

# Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill – Youth Futures Foundation Response

January 2025

## About Youth Futures Foundation

Youth Futures Foundation is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people. We want to see an equitable future society where all young people have the opportunity to be in good work. Our work has two overarching objectives to bring about system change for marginalised young people:

1. **To find and generate high-quality evidence** to better understand England's youth unemployment and inactivity challenge, and most importantly to learn what solutions work to address this. We do this through bringing together the best evidence already in existence and build on this by conducting original research and testing and evaluating promising interventions to produce much needed new evidence where there are gaps.
2. **To put evidence into action with policy makers and employers** who have the means to make direct impactful change for young people. We do this through translating the evidence practically for stakeholders to use and understand, and through partnerships and engagement to influence, inform and support them as decision makers to back evidence-based interventions that work.

Throughout our work, we proudly involve the voices, perspectives and participation of young people experiencing marginalisation, through our Future Voices Group, our young Board members and beyond.

## Our response

Our response will centre on part one of the Bill exploring children's social care, as care-experienced young people are a key cohort of young people we focus on. As our expertise is primarily on the systemic barriers for young people entering employment, we will be responding more generally to the consultation and providing a wider picture on the challenges, what works and our key recommendations to support care-experienced young people to access good quality work.

## What are the challenges care-experience young people face?

The latest [Office for National Statistics](#) figures show NEET (not in education, employment or training) rates in the UK remain high at 13.2%, with 946,000 16 to 24-year-olds now out of education, training or employment. This is nearly a quarter of a million more young people (302,000) than three years ago when NEET rates were at their lowest at 9.5% and is now equivalent to 1 in 8 young people.

A specific group of young people that experience additional barriers and are more likely to be NEET include young people with care experience. There are currently 84,000 children in



care in England and many face a care cliff edge of support at 18 or younger, experiencing significant challenges in making a successful transition to adulthood and employment. Despite promising initiatives focused on care experience young people, more effort and funding is required to ensure that every care leaver can find a good quality job as soon as possible to help them start their journey towards financial security and independence.

- **Young care leavers are much more likely to be NEET than their peers.** 41% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 in England were NEET in 2021, compared to around 9% of the age group as a whole. ([Association for Young People's Health, 2022](#)) (AYPH 2022)
- When entering the labour market, **care-experienced young people often encounter precarious employment conditions in marginal or insecure jobs** with zero-hour or temporary contracts. They are also significantly more likely to be economically inactive ([Harrison et al, 2023](#)).
- **Only 20% of care leavers attain five GCSE A\* to C grades (including English and maths)** compared to 62% among the general population, and **10% of care leavers do not sit any GCSEs at all.** In addition, **26% of care leavers were found to be 'persistent absentees' at secondary school**, compared to 9.3% for all pupils. These gaps impede their opportunities for accessing work or post-16 education ([Ibid](#)).
- The two main drivers of poor EET outcomes are:
  - **Disrupted educational experience and poor KS4 attainment.** Only 20% of care leavers attain five GCSE A\* - C grades including English & Maths and this acts to filter care leavers out from EET pathways. ([Harrison et al, 2023](#), [Crowley et al 2023](#)).
  - **The prevalence of SEN, Mental Health and Disability.** 62% of care leavers were identified as having a high level of need. This is connected to trauma before, during and after care and learning difficulties that might be diagnosed late due to conflation with other difficulties at school. ([Harrison et al, 2023](#), [Crowley et al 2023](#)).

## What works in helping young care-experienced people into work?

1. **Intensive, consistent, ongoing support, including expertise in access to EET, support for the practical things that care leavers face** such as accommodation & finance, and support for the mental health, trauma, relationship-building and emotional wellbeing aspects of care leavers' lives. Some groups will also need specialist support (young parents, those with substance abuse or offending behaviour), and small-scale targeted pre-employment offers may be of benefit for them. ([DfE 2014](#), [Newton et al, 2020](#)).
2. **Evidence shows an increased focus on education pathways and career planning while a young person is still in care** can improve their chances in the labour market, as this allows an early assessment of their strengths and aspirations and helps them address any gaps in skills, abilities and motivation. Groups at higher risk such as care leavers with emotional, mental or behavioural problems may require more intensive and structured support to facilitate their post-16 participation, with some young people potentially benefiting from a delayed or gradual move into employment ([Dixon 2007](#), [Harrison et al, 2023](#)).
3. **Support in accessing Further Education.** Harrison et al (2023) reported 67.9% engaging at some point up in the period they studied (up to 20 years and 7 months.) This is an important route for those whose education was disrupted during KS4.



Our [Youth Employment toolkit](#) has found vocational training interventions (on-the-job training, off-the-job training, and apprenticeships) are likely to have the greatest impact on employment outcomes for care leavers. Evidence also shows that a strong system of 'wraparound' support for care leavers, can help them make the most of learning opportunities and tackle potential barriers to work and learning (such as mental health issues, problems with housing, access to transport, etc).

To test certain interventions we are currently undertaking two Randomised Control Trials focused on care experienced young people.

### **Reboot West (RW3)**

Reboot West 3 is a programme run by 1625 Independent People (1625ip), that works with care experienced young people aged 16-25 across Bristol and the South West, who are NEET or at high risk of becoming NEET and helping them to access and sustain learning, training and work as well as helping them to achieve stability and wellbeing in their lives.

The 1625ip coaches form trusting relationships with young people and together they explore what matters most to the young person and what they are good at, helping them to gain the confidence, skills, motivation and qualifications to progress to meaningful work, including job coaching and practical help. Reboot Coaches also work holistically to ensure the young person is in a safe and secure physical and mental state to begin EET work through Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a psychological approach that helps young people to build commitment and make positive choices.

Youth Futures has commissioned BIT to undertake a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) of RW3 – the first ever in the UK looking at the impact of a therapeutic approach for care experienced young people – to generate robust evidence on how the programme supports young people into positive education, employment and training opportunities. The RCT will finish in July 2026 and alongside 1625ip, Youth Futures plans to use the findings to influence a step change in how care experienced young people, some of the most marginalised young people, are empowered to access good education and training opportunities and find high quality work.

### **Drive Forward**

The 'Supporting Care Leavers into Employment' (SCLiE) programme, delivered by Drive Forward Foundation (DFF), aims to address the barriers that care experienced young people face in relation to finding high quality employment in London. Care experienced young people receive a package of individualised support designed to help them develop the skills and networks they need to find fulfilling employment, while also supporting them with the other barriers in their life.

Care experienced young people are offered a mix of tailored one-to-one support, intensive employability skills training, in-work mentoring support and opportunities provided through working in partnership with corporate partners, prospective employers and local authorities.



Youth Futures is now commissioning a Randomised Controlled Trial to build robust evidence to understand whether the programme increases the likelihood that care experienced young people enter education, employment or training vs. the 'business-as-usual' local authority support, working with local authorities to support with the referral of care experienced young people to the programme.

## Our recommendations

### **Launch a 'care leavers employer support package' increasing access both to apprenticeships and to the Kickstart scheme for care leavers**

From September 2020 until March 2022, the 'Kickstart' scheme funded new 6-month job placements for 16- to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit who were at risk of long-term unemployment. The DWP recognised Kickstart should be targeted at people who would otherwise face significant disadvantage in the labour market, but the lack of formal eligibility criteria or targets for participation by particular groups such as care leavers meant that many care leavers – both those claiming Universal Credit and those outside of the benefit system – missed out on the job placements provided by Kickstart. The government should therefore revive the Kickstart scheme but specifically target the job placements at care leavers and include a dedicated and structured training element alongside additional support to overcome barriers to employment.

More proactive outreach and practical support which is needed to encourage both apprenticeship and kickstart take up by care leavers. We recommend that employers and training providers who recruit a care leaver onto an apprenticeship or a kickstart programme should receive £3,000 each. With this new set of £3,000 bursaries in place for care leavers, employers and providers, the government should aim to treble the number of care leavers starting an apprenticeship each year to 900.

### **Give greater financial assistance to those leaving care at age 16**

The 16-19 Bursary Fund provides targeted funding to help young people aged 16 to 19 with the costs of staying on in education and training. Care leavers are entitled to bursaries of up to £1,200 a year, yet [current DfE guidance](#) states that "students should be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the types of costs they have and must not be automatically awarded £1,200." A recent FOI request to the Department for Education found that vulnerable groups such as care leavers only receive an average bursary of £969, meaning that they are missing out on over £200 of financial assistance at this crucial time in their lives. If the goal is to provide care leavers with the best possible chance of making a successful transition from education to employment, the DfE guidance should be amended so that care leavers automatically receive the full bursary from government during their studies. As well as scrapping the discriminatory age bands for the minimum wage, also reviewing the age banding for apprenticeships, which act as a barrier to young people such as care leavers who are not able to live at home with their family.

In addition to the above:



- Considering whether additional bursaries might be offered to care leavers undertaking apprenticeships to recognise the extra costs that they face as they are not able to live at home with their family.
- As part of the strategy for post-16 education, considering the support available for care experienced young people, reflecting the fact that children in care often have disrupted education and complete their Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications later than other young people.
- In transforming Further Education Colleges into specialist Technical Colleges, recognising that this provision offers a lifeline to young people, such as those with care experience, who have had a disrupted education. A recent study indicated that 67% of care leavers accessed further education provision – often to re-sit functional skills, L2 or L3 qualifications. These opportunities for a “second chance” at qualifications should not be put at risk by the changes planned.

