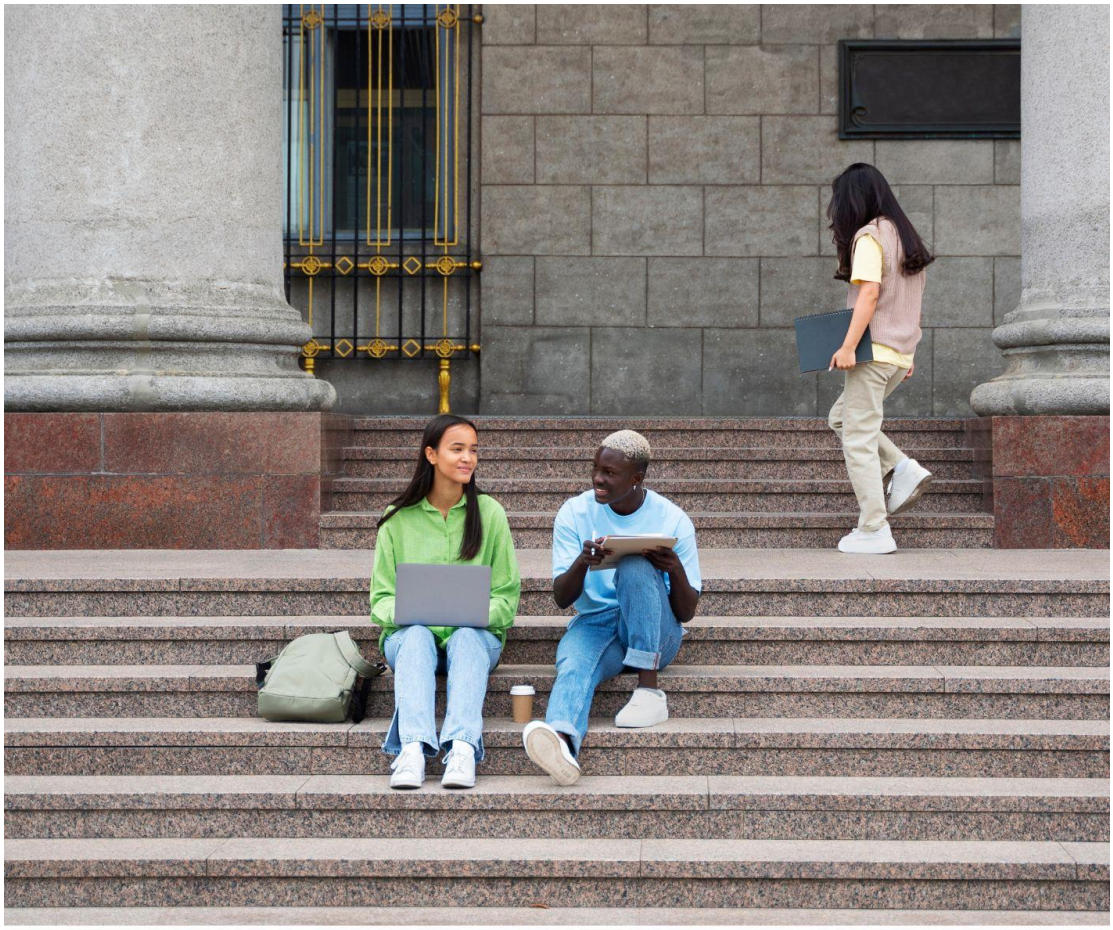
That should give us both confidence and challenge. Confidence, because it shows that what we do matters. Challenge, because it requires us to act with greater consistency, ambition and alignment. We can create systems where higher education is not seen as exceptional for young people with care experience, but expected, supported and achievable.

The report provides an opportunity to pause and ask important questions:

- Are we supporting career ambitions early and consistently enough?
- Are education, social care and higher education partners aligned around a shared ambition for progression?
- Do our local offers remove barriers at the point they matter most?
- What can we learn from areas where more young people are already making that journey?

Above all, this is a call to action rooted in belief. The variation set out in this report demonstrates that change is possible. Our collective role is to turn that possibility into reality, so that more young people with care experience can move forward with confidence, knowing that higher education is not just an option, but a pathway that is open to them.

Matthew Blood, Head of the Virtual Schools, Progress and Participation,
London Borough of Camden



"We can create systems where higher education is not seen as exceptional for young people with care experience, but expected, supported and achievable."

Executive summary

Too many care-experienced young people face a difficult and uncertain future when they leave formal schooling. The transition to adulthood, a time that should be marked by excitement and opportunity, is too often characterised by instability and anxiety. Without the family networks and support systems that many of their peers can rely upon, the journey beyond education can feel isolating and overwhelming.

This report has its origins in a conversation at the NNECL Annual Conference, where a deceptively simple but important question was posed: which Local Authorities are most successful in supporting care-experienced young people into university, for those who wish to pursue that route? The question was not whether higher education is the right path for everyone, but whether it remains a genuine and achievable option for those who choose it.

Across the UK, care-experienced learners are recognised as a priority group within higher education, with targeted outreach and support intended to improve educational outcomes and reduce the risk of homelessness, poor mental health and underemployment. NNECL exists because this commitment has not yet translated into equitable outcomes. Too many care-experienced learners continue to encounter barriers that limit their opportunities and aspirations. A central finding of this report is that designation alone is not enough. Being identified as a priority group does not, in itself, improve participation. The data clearly shows progress depends on the quality, consistency and ambition of the support that sits behind the label. While educational attainment remains a significant factor in progression to higher education, it does not fully explain the substantial variation in participation rates across England. Local context matters. Expectations matter. Access to sustained, high-quality support matters. In the period covered by this report, only 13% of care-experienced young people progressed to higher education, compared with almost half of their non-care-experienced peers. This stark disparity should concern all of us. More importantly, it should challenge the assumption that low participation is inevitable. Some Local Authorities achieve significantly stronger outcomes than others, demonstrating that barriers can be overcome when aspiration, opportunity and effective support are brought together.

We therefore call on local authorities, universities, colleges, Virtual Schools and national policymakers to use the evidence in this report to identify and learn from effective practice, strengthen support before and after Key Stage 4, and ensure every care-experienced young person who wishes to pursue higher education has a genuine opportunity to do so. The question is not whether care-experienced young people can succeed in higher education; it is whether the systems around them are prepared to provide the stability, ambition and support that success requires.

We are grateful to Neil Harrison, one of NNECL's very excellent trustees, for undertaking the research that underpins this report and for enabling NNECL to publish its findings.

Denise Rawls, Executive Director, NNECL

Key findings

Participation rates, national and regional
Overall participation in higher education among care-experienced young people in England stood at just 13% - a figure that remains too low. However, the most striking finding is the degree of variation across the country:

- Regional rates range from 9% (East Midlands and South West) to 21% (London).
- At Local Authority level, rates range from 6% (North East Lincolnshire) to 27% (Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea).
- London stands apart, with most London Local Authorities recording higher participation rates than most areas outside the capital.

Where a young person lives continues to shape their likelihood of progressing into higher education. This variation is not inevitable - it reflects the impact of local systems, expectations and the coherence of the collective support offer.

Participation by sex, ethnicity and special educational needs and disabilities
Across nearly every English region and Local Authority, participation rates are substantially higher in areas with higher proportions of care-experienced young people who:

- Are women
- Are from Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- Do not have special educational needs and disabilities

The marked disparities between these subgroups across regions and Local Authorities reflect variable levels of access to and support for higher education.

Contextual and demographic factors
Analysis at Local Authority level identified strong positive relationships between care-experienced young people's participation rates and:

- The overall participation rate for all young people in the area
- The proportion of the local population from Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- Average Key Stage 4 qualification levels (a weaker, but positive, relationship)

Notably, no relationship was found with neighbourhood deprivation. Care-experienced young people are more likely to access higher education in areas where it is culturally normalised, where Key Stage 4 attainment is higher, and where communities are more ethnically diverse. These factors account for some, but not all, of the London uplift in participation rates.

Individual-level factors
At the individual level, a care-experienced young person's likelihood of accessing higher education is significantly influenced by:

- Key Stage 4 attainment
- Sex and ethnicity
- Whether they have special educational needs and disabilities
- Whether they are an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

These individual factors have a substantial influence on aggregated participation rates at regional and Local Authority level, meaning that reported rates reflect the profile of young people in care in each area - not solely the effectiveness of local practice. However, attainment alone is not the whole story: even young people with similar levels of attainment can experience markedly different outcomes depending on their local context and the support surrounding them.

Where a young person lives continues to shape their likelihood of progressing into higher education. This variation is not inevitable, it reflects the impact of local systems, expectations and the coherence of the collective support offer.

1. Background

There has been growing interest in the participation[1] of care-experienced learners[2] in higher education since the *Care Matters: Time for Change* White Paper (Department for Education and Skills, 2008), where concern was expressed that numbers were very low as part of a wider policy initiative to address substantially lower-than-average outcomes across all educational phases. Early work estimated national progression rates at just 1-2% (Jackson et al., 2005); among the lowest for any identifiable social group. Survey data collected from young people through social work teams suggest that 6% of care leavers are participating between the ages of 18 and 21 (Department for Education [DFE], 2025a).

Since the mid-2010s, advances in the availability of data and the ability to anonymously link datasets has demonstrated that these were substantial underestimates. Harrison (2017) used linked data from the National Pupil Database and the Higher Education Statistics Agency for the 1991/92 birth cohort to calculate that 11.8% of young people who were in care at age 16 had participated in higher education by the age of 23. Using a similar approach tracking the 1998/99 birth cohort through to the age of 22, Feinstein et al. (2025) concluded that 14% of care-experienced young people and 14% of care leavers had participated.

These higher figures were further substantiated in 2019 when the DFE began publishing annual calculations of participation rates up to the age of 19, backdated to 2009/10 (DFE, 2019). In 2023/24, the participation rate was (a) 15% for young people who were in care continuously for 12 months or more on 31st March in the academic year in which they turned 15, and (b) 13% for those who were defined as care leavers (DFE, 2025b). That these proportions compare to 46% for the general population demonstrates that care-experienced young people remain significantly under-represented in higher education, although there is evidence of incremental year-on-year improvements over the last 15 years.

Based on regression modelling, Harrison (2017), Harrison et al. (2023) and Feinstein et al. (2025) argue that the starkly contrasting participation rates can be mainly attributed to differences in qualifications gained at the age of 16, although a statistically significant 'participation gap' remains after controlling for demographic factors, attainment, special educational needs and disabilities.

Using self-declaration data collected upon application to higher education, Stevenson et al. (2020) note that care-experienced students tend to participate later in life than other students. This suggests that calculations of participation rates that end at the age of 19 or 22 may afford an incomplete picture of higher education participation. On this basis, Harrison (2020) estimates that lifelong participation rates may be around 25%.

[1] In this report, we use 'participation' to denote entry to a higher education programme. This should not be taken to mean that the programme was completed – this is beyond the scope of this report.

[2] In this report, we use 'care-experienced' to denote any person who spent time in the care of their local authority during childhood and 'care leaver' to denote the subset who meet the relevant statutory definition and are able to access the package of 'leaving care' support on transition to adulthood. The Department for Education often uses a third definition of young people who were in care for a 12 month period approaching their 16th birthday – this is effectively used as a simplified proxy for care leavers.

2. Aims and research questions

All the analysis of participation rates for care-experienced young people that has been undertaken to date has been at the national level. This is largely as the numbers in a single birth cohort are too small to permit analysis at a more granular level; there are also ethical concerns about identifiability when exploring very small subgroups. However, spatial patterns of participation in higher education are well-documented for young people in general (e.g. Office for Students, 2024), so it is likely that similar disparities will exist for care-experienced learners.

The primary aim of this report is therefore to fill this evidence gap by pooling young people who were in care at any point in a 15 year period (2006/07 to 2020/21) and identify whether they have yet participated in higher education. From this pooled data, it is possible to calculate participation rates for each of the nine English regions and the approximately 150 Local Authority areas in England[3]. As with any analytical strategy that pools data over a long time period, there are limitations with this approach (e.g. changing qualification regimes, funding systems or data definitions) – these are outlined in Section 8.

The **research questions** underpinning this report are as follows:

- **RQ1:** What are the higher education participation rates for care-experienced young people at the local government region and Local Authority levels?
- **RQ2:** How, if at all, do these participation rates vary by sex, ethnicity or special educational needs and disabilities?
- **RQ3:** What relationships, if any, exist between the participation rates and background demographic data at the Local Authority level (e.g. average qualification levels or neighbourhood deprivation)?
- **RQ4:** To what extent can differences in participation rates be accounted for by differences in the individual's Key Stage 4 qualifications or demographic profile?

3. Methodology

This report draws on pooled and anonymously linked data from three sources:

- **Children Looked After Dataset** (CLAD) – this contains instances of care at the individual level, derived from records held at the Local Authority level. It is primarily used in this study to identify care-experienced young people within their Local Authority and to provide demographic information. The CLAD covers England only.
- **National Pupil Database** (NPD) – this contains details of school attendance and attainment at the individual level, derived from records held at schools. It is primarily used in this study to provide information about attainment at age 16 and special educational needs and disabilities. The NPD covers England only.

[3] Local Authority boundaries are politically determined and there are periodic reviews in which Local Authorities may be merged, split or otherwise reorganised. The number of Local Authorities thus varied slightly across the period covered by this report.

- **HESA Dataset** (HESAD) – this contains details of participation in higher education, derived from records held at universities and other providers; this includes part-time study (e.g. through the Open University). It is primarily used in this study to identify which care-experienced young people participated in higher education. The HESAD covers the whole of the UK.

The same individuals can be identified in each dataset through the use of an anonymised marker variable specifically created by the DFE for this purpose[4]. This enables data to be linked across datasets, building a detailed picture about a young person's care history, school history and, for some, higher education history.

Access to the three datasets was negotiated with the DFE's Data Access and Sharing Team as Project DR240911.01. The data were accessed through the Secure Research Service at the Office for National Statistics[5]. Ethical approval for this study was given by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Exeter.

3.1 Data preparation

Two inclusion criteria were used to isolate the individual records for analysis:

- Any young people who had a care record in England in any year between 2006/07 and 2020/21 (from the CLAD);
- and who were recorded as completing Key Stage 4 (KS4) in England between 2006/07 and 2019/20 (from the NPD).

A small number of records (<50) were then discarded on visual inspection as they were duplicates or otherwise ambiguous (e.g. the same young person recorded as simultaneously attending two schools). The total number of care-experienced individuals identified through these criteria was **154,040**. The HESAD was then used to identify the subset of care-experienced young people who were recorded as entering higher education in the UK between 2009/10 and 2021/22; these totalled **19,430**. The overall participation rate within this study can therefore be calculated at **13%**, which is broadly consistent with previous academic studies (Harrison, 2017; Feinstein et al., 2025) and official figures (DFE, 2025b).

[4] More information about data sharing can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/data-protection-how-we-collect-and-share-research-data.

[5] In keeping with the data privacy policies of the Office for National Statistics, all counts provided in this report are rounded to the nearest 10 and any counts under 20 are suppressed. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

3.2 Data definitions

The following variables extracted or inferred from the three datasets are used in this report:

Table 1: Variables used in analysis

Variable	Values	Source	Notes
HE	Yes / No	HESAD	Whether the young person was recorded as entering higher education during the relevant period
LA	Categorical: 157 categories	CLAD	Which Local Authority was caring for the young person at their last care record within the relevant period
Sex	Male / Female	CLAD	This is recorded as a binary variable in the CLAD
Ethnicity	Categorical: 18 categories	CLAD	As recorded at their last care record within the relevant period
KS4 attainment	Categorical: 5 categories	NPD	Aggregate qualifications attained at KS4 (first attempt, where multiple instances exist)
SEND	Yes / No	NPD	Whether the young person was recorded as having a special educational need or disability at KS4
SEND type	Categorical: 10 categories	NPD	The primary recorded special educational need or disability at KS4 – only 2012/13 onwards
UASC	Yes / No	NPD	Whether the young person was recorded as being an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child at KS4

4. Descriptive statistics

We begin by presenting some descriptive statistics for the dataset as a whole. Table 2 shows participation rates by KS4 attainment and sex.

Table 2: Participation rates by KS4 attainment by sex (N=154,040)

	Proportion of total with this profile	Participation rate	
		Men	Women
5+ 'good' GCSE passes including English and maths	13%	44%	54%
5+ 'good' GCSE passes excluding English and/or maths	10%	18%	26%
Five or more GCSE passes (any grades)	29%	7%	11%
One or more GCSE passes (any grades)	23%	3%	6%
No GCSE passes (including no GCSE entries)	24%	1%	2%
Total	**100%**	**9%**	**17%**

It is well documented that care-experienced young people have substantially lower-than-average attainment at KS4 (e.g. DFE, 2025c; Sebba et al., 2015). In this dataset, a total of 23% attained five 'good' GCSE passes[6], with just over half of these holding both English and mathematics. This is an important threshold as it is generally seen as a prerequisite for admission to Level 3 qualifications (e.g. A Levels) that afford access to higher education. Given this, it is unsurprising to see that care-experienced young people with stronger attainment were substantially more likely to access higher education. Among those with five 'good' GCSE passes including English and mathematics, 54% of women and 44% of men

[6] See Section 8 for an explanation of 'good' passes.

participated across the relevant period. Participation rates fall markedly for young people with lower attainment profiles – for those with no GCSE passes, the rates were 2% for women and 1% for men. Overall, care-experienced young women (17%) were nearly twice as likely as men (9%) to participate in higher education. This echoes sex differences in participation in the general population of young people, although the contrast is even more evident here.

Table 3 shows participation rates by ethnicity and sex. Overall, 71% of the dataset were recorded as being of White British ethnicity; the next largest groups were Black African (4%), White Other (3%), Mixed White/Black Caribbean (3%) and Black Caribbean (3%). Among women, participation rates were highest among the Black African (53%), Chinese (50%) and Other Asian (39%) ethnic groups. Among men, they were highest among the Chinese (36%), Black African (25%) and Bangladeshi (23%) ethnic groups. Participation rates were lowest among those recorded as being of White British ethnicity, with 12% for women and 6% for men. Participation rates were higher for women across every ethnic group, although the scale of the disparity varied somewhat; the greatest disparity was within the Black Caribbean ethnic group, where women were nearly three times more likely to enter higher education than men (31%, compared to 11%).

Table 3: Participation rates by ethnicity by sex (N=154,040)

	Proportion of total by ethnicity	Participation rate	
		Men	Women
Bangladeshi	1%	23%	36%
Indian	1%	22%	39%
Other Asian background	2%	15%	39%
Pakistani	2%	18%	32%
Black African	4%	25%	53%
Black Caribbean	3%	11%	31%
Other Black background	2%	15%	35%
Chinese	<0.5%	36%	50%
Other Mixed background	2%	14%	25%
Mixed White/Asian background	1%	11%	22%
Mixed White/Black African background	1%	15%	28%
Mixed White/Black Caribbean background	3%	8%	21%
Not known	<0.5%	15%	24%
Any other background	2%	15%	32%
White British	71%	6%	12%
White Irish	1%	7%	16%
Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller	<0.5%	*	*
White Other background	3%	9%	21%
Total	**100%**	**9%**	**17%**

* Suppressed due to low numbers

Table 4 shows participation rates by SEND type; as noted above, these data are only available from 2012/13 onwards. Overall, 44% of care-experienced young people were recorded as having a SEND. The most common types were social, emotional and mental health needs (21%) and moderate learning difficulties (7%). Participation rates for young people recorded as having a SEND were lower across all types than those not recorded as having a SEND. Among women, the rates were highest for the other SEND (16%), hearing or visual impairment (15%) and social, emotional and mental health needs (11%) groups. Among men, the rates were highest for the other SEND (10%), hearing or visual impairment (8%) and speech, language or

communication needs (7%) groups. The only SEND type for which men had equal participation rates to women was autistic spectrum disorder (6%).

Table 4: Participation rates by ethnicity by SEND type (N=93,560)

	Proportion of total by SEND type	Participation rate	
		Men	Women
Autistic spectrum disorder	4%	6%	6%
Hearing or visual impairment	1%	8%	15%
Moderate learning difficulty	7%	4%	5%
No special educational needs or disability	56%	13%	23%
Other special educational needs or disability	2%	10%	16%
Physical disability	1%	8%	9%
Severe learning difficulty or multi-sensory impairment	4%	*	*
Social, emotional or mental health needs	21%	5%	11%
Speech, language or communication needs	2%	7%	8%
Specific learning difficulty	3%	6%	8%
Total	**100%**	**9%**	**17%**

* Suppressed due to low numbers

Table 5 shows participation rates for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs); it important to remember that only those present in schools at KS4 are included in this dataset, which is the minority of UASC as most are aged 16 or 17 when they arrive in the country (DFE, 2025). UASCs only made up 4% of the dataset, but they had substantially above average participation rates (20%, compared to 12% for other young people), with 50% of women and 15% of men accessing higher education.

Table 5: Participation rates by UASC status by sex (N=154,040)

	Proportion of total by UASC status	Participation rate	
		Men	Women
Recorded as a UASC	4%	15%	50%
Not recorded as a UASC	96%	8%	17%
Total	**100%**	**9%**	**17%**

5. Participation rates by Local Authority

Table 6 below lists the higher education participation rates for care-experienced young people by the Local Authority which had responsibility for them at their last recorded period of care; in the first column, labelled **%CE** and highlighted in green. The second column (labelled **%CE5+** and highlighted in blue) shows the participation rates for those care-experienced young people who achieved five or more 'good' GCSEs at KS4, including both English and mathematics.

It is important to note that the Local Authorities are used here as an organising geography, and the calculated rates should not be read as an endorsement or criticism of the Local Authority as an organisation. The participation rates for a given Local Authority are likely to be influenced by a wide array of background factors such as the profile of local schools, the local labour market, demographic patterns and the proximity of universities, in addition to the level and quality of direct support provided by the Local Authority itself.

With this in mind, four pieces of contextual data are provided for each Local Authority. The third column (labelled **%HE**) is the higher education participation rate for all young people in the Local Authority, based on the proportion of 15 years olds in 2019 entering by the age of 19[7]. The fourth column (labelled **Att8**) is the Attainment 8 measure of KS4 outcomes for all young people in 2019, with higher figures representing higher attainment[6]. The fifth column (labelled **IMD**) is the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation, with higher figures representing higher levels of neighbourhood deprivation[8]. The sixth column is the proportion of the overall population identifying as a member of a Black or Minority Ethnic group (labelled **%BME**) at the 2011 Census[9]. These data were chosen as they were felt to have a likely relationship with participation rates for care-experienced young people, as well as being readily available for Local Authorities during the appropriate time period; they are not intended to be exhaustive, and future analysis could seek to identify additional contextual data.

An important consideration when viewing Table 6 is that there were several Local Authority reorganisations during the period in question – for example, in the counties of Dorset and Northamptonshire. For the purposes of this analysis, both 'old' and 'new' Local Authorities are listed, and no attempt has been made to reallocate young people from the historic data. This means that the participation rates for the reorganised Local Authorities only represent young people who were in care when those Local Authorities existed – i.e. not the whole period covered by the dataset.

The participation rates for Local Authorities with very small numbers of care-experienced young people participating in higher education have been suppressed for privacy reasons (in keeping with the ONS requirements); this includes some of the reorganised Local Authorities mentioned above for which only a small amount of data is available. Suppression is denoted by an asterisk. Dashes denote those authorities that did not exist at the relevant time points for the contextual data or where data was suppressed in the original datasets.

Table 6: Participation rates by Local Authority

Local Authority	%CE	%CE5+	%HE	Att8	IMD	%BME
EAST MIDLANDS	**9%**	**44%**				
Derby	**10%**	**47%**	39.8	43.2	27.79	19.7
Derbyshire	**9%**	**45%**	41.0	45.6	18.52	2.5
Leicester	**12%**	**56%**	47.2	42.8	33.07	49.5
Leicestershire	**9%**	**43%**	45.3	46.2	12.46	8.6
Lincolnshire	**8%**	**41%**	44.1	46.6	20.61	2.4
North Northamptonshire (post-2021)	**10%**	*	-	-	-	-
Northamptonshire (pre-2021)	**9%**	**41%**	38.6	41.4	18.94	28.5
Nottingham	**9%**	**47%**	41.7	47.2	36.93	4.5
Nottinghamshire	**8%**	**38%**	43.9	45.1	18.85	8.5
Rutland	*	*	51.9	52.7	9.62	2.9
West Northamptonshire (post-2021)	**8%**	*	-	-	-	-
EAST OF ENGLAND	**11%**	**51%**				
Bedford (post-2009)	**14%**	**63%**	45	45.8	19.24	19.5

[7] Drawn from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-interactive-tool-lait.
[8] Drawn from https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015.
[9] Drawn from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data_finder.

Bedfordshire (pre-2009)	*	*	-	-	-	-
Cambridgeshire	9%	44%	48.2	48.0	13.39	7.4
Central Bedfordshire (post-2009)	7%	*	42.4	45.2	12.20	6.2
Essex	11%	49%	42.5	46.1	17.16	5.7
Hertfordshire	13%	55%	56.9	51.5	12.19	12.4
Luton	17%	58%	51.9	43.3	27.58	45.3
Norfolk	10%	47%	37.0	45.1	21.16	3.5
Peterborough	12%	58%	43.1	42.0	27.66	17.5
Southend-on-Sea	13%	47%	53.8	52.0	24.52	8.4
Suffolk	10%	46%	38.8	45.5	18.31	4.8
Thurrock	16%	54%	39.1	42.9	21.60	14.1
LONDON	21%	60%				
Barking and Dagenham	20%	63%	58.5	46.1	34.64	41.7
Barnet	21%	60%	69.5	56.0	17.81	35.9
Bexley	16%	55%	54.7	49.6	16.17	18.1
Brent	24%	61%	64.2	49.9	26.66	63.7
Bromley	13%	47%	55.4	50.3	15.16	15.7
Camden	24%	70%	65.3	48.0	24.96	33.7
City of London	*	*	-	-	13.60	-
Croydon	17%	64%	55.1	45.8	23.64	44.9
Ealing	24%	60%	66.9	50.0	23.59	51.0
Enfield	20%	58%	60.0	46.3	26.99	39.0
Greenwich	22%	61%	54.2	44.5	25.54	37.5
Hackney	22%	55%	59.4	49.0	35.28	45.3
Hammersmith & Fulham	20%	58%	65.4	52.9	24.36	31.9
Haringey	25%	60%	58.6	46.3	31.04	39.5
Harrow	24%	68%	70.9	50.7	14.30	57.8
Havering	16%	48%	46.5	46.9	17.88	12.3
Hillingdon	22%	61%	57.1	47.8	18.11	39.4
Hounslow	19%	55%	65.4	49.4	22.47	48.6
Islington	20%	59%	52.9	46.3	32.53	31.8
Kensington & Chelsea	27%	69%	64.9	51.6	23.38	29.4
Kingston upon Thames	20%	49%	67.9	57.8	11.13	25.5
Lambeth	22%	56%	52.7	44.6	28.91	42.9
Lewisham	18%	54%	53.5	44.9	28.59	46.5
Merton	19%	61%	61.9	49.7	14.93	35.1
Newham	26%	64%	62.9	48.7	32.94	71.0
Redbridge	25%	68%	72.2	53.1	20.24	57.5
Richmond upon Thames	15%	46%	63.7	51.7	10.04	14
Southwark	23%	57%	61.6	50.2	29.49	45.8
Sutton	14%	57%	66.8	58.1	14.58	21.4
Tower Hamlets	24%	65%	65.4	46.8	35.66	54.8
Waltham Forest	18%	69%	58.5	46.1	30.19	47.8
Wandsworth	20%	66%	61.1	50.8	18.30	28.6
Westminster	27%	64%	69.5	52.9	27.69	38.3
NORTH EAST	11%	44%				
County Durham	8%	33%	38.1	45.0	25.74	1.8
Darlington	9%	*	44.1	45.8	23.64	3.8
Gateshead	12%	51%	43.0	46.2	25.93	3.7
Hartlepool	12%	48%	38.5	42.3	33.18	2.3
Middlesbrough	12%	49%	37.7	42.4	40.22	11.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	13%	55%	42.8	45.1	28.26	14.5
North Tyneside	10%	42%	42.7	46.0	21.28	3.4
Northumberland	9%	39%	43.4	46.1	20.53	1.6
Redcar and Cleveland	12%	47%	42.1	43.6	28.57	1.5
South Tyneside	8%	29%	41.2	44.3	30.61	4.1
Stockton-on-Tees	14%	52%	44.5	46.8	24.63	5.4
Sunderland	10%	43%	35.3	43.2	29.73	4.1

NORTH WEST	**12%**	**50%**				
Blackburn with Darwen	**14%**	**49%**	49.5	45.8	34.19	30.8
Blackpool	**8%**	**41%**	31.2	38.5	42.00	3.3
Bolton	**13%**	**61%**	46.7	44.6	28.42	18.1
Bury	**15%**	**60%**	45.2	45.2	21.77	10.8
Cheshire (pre-2009)	*	*	-	-	-	-
Cheshire East (post-2009)	**11%**	**49%**	51.1	48.8	14.13	3.3
Cheshire West & Chester (post-2009)	**10%**	**56%**	46.9	46.4	18.09	2.6
Cumbria	**10%**	**50%**	37.1	46.7	21.33	1.5
Halton	**12%**	**53%**	36.5	44.2	31.94	2.2
Knowsley	**10%**	**43%**	22.5	35.3	41.39	2.8
Lancashire	**10%**	**47%**	43.6	46.7	22.50	7.7
Liverpool	**14%**	**60%**	46.2	43.5	41.13	11.1
Manchester	**16%**	**57%**	48.5	43.2	40.51	33.4
Oldham	**14%**	**51%**	45.8	42.7	30.29	22.5
Rochdale	**13%**	**49%**	43.8	43.5	33.68	18.3
Salford	**14%**	**55%**	36.4	41.0	32.96	9.9
Sefton	**11%**	**46%**	43.7	44.9	25.73	2.6
St. Helens	**9%**	**41%**	39.2	44.6	29.81	2.0
Stockport	**14%**	**45%**	44.2	47.3	19.11	7.9
Tameside	**11%**	**45%**	40.2	43.9	29.38	9.1
Trafford	**14%**	**42%**	60.5	56.8	15.39	14.5
Warrington	**11%**	**37%**	49.4	47.2	19.31	4.1
Wigan	**10%**	**42%**	40.6	45.3	24.86	2.7
Wirral	**10%**	**44%**	49.3	48.8	26.89	3.0
SOUTH EAST	**10%**	**46%**				
Bracknell Forest	**11%**	*	47.1	48.1	10.46	9.4
Brighton & Hove	**11%**	**41%**	47.4	48.0	23.44	10.9
Buckinghamshire	**13%**	**46%**	61.1	55.0	9.76	13.6
East Sussex	**10%**	**45%**	36.9	45.2	18.83	4.0
Hampshire	**10%**	**41%**	43.6	47.2	11.92	5.0
Isle of Wight	**10%**	**54%**	35.9	40.8	23.09	2.7
Kent	**9%**	**44%**	46.2	47.1	18.81	6.3
Medway	**11%**	**53%**	43.6	46.0	22.33	10.4
Milton Keynes	**11%**	**47%**	48.6	44.5	18.03	20.0
Oxfordshire	**10%**	**42%**	45.9	46.8	11.51	9.1
Portsmouth	**9%**	**40%**	34.4	41.0	27.05	11.6
Reading	**13%**	**45%**	49.7	49.0	19.32	25.2
Slough	**18%**	**59%**	64.5	53.2	22.87	54.3
Southampton	**8%**	**44%**	38.0	43.3	26.88	14.1
Surrey	**12%**	**49%**	52.2	50.2	9.39	9.6
West Berkshire	**10%**	**56%**	46.3	48.5	10.24	5.2
West Sussex	**9%**	**43%**	42.8	46.6	14.03	6.2
Windsor & Maidenhead	**15%**	*	55.6	51.5	8.86	13.9
Wokingham	**12%**	**56%**	55.8	52.3	5.65	11.6
SOUTH WEST	**9%**	**41%**				
Bath & North East Somerset	**10%**	**48%**	46.2	48.7	12.09	5.4
Bournemouth (pre-2019)	**12%**	*	45.6	50.0	21.85	8.0
Bournemouth, C'church & Poole (post-2019)	**10%**	**40%**	-	-	-	-
Bristol	**9%**	**46%**	41.7	45.5	27.16	16.0
Cornwall	**9%**	**36%**	37.7	45.1	23.83	1.8
Devon	**8%**	**43%**	37.5	45.8	17.09	2.5
Dorset (post-2019)	**10%**	**47%**	-	-	-	-
Dorset (pre-2019)	**12%**	**41%**	40.9	47.4	14.34	2.1
Gloucestershire	**8%**	**43%**	47.2	49.6	15.01	4.6
Isles Of Scilly	*	*	28.6	64.8	12.01	1.2
North Somerset	**10%**	**40%**	43.6	46.5	15.78	2.7
Plymouth	**7%**	**38%**	38.7	44.1	26.64	3.9

Poole	*	*	46.9	51.2	15.22	4.1
Somerset	8%	34%	36.0	44.9	17.78	2.0
South Gloucestershire	7%	35%	38.4	44.8	11.36	5.0
Swindon	7%	40%	37.7	43.9	17.86	10.2
Torbay	9%	42%	43.1	48.2	28.79	2.5
Wiltshire	11%	47%	46.4	48.3	13.47	3.4
WEST MIDLANDS	13%	48%				
Birmingham	18%	55%	53.4	45.8	37.77	42.1
Coventry	13%	45%	46.4	43.3	28.11	26.2
Dudley	12%	45%	39.1	43.4	22.96	10.0
Herefordshire	9%	41%	36.6	45.9	19.74	1.8
Sandwell	13%	42%	41.2	40.6	34.61	30.1
Shropshire	11%	53%	40.7	45.8	16.69	2.0
Solihull	12%	52%	48.3	47.2	17.24	10.9
Staffordshire	11%	45%	41.1	44.6	16.38	4.3
Stoke-on-Trent	9%	36%	36.6	41.9	34.36	11.4
Telford & Wrekin	12%	55%	44.1	45.4	24.85	7.3
Walsall	12%	54%	44.7	43.8	30.37	21.1
Warwickshire	11%	43%	49.2	49.4	15.01	7.3
Wolverhampton	14%	54%	46.7	44.4	33.18	32.0
Worcestershire	8%	39%	42.1	46.5	17.70	4.3
YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER	10%	46%				
Barnsley	8%	*	34.0	42.5	29.57	2.1
Bradford	10%	50%	44.6	42.7	33.17	32.6
Calderdale	11%	54%	50.4	49.4	24.61	10.3
Doncaster	7%	34%	36.5	42.7	29.05	4.7
East Riding of Yorkshire	13%	43%	45.2	48.1	15.79	1.9
Kingston upon Hull	11%	48%	36.1	43.3	41.24	5.9
Kirklees	11%	47%	45.8	45.4	23.96	20.9
Leeds	10%	49%	42.6	44.8	26.62	14.9
North East Lincolnshire	6%	*	38.2	43.4	30.90	2.6
North Lincolnshire	7%	*	35.8	44.8	21.36	4.0
North Yorkshire	12%	57%	47.7	48.5	14.65	2.7
Rotherham	7%	38%	38.0	43.6	28.28	6.4
Sheffield	10%	53%	46.0	44.6	27.57	16.3
Wakefield	7%	38%	38.3	43.5	26.89	4.6
York	10%	41%	48.3	49.7	12.22	5.7

* Suppressed due to low numbers

The highest participation rates were found to be in Westminster (27%), Kensington & Chelsea (27%) and Newham (26%); indeed, the highest 26 participation rates were all to be found in the London region. The highest participation rates outside of London related to Slough (18%), Birmingham (18%) and Luton (17%). Conversely, the lowest participation rates were found to be in North East Lincolnshire (6%), Swindon (7%) and Wakefield (7%); the lowest in London was for Bromley (13%). The highest participation rate is therefore over four times greater than the lowest, demonstrating a marked disparity in the likelihood of care-experienced young people engaging in higher education between different geographical areas.

Care-experienced young people who attained five or more 'good' GCSEs including English and mathematics at KS4 were substantially more likely to enter higher education during the relevant period. Once again, the highest rates were all in London, with the three highest being Camden (70%), Kensington & Chelsea (69%) and Waltham Forest (69%). The lowest rates were in South Tyneside (29%), County Durham (33%) and Doncaster (34%). Comparable area disparities are

therefore apparent in the data for care-experienced young people with a high attainment profile as for the wider group, with similarly-qualified young people being over twice as likely to participate in higher education in some areas than others.

At the regional level, the headline participation rate shows limited variation between 9% and 13%, with the exception of London as an outlier at 21%. London also has a notably higher rate among those care-experienced young people with five or more 'good' GCSEs including English and mathematics (at 60%), with the remaining regions varying between 41% (South West) and 51% (East of England).

6. Influence of contextual factors

The series of scatterplots (Figures 1 to 4) below illustrate the relationship between the participation rate for care-experienced young people and the four contextual variables provided in Table X, with each dot representing a single Local Authority.

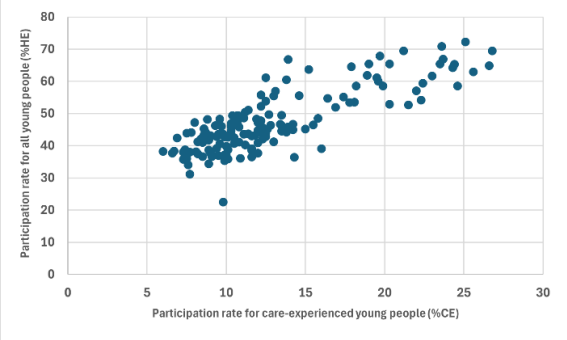


Figure 1: participation rate for all young people

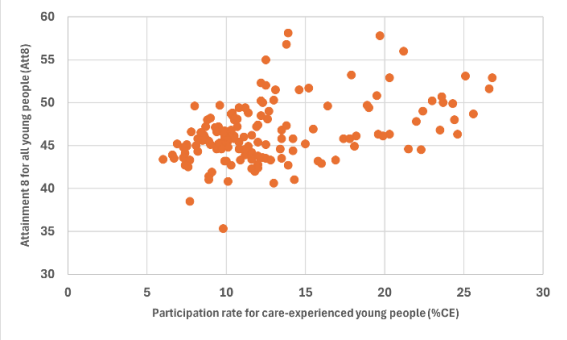


Figure 2: Attainment 8 for all young people

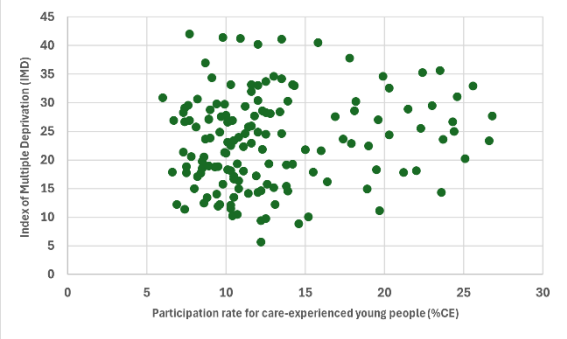


Figure 3: Index of Multiple Deprivation

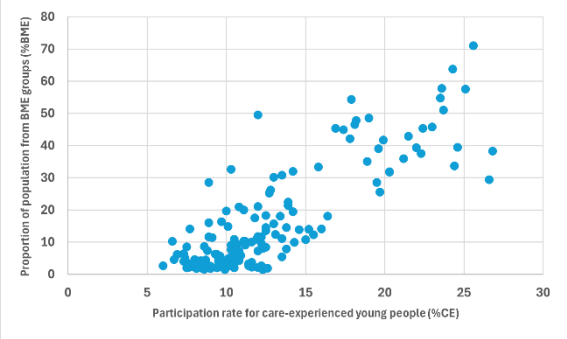


Figure 4: proportion of population from BME groups

Figures 1 and 4 show clear relationships, with the participation rate for care-experienced young people tending to be higher where (a) the participation rate among all young people is higher, and (b) where a higher proportion of the population identifies as a member of a BME group. The relationship is less clear in Figure 2, with some indication that higher participation rates are associated with higher Attainment 8 scores, but with substantial variability (as seen in the dispersion of the dots). Figure 3 suggests that there no relationship between participation rates and deprivation levels at the Local Authority level[10].

[10] The Pearson correlation coefficients were .823, .430, .139 and .836 across Figures 1 to 4 respectively.

7. Subgroup analyses

Table 7 explores the participation rates for three subgroups (by SEND, ethnicity and sex). This analysis is somewhat compromised by the small numbers in each subgroup in some Local Authorities; suppressed figures are denoted by an asterisk. Consistent with the descriptive analyses in Section 4 above, young people with SEND are less likely to participate in higher education in nearly all Local Authorities where comparisons are possible, whereas women and young people from BME communities are more likely throughout.

However, the disparities do vary considerably between Local Authorities. With respect to SEND, the difference in participation rates varies between +2 percentage points (Dorset pre-2019) and -16 percentage points (Merton). In other words, the rate for young people with SEND in Dorset prior to the 2019 boundary reorganisation was actually slightly higher than for other young people (13% compared to 11%), whereas in Merton it is substantially lower (10%, compared to 26%). Similarly, the disparity in participation rates by ethnicity varies between -2 percentage points (Suffolk) and -28 percentage points (Bexley), while the disparity between men and women varies between -1 percentage point (Portsmouth) and -22 percentage points (Redbridge).

Care is needed with the interpretation of this analysis. High disparities may suggest strong structural inequalities at work in a given Local Authority area, but they might also suggest particularly strong practice with certain groups or in certain schools. Conversely, low disparities between subgroups might suggest that the Local Authority has been successful in narrowing gaps in participation, but it may also arise where rates are universally low. Nevertheless, this analysis does provide some useful insights through comparing subgroups between areas.

There are also strong regional differences. The higher education participation rate for care-experienced young people with SEND generally varies between 5% and 8%, rising to 16% in London. However, the disparity compared to care-experienced young people without SEND is broadly constant at between -6 and -9 percentage points. There are greater disparities with respect to ethnicity, varying between -7 (South West) and -19 (North East) percentage points. Overall, care-experienced young people from BME communities are least likely to access higher education in the South West (15%) and most likely in the North East (28%). Conversely, care-experienced young people from the White British community have the lowest participation rates in the East Midlands (7%) and the highest in the North West (10%). Participation rates are broadly constant between regions for young men (between 6% and 8%) and young women (between 12% and 17%), with the exception of London, which has rates of 14% and 29% respectively. this also means that it has the greatest disparity at -15 percentage points for young men relative to young women; the other regions have disparities of between -6 and -9 percentage point.

Table 7: Local Authority participation rates by subgroups

Local Authority	SEND		BME		Sex	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	Male	Female
EAST MIDLANDS	**13%**	**5%**	**7%**	**16%**	**6%**	**13%**
Derby	16%	5%	8%	14%	7%	14%
Derbyshire	12%	5%	8%	*	6%	12%
Leicester	16%	9%	6%	21%	7%	18%
Leicestershire	13%	*	7%	16%	6%	12%
Lincolnshire	12%	5%	7%	*	5%	11%
North Northamptonshire (post-2021)	*	*	*	*	*	*
Northamptonshire (pre-2021)	14%	5%	7%	17%	5%	14%
Nottingham	12%	5%	5%	14%	7%	11%
Nottinghamshire	11%	4%	7%	14%	5%	10%
Rutland	*	*	*	*	*	*
West Northamptonshire (post-2021)	12%	*	*	*	*	*
EAST OF ENGLAND	**15%**	**8%**	**9%**	**20%**	**8%**	**15%**
Bedford (post-2009)	18%	10%	9%	22%	10%	19%
Bedfordshire (pre-2009)	*	*	*	*	*	*
Cambridgeshire	10%	7%	6%	20%	7%	11%
Central Bedfordshire (post-2009)	*	*	6%	*	*	11%
Essex	13%	7%	9%	20%	7%	15%
Hertfordshire	17%	9%	10%	22%	9%	18%
Luton	20%	13%	11%	22%	10%	24%
Norfolk	13%	7%	9%	15%	7%	14%
Peterborough	17%	7%	10%	18%	9%	15%
Southend-on-Sea	19%	*	11%	*	10%	15%
Suffolk	13%	6%	10%	12%	7%	13%
Thurrock	22%	*	10%	29%	13%	20%
LONDON	**25%**	**16%**	**9%**	**26%**	**14%**	**29%**
Barking and Dagenham	25%	12%	8%	31%	12%	28%
Barnet	26%	17%	13%	25%	16%	28%
Bexley	22%	9%	7%	35%	9%	23%
Brent	27%	19%	*	25%	16%	34%
Bromley	16%	9%	9%	20%	10%	17%
Camden	26%	22%	12%	29%	18%	31%
City of London	*	*	*	*	*	*
Croydon	19%	15%	8%	19%	12%	31%
Ealing	27%	19%	15%	26%	17%	30%
Enfield	24%	15%	9%	24%	11%	30%
Greenwich	27%	15%	9%	32%	16%	29%
Hackney	26%	18%	*	25%	17%	28%
Hammersmith & Fulham	24%	17%	*	25%	12%	31%
Haringey	27%	22%	12%	27%	17%	33%
Harrow	27%	19%	*	27%	16%	34%
Havering	19%	*	10%	28%	13%	18%
Hillingdon	28%	12%	7%	32%	18%	28%
Hounslow	23%	14%	9%	26%	13%	25%
Islington	23%	17%	10%	24%	13%	29%
Kensington & Chelsea	30%	22%	*	29%	18%	36%
Kingston upon Thames	27%	*	*	27%	*	31%
Lambeth	25%	18%	*	24%	15%	30%
Lewisham	19%	16%	*	22%	10%	26%
Merton	26%	10%	*	25%	10%	29%
Newham	31%	19%	*	30%	19%	32%
Redbridge	31%	16%	*	30%	15%	36%
Richmond upon Thames	18%	*	*	21%	*	21%

Southwark	27%	17%	8%	28%	14%	33%
Sutton	18%	10%	11%	20%	10%	17%
Tower Hamlets	29%	17%	11%	27%	16%	30%
Waltham Forest	20%	16%	*	22%	11%	27%
Wandsworth	23%	16%	*	24%	11%	29%
Westminster	30%	23%	*	28%	20%	35%
NORTH EAST	**14%**	**7%**	**9%**	**28%**	**8%**	**14%**
County Durham	9%	7%	8%	*	7%	9%
Darlington	12%	*	8%	*	*	12%
Gateshead	16%	*	10%	35%	6%	18%
Hartlepool	14%	*	10%	*	10%	13%
Middlesbrough	15%	8%	8%	30%	7%	17%
Newcastle upon Tyne	19%	5%	8%	32%	9%	16%
North Tyneside	13%	7%	10%	*	8%	12%
Northumberland	10%	7%	9%	*	*	13%
Redcar and Cleveland	17%	*	12%	*	*	19%
South Tyneside	12%	*	8%	*	*	10%
Stockton-on-Tees	18%	8%	11%	36%	10%	17%
Sunderland	13%	7%	9%	*	8%	12%
NORTH WEST	**16%**	**7%**	**10%**	**24%**	**8%**	**16%**
Blackburn with Darwen	16%	9%	10%	26%	11%	16%
Blackpool	13%	*	7%	*	5%	12%
Bolton	20%	6%	10%	30%	8%	19%
Bury	22%	*	12%	27%	10%	21%
Cheshire (pre-2009)	*	*	*	*	*	*
Cheshire East (post-2009)	14%	8%	11%	*	7%	16%
Cheshire West & Chester (post-2009)	14%	7%	10%	*	7%	14%
Cumbria	14%	5%	10%	*	7%	14%
Halton	16%	*	11%	*	*	17%
Knowsley	13%	*	10%	*	6%	14%
Lancashire	14%	5%	9%	20%	7%	14%
Liverpool	17%	9%	11%	22%	10%	17%
Manchester	22%	9%	9%	25%	11%	21%
Oldham	17%	10%	9%	25%	8%	19%
Rochdale	18%	6%	9%	24%	8%	18%
Salford	18%	9%	11%	30%	11%	18%
Sefton	14%	7%	11%	*	8%	15%
St. Helens	16%	*	9%	*	*	15%
Stockport	18%	9%	11%	31%	9%	19%
Tameside	16%	*	9%	31%	9%	14%
Trafford	19%	9%	10%	26%	11%	17%
Warrington	13%	9%	10%	*	8%	14%
Wigan	12%	7%	8%	*	6%	13%
Wirral	14%	8%	9%	*	8%	14%
SOUTH EAST	**14%**	**7%**	**8%**	**18%**	**7%**	**14%**
Bracknell Forest	13%	*	*	*	*	13%
Brighton & Hove	15%	7%	9%	17%	8%	14%
Buckinghamshire	16%	8%	9%	19%	8%	18%
East Sussex	14%	5%	8%	15%	7%	13%
Hampshire	13%	5%	8%	18%	7%	12%
Isle of Wight	12%	8%	11%	*	8%	12%
Kent	12%	6%	8%	14%	7%	12%
Medway	14%	8%	9%	21%	7%	16%
Milton Keynes	14%	7%	8%	20%	8%	16%
Oxfordshire	13%	7%	8%	17%	6%	15%
Portsmouth	12%	6%	7%	18%	9%	9%
Reading	16%	10%	10%	16%	8%	17%
Slough	28%	*	*	23%	11%	25%

Southampton	12%	5%	4%	22%	7%	9%
Surrey	16%	8%	10%	20%	8%	17%
West Berkshire	12%	*	9%	*	12%	*
West Sussex	14%	5%	8%	15%	6%	13%
Windsor & Maidenhead	17%	*	15%	*	*	21%
Wokingham	14%	*	*	*	*	*
SOUTH WEST	**12%**	**6%**	**8%**	**15%**	**6%**	**12%**
Bath & North East Somerset	14%	*	8%	*	*	12%
Bournemouth (pre-2019)	16%	*	*	*	*	*
Bournemouth, C'church & Poole (post-2019)	12%	8%	8%	*	*	14%
Bristol	11%	6%	6%	14%	6%	12%
Cornwall	12%	6%	9%	*	5%	13%
Devon	11%	5%	8%	12%	6%	11%
Dorset (post-2019)	12%	8%	10%	*	8%	12%
Dorset (pre-2019)	11%	13%	12%	*	11%	14%
Gloucestershire	11%	4%	8%	10%	5%	12%
Isles Of Scilly	*	*	*	*	*	*
North Somerset	13%	7%	9%	*	*	14%
Plymouth	10%	6%	6%	*	5%	11%
Poole	*	*	*	*	*	*
Somerset	12%	4%	7%	*	4%	11%
South Gloucestershire	9%	*	6%	*	*	10%
Swindon	10%	*	5%	*	5%	8%
Torbay	12%	7%	8%	*	7%	11%
Wiltshire	15%	5%	10%	*	8%	13%
WEST MIDLANDS	**16%**	**8%**	**9%**	**22%**	**8%**	**17%**
Birmingham	23%	11%	9%	25%	12%	24%
Coventry	17%	8%	9%	22%	8%	18%
Dudley	14%	7%	10%	20%	7%	16%
Herefordshire	11%	*	8%	*	8%	*
Sandwell	19%	6%	10%	18%	8%	20%
Shropshire	14%	*	10%	*	8%	14%
Solihull	15%	7%	8%	19%	10%	15%
Staffordshire	13%	8%	10%	20%	7%	15%
Stoke-on-Trent	10%	7%	8%	16%	5%	14%
Telford & Wrekin	17%	*	10%	25%	9%	15%
Walsall	17%	*	9%	18%	7%	17%
Warwickshire	15%	6%	9%	17%	8%	14%
Wolverhampton	19%	9%	9%	24%	9%	20%
Worcestershire	10%	7%	8%	11%	5%	13%
YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER	**14%**	**6%**	**8%**	**18%**	**7%**	**13%**
Barnsley	10%	*	6%	*	*	10%
Bradford	15%	6%	6%	17%	8%	13%
Calderdale	15%	*	9%	*	*	18%
Doncaster	11%	*	6%	*	6%	10%
East Riding of Yorkshire	16%	*	12%	*	9%	17%
Kingston upon Hull	15%	6%	9%	27%	7%	15%
Kirklees	14%	6%	8%	19%	7%	15%
Leeds	14%	6%	7%	20%	7%	13%
North East Lincolnshire	*	*	5%	*	*	*
North Lincolnshire	10%	*	7%	*	*	*
North Yorkshire	17%	8%	12%	*	8%	18%
Rotherham	12%	*	6%	*	*	10%
Sheffield	15%	5%	7%	15%	7%	14%
Wakefield	8%	5%	6%	*	5%	10%
York	16%	*	9%	*	*	13%

* Suppressed due to low numbers

8. Data considerations and limitations

As with all secondary data analysis, the findings are influenced by the data that are available and their applicability to the research questions. This is even more salient in a study such as this, where a long timeframe is being examined and during which elements of national policy, local practice and data recording are likely to change. This necessitates decisions about which data are analysed and how they are included in analysis; some of these may be essentially arbitrary. The following bullet points outline the major data considerations within this study:

- The grading scale for GCSEs, which comprise the majority of KS4 qualifications, altered over the period being examined (from A*-G to 1-9). The scales are not directly comparable, but grades of A* to C and 4 to 9 are considered 'good' passes to provide continuity across the period.

- The four contextual variables (%HE, Att8, IMD and %BME) represent single time points, in contrast to the pooled data for care-experienced young people (%CE and %CE5+). The time points were chosen to reflect a period of stability in Local Authority boundaries and the availability of the data – for example, IMD is only published roughly every five years, while the Census is held every ten years. Other time points were explored, but they did not substantially alter the findings. Other data were also explored (e.g. IDACI rather than IMD), but these also provided comparable findings.

- Several of the demographic variables (e.g. SEND or ethnicity) may be recorded differently for an individual in different datasets or at different time points, either due to error or a change in categorisation by the young person or the professionals working with them. For example, the recorded SEND type might vary through time with changing diagnoses. Similarly, a young person might move between Local Authorities if their circumstances change. As a working principle, the last recorded data has been used, but this might not adequately represent the whole of their childhood.

- Some of the participation rates quoted in this report are based on relatively small groups of young people. This is unavoidable in the context of looking at a generally rare event (i.e. participating in higher education) for a small social group (i.e. care-experienced young people). Readers should therefore exercise caution in interpreting the figures and avoid over-extrapolating from minor differences between Local Authorities.

- The HESAD, for the period covered by this study, did not include all forms of higher education. Specifically, higher education undertaken (a) outside the UK, (b) in a further education college, or (c) with a private provider, will not generally be recorded. All the participation rates in this report are necessarily an underestimate of the true value. The scale of this underestimate is not known, but it is unlikely to radically alter the conclusions of this report.

9. Conclusions

Research Question 1: What are the higher education participation rates for care-experienced young people at the local government region and Local Authority levels?

The overall participation rate for care-experienced young people in England in this dataset is 13%. At a regional level, the rates vary between 9% (East Midlands and South West) and 21% (London). At the Local Authority level, the rates vary between 6% (North East Lincolnshire) and 27% (Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea). Most Local Authorities within London have higher participation rates than most Local Authorities outside of London.

Research Question 2: How, if at all, do these participation rates vary by sex, ethnicity or special educational needs and disabilities?

In nearly every instance, participation rates at the regional and Local Authority levels are substantially higher among care-experienced young people who (a) are women, (b) are from BME communities, and (c) do not have SEND. The disparities between subgroups show marked differences across regions and Local Authorities, reflecting variable levels of access to higher education.

Research Question 3: What relationships, if any, exist between the participation rates and background demographic data at the Local Authority level (e.g. average qualification levels or neighbourhood deprivation)?

At the Local Authority level, there were strong positive relationships between the participation rate for care-experienced young people and (a) the participation rate for all young people, and (b) the proportion of the population from BME communities. There was a weaker positive relationship with average qualification levels, but no relationship with neighbourhood deprivation. In other words, care-experienced young people are more likely to access higher education in more ethnically diverse areas, where KS4 attainment is higher and/or where higher education is normalised among young people. This accounts for some, but not all, of the London 'uplift' in participation rates. This nature of this uplift is beyond the scope of this report, but may relate to the abundance of higher education providers in London and the relative ease of travel around the city.

Research Question 4: To what extent can differences in participation rates be accounted for by differences in the individual's Key Stage 4 qualifications or demographic profile?

In keeping with previous studies, there are clear relationships at the individual level between a care-experienced young person's propensity to access higher education and (a) their KS4 attainment, (b) their sex, (c) their ethnicity, (d) whether they have SEND, and (e) whether they are a UASC. These have a substantial impact on aggregated participation rates at the regional or Local Authority level. In other words, the rates reported in this report are heavily influenced by the profile of the young people in care in each area, rather than solely reflecting the effectiveness of local practice. Determining whether these relationships account for <u>all</u> the differences in participation rates is beyond the scope of this report and will be addressed in future analysis.

10. Moving forward

We believe the way forward, to achieve the systemic change needed to transform care-experienced young people's educational outcomes across the post-16 education sector, is a shared one. NNECL therefore advocates for:

- **A revised UK-wide minimum offer from Local Authorities**, ensuring all care-experienced young people have access to meaningful educational support and clear pathways into further and higher education, regardless of where they live. The offer should be clearly communicated to young people and those who support them.
- **An extension of Local Authority support for care leavers engaged in education from age 25 to age 30**, recognising that many care-experienced learners require longer to access and complete post-16 qualifications, and that the current statutory framework has not delivered the progress needed to close participation gaps.
- **A mandatory baseline standard of training for Personal Advisors on post-16 education pathways for care-experienced young people.** Personal Advisors play vital a central role in supporting transition to adulthood and should be equally equipped to provide consistent, informed guidance, so they can advocate for educational progression. This would strengthen collaboration, reduce the risk of young people falling through gaps in provision, and ensure that tools such as Personal Education Plans and the Further Education Bursary are used consistently across all Local Authorities.
- **The adoption of the NNECL Quality Mark as a mandatory standard across further and higher education providers in England.** This would ensure care-experienced young people enter educational environments who have evidenced the ways in which their support and practice is impacting on care-experienced learners progression.

However, improving outcomes is not solely the responsibility of education providers or statutory services. Care-experienced young people are shaped day to day, by the people around them in their everyday lives: employers, barbers, youth workers, sports coaches, newsagents, mentors and other trusted adults. These relationships play a vital role in challenging expectations, broadening horizons and helping young people imagine futures that might otherwise feel out of reach. We therefore call for a wider national conversation about the role communities can play in supporting the educational ambitions of care-experienced young people. If more young people are to progress into ambitious post-16 pathways, we must create a culture in which those pathways are visible, actively encouraged and reinforced through everyday relationships across society.

This report shows that low participation is not inevitable. Some Local Authorities are already achieving significantly stronger outcomes than others – even where the demographic context is similar. The challenge is to understand what is working, share that learning, and ensure that every care-experienced young person, regardless of where they live, has access to the opportunities, encouragement and conditions needed to fulfil their potential.

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We welcome working in partnership with organisations who are well placed to deliver change at scale. Please get in touch to find out how you can get involved, make a difference and transform the educational opportunities for care experienced people.

Thank you,
Team NNECL

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