



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Children's Homes](#), HC 83

Tuesday 1 February 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 February 2022.

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Miriam Cates; Brendan Clarke-Smith; Tom Hunt; Kim Johnson; Dr Caroline Johnson; Ian Mearns; Kate Osborne.

Patrick Ward, Chair of the National Association of Virtual School Heads, and Henrietta Imoreh, Participation Officer, Become, and Alex Jones, St Christopher's, were in attendance

Questions 253-308

Witnesses

[I](#): Young person A, Young person B, Young person C and Young person D.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Young person A, Young person B, Young person C and Young person D.

Q253 **Chair:** Welcome. Good morning to you.

It is really good to see you here today in our Committee. I thought we would go round the table and do some introductions. We will say who we are, and if you could introduce yourselves as well.

I start by saying thank you so much for coming. It is going to be very informal; we just want to learn from you—that is why we have asked you to come today. We are trying to make things better and get the Government to have better policies, so that is why we wanted to get advice.

I will start. I'm Robert, I'm the Chairman of the Education Committee. That is an elected position in the House of Commons—you have to stand for election and be voted for by all the other MPs from all the parties in the House of Commons. I will start with you Young person C—a would-be MP, as I understand it.

Young person C: Hi. I am Young person C. I am here today to talk about a few things.

Chair: Thank you for coming.

Dr Caroline Johnson: Hi. I am Caroline Johnson. I am the MP for Sleaford and North Hykeham. I have a background as a children's doctor before I became an MP.

Chair: I should have said that I am the MP for Harlow in Essex. I don't know if anyone has ever been to Essex.

Young person C: Yes, I have.

Chair: Which part?

Young person C: What's it called? Chafford Hundred.

Chair: Ah, very nice.

Miriam Cates: I am Miriam. I am the Member of Parliament for Penistone and Stocksbridge, which is near Sheffield in South Yorkshire. I used to be a science teacher. I have three children who are 13, 11 and nearly 8.

Young person B: My name is Young person B. I am from [place name redacted]—, predominantly [place name redacted]—. I am here to help with your inquiry.



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Tom Hunt: I am Tom Hunt. I am the Member of Parliament for Ipswich in Suffolk. I have a particular interest in special educational needs.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I'm Brendan Clarke-Smith. I am the MP for Bassetlaw, which is in north Nottinghamshire. Before I was a Member of Parliament, I was a secondary school teacher.

Portia Dadley: Hi, I'm Portia. I work for *Hansard*. We work right across the House of Commons. Everything that MPs say in a public forum, we write it down so you can read about it afterwards.

Patrick Ward: Hello. I'm Patrick Ward, I'm headteacher of Lewisham Virtual School and I am also chair of virtual schools nationally. I am responsible for the education of children with a social worker.

Henrietta Imoreh: I'm Henrietta. I work for an organisation called *Become*, which also provides the secretariat for the APPG for looked after children.

Alex Jones: I'm Alex. I work for a charity called St Christopher's.

Young person D: Hi, I'm Young person D. I'm from [place name redacted].

Chair: A beautiful place—I often go on my holidays there.

Ian Mearns: Where about in [place name redacted]?

Young person D: [place name redacted].

Kate Osborne: We were just having a chat. [Place name redacted] is a really lovely place. I go through it on the train when I travel up and down.

I'm Kate. I am the MP for Jarrow in the north-east. For those who don't know where Jarrow is, it is next to Gateshead, where Ian's from, not far from Sunderland or Newcastle. Before I was an MP—I was elected in 2019—I worked for Royal Mail for 25 years and I was also a foster carer. I have been in here since December 2019.

Kim Johnson: Hi everyone. My name's Kim Johnson, the Labour MP for Liverpool, Riverside—the best city in the world, with the best football club in the world. Before I was elected, I worked in adult social services. I was elected in 2019. Welcome to you all today.

Young person A: Hi, I'm Young person A. I am currently an intern at the Foreign Office. I work for the Mayor of London, for London's Violence Reduction Unit. I am also from [place name redacted]. I am happy to be here today.

Chair: Thank you. Thank you for coming.

Ian Mearns: I am Ian Mearns, MP for Gateshead, which is in the north-east of England, on the south bank of the river, opposite Newcastle-upon-Tyne, next to Jarrow.



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Chair: Thank you to you all. I don't know if you would like to start by asking us questions first. You can ask us anything—our favourite movie, why we are MPs, about the House of Commons and what it is like to work here—and then we will start asking you questions. We can leave that to the end if you prefer. Are we all right to use your first names, everybody? Yes. Young person B—thank you.

Young person B: What are your key aims for this inquiry? What is the mandate you have been given to give back to the Government?

Chair: What we are looking at in our inquiry is predominantly the education and educational outcomes, and what happens after children finish their care. We have had a lot of witnesses come, from councils to Government Ministers, to Ofsted, which inspects, to advisers, such as Patrick.

We are trying to learn what is wrong with the system, because there are clearly a lot of things wrong. Just 7% of children in care get good Maths and English GCSEs for example. We are trying to look at solutions.

We have this session with you and then we have one final session with the Minister who has to answer some questions from us, then we will write a report that we then present to Parliament and the Government. The Government have to respond saying what they are going to do about it.

Dr Caroline Johnson: It is worth pointing out that the Committee decides its own topics. It isn't that the Government ask us to do specific things for them. We are independent and we scrutinise and hold them to account.

Young person B: So do you pick the core subjects?

Dr Caroline Johnson: We pick what we want to investigate and then they have to come and answer the questions.

Ian Mearns: Can I quickly add to that? When we do an inquiry, we write the report and make recommendations to Government, and then Government have to formally respond to those recommendations. When we write a report and get the official Government response, the initial Government response is usually quite dismissive of the recommendations, but it's funny how recommendations turn up as Government policy somewhere down the line.

Chair: Would anybody else like to ask anything?

Young person D: Just before I begin, are we disturbing you, Tom, with your phone?

Tom Hunt: Sorry.

Young person D: Anyway, I was wondering what each of your personal interests were in improving the care system.



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Chair: That is a good question. My interest, my passion, is education and skills, so I would like to see better education for children in care, and pupils and students in care getting better outcomes. Would anyone else like to answer that?

Kim Johnson: For me, the answer is linked to Robert's answer to the question, about improving life chances, because the evidence sessions that we have had indicate that children and young people in care fare worse than other children in terms of education and becoming NEETs. And the care-to-prison pipeline is often a big issue. I think a lot of that is linked to inconsistency—a high turnover of social workers, a high turnover of schools and the lack of stability. I think that to be able to deal with that, the sector needs to be adequately resourced and funded and needs adequately trained staff to meet the needs of children and young people in the sector.

Young person B: How can you possibly have the data on that when people don't have to be registered in private care homes that offer education on-site? How can you regulate that if you don't have a facility to register them or even for Ofsted sometimes to go in, and so on? So how can you collect the data for that to actually transpire—

Kim Johnson: I think that has been one of the issues that we have discussed in this inquiry so far with Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner—the major gaps in data collection. If you don't have data, you don't have an evidence base, so it's very difficult to put in place improvements. Unregulated services and education being delivered on site by untrained teachers is a massive issue that we have heard about during the evidence sessions that we have had and it will be included in our report when we conclude all the sessions, Young person B.

Young person C: I feel like a huge part of the problem with the education system and children in care is the moving around a lot. Children in care move around quite a bit. I have: I'm at my fourth high school, and even in primary school, I kept on being asked whether I wanted to move. I feel like that causes a huge issue mentally and it really disturbs the child's education, because if you are a young child, the last thing you need is a lack of stability. How can you focus on things like your education if you haven't got that and if you have to constantly be going to new environments where you know nobody and nothing and you just have to start anew?

Kim Johnson: Again, all those issues about the impact that moving around has on young people have been raised with us directly by people who have come to our evidence sessions. Clearly, there is an impact on mental health and an impact on educational attainment, but there is also the impact that it has because of having to develop relationships at every single institution that you go to. Those kinds of things need to be looked at and addressed to provide a level of stability for children and young people who are in care.

Young person B: It just causes a resource problem in the future, because



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we get criticised for not being in education; we get moved across the country. I was in 56 different placements. I went from [place name redacted]—to [place name redacted]—, from private to non-private. I was in a transition from a local authority that changed and cancelled all the local authority care homes. That was so difficult for me, and now it's causing a bigger resource issue, especially with the SEND education as well. I'm finding that getting that is nearly impossible at my age. That for me is something that's really important and something that I can't emphasise enough.

Q254 Chair: We are going to divide the session into four different sections. Some of you have done this already, but can you set out what your educational experiences have been? What are the problems, but also what do you think the solutions are? Any of you feel free to come in.

Young person A: I went into care quite late when I was about 15. Even before that, I was moved around from school to school and I ended up in a PRU—a pupil referral unit. From there, my education went downhill. Within the process of being in the PRU, I ended up going into care, which was probably the hardest thing ever, because I had to deal with being in an environment where, sometimes, I saw the PRU as being a place where “the bad kids” end up.

In that sense, you kind of get limited from doing things that you would do in any other school. For example, I was only set out to get five GCSEs at the time, but even then the resources were weak. They didn't have a lot of teachers, so your English teacher would be your maths teacher, art teacher or music teacher. There were no activities for us to do. It felt like we were locked up in a prison.

I remember my dad took me there before I started—before I moved into care. He was like, “This is the end of your life. You're not going to go anywhere or do anything with yourself”. I have always been very academic and smart and have always enjoyed school, but it got to the point where I didn't want to go into school any more. It was like, what am I going into school for? I am literally not learning anything here. I am in an environment where I might not necessarily be a bad kid, I have had my troubles from school and my dilemmas, but I am not getting the support and service that I need.

The reason I ended up in care was because I literally broke down in front of a teacher. I think she was a support worker and I literally crumbled in front of her and told her everything I was dealing with in school and outside school. No one would have known that unless I had felt I could go to her.

Even after I left the PRU, because I had to move out of the area—I moved to [place name redacted]—I didn't even know if I was ever going to get any GCSEs. I had just sat my English exam in year 10. That was something I could get a grip on. I was in [place name redacted]—for about two months and did not complete any GCSEs there.



I then got moved to [place name redacted]—, which is not a diverse area. I was the only black girl in my class. It was hard, because I had moved from [place name redacted]— which is quite diverse and I had friends. There was no support with my cultural needs or with exploring the things that I like to do or even make plans or even achieve three GCSEs to get into college. I just remember I had to cram in about three months things that you learn from year 10 to year 11.

I managed to come out of it with six GCSEs, which I was happy with, but that was down to me saying to myself, you need to start bucking up your ideas now. You need to start working towards something. Even though I went through so many schools and so many regulations, I can now sit here and say I work for the Foreign Office and I work for the London violence reduction unit, but I don't feel that choice was made by social workers or teachers in my life telling me I was going to get somewhere. All I ever heard was, "You're in a pupil referral unit, that's it. You've ruined all your chances to succeed in life".

When you're in care, other kids look at you. When I was in [place name redacted]—, people used to say, "Why are you here?" or "Where did you come from?" or they were asking me about my hair; wanting to touch my hair and things like that. I never got support with those things and having to deal with everything all at once, and with education and trying to go to college and get these things, you have to grow up really quickly. As a young person, you shouldn't have to do that, no matter if you're in care or not.

I think the solution, to me, would have been if I had had teachers in my life who were actually good at what they did. I am not saying that all teachers are bad, but I feel like a lot of them—and a lot of support workers and social workers—get into these roles and don't actually have passion for what they want to do. I feel like, sometimes, it's just a job.

There needs to be other resources put into these services, where we can actually make children's lives better. Even if they end up in a PRU, they need resources in the PRU that can help them deal with their mental health issues and physical issues, and actually explore things that can help them not get into trouble. It's about early intervention rather than dealing with it after it happens. You need to deal with it before. I feel like if things like that were in place in my life before, and not so late in my life, I would have been on the right track earlier on.

Ian Mearns: Amazing. Thank you.

Q255 **Chair:** Would anyone else like to come in on that?

Young person D: Sure. Could you repeat the question please?

Chair: We are just asking about your educational experiences and what went wrong, but also for any solutions.

Young person D: I went into care pretty late—I was 16, I think—so by that point, I'd already sat my GCSEs, and failed quite a few. I lived in a



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residential home, so I was expecting the support for further education, like colleges, to be pretty good, but it just wasn't. I study technology, and obviously quite a lot of the resources that you need to use to progress and learn the basic fundamentals were pretty much locked away because I didn't have internet access.

I am part of the HE academic board at my college, so I know about the statistics on care-experienced people, and the number of people that study under that; there is a pattern that they are either not tracked, or make up less than 1% of the college population. I'm one of the only students who is care experienced at my college, and I think that's wrong, especially when there doesn't seem to be a lot being done. Teachers aren't being trained about what to expect from a care-experienced student, or on progression into housing, independence help, and those sorts of things. It is just a bit grim. Overall, it was less positive than I would have liked.

Chair: Thank you. Anybody else, please?

Young person B: I was in care from when I was five years old so, like I said, I was looked after by a local authority. I was moved into different foster placements. Foster placements are not always the best place for a child to be; I didn't want a mum and dad, so children's homes were going to suit me best.

My education suffered because these placements are so poorly run. My placement, just before my GCSEs, got shut down by Ofsted, and I couldn't resit them anywhere else because I was in [place name redacted]—at the time. This was three months before I'd taken my GCSEs, and I couldn't go and sit somewhere else.

My transition into education was going into college. That transition—if someone went into a college right now and said, "I am care experienced," they'd probably only know because they'd got a bursary for them saying "care experienced". There is no way that they know much about us, so that is one of the things that really needs to be implemented. They have to take more responsibility. They have to. It's their job. It's their job to make sure that the education, health and care plan is taken care of. There needs to be a core person in every college who is made to deal with the care experienced—as Young person D said, there are not a lot of us, but giving someone that responsibility, which would mean that people could check in and make sure they're doing their job properly, would be one of my things.

Young person A: I definitely agree, because I remember when I was in care I was semi-independent, going to college, and I had to work—I had to pay my bills. I remember after doing the night shift from 12 to 6 having to then drive to college. I remember getting to college and falling asleep, and my tutor was like, "Wake up! Wake up! You can't be sleeping in tutor time or your class," and I was like, "I literally can't even focus." There was nowhere for me to go and just say, "I've got a lot on my plate. I'm literally having to play adult while playing student at the same time." There were



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no resources for that. You literally just had to suck it up and be like, “Yeah, okay, I’m working.” Do you know what I mean?

Chair: Carry on, Young person B, and then I will bring in Young person C.

Young person B: I am referring to a disability, as well as other things. Autism is being more recognised as we come into this year, I’m going to say. It is a later progression. Girls are better at masking it. So for me the experiences that I’ve had have been astronomical in the sense that it has happened in the last couple of years, when I’ve had to do my electrical qualification. I found absolutely no resources. There’s nothing there, and because the local authority has not done my education, health and care plan—it has never been reviewed, even though the Government told them to do it multiple times—there is nobody with accountability. It should be mandatory for a single person in care to have an education and health plan. It doesn’t need to be something you give funding for; it is there to provide stability—it is the core principles of treating us the same as everybody else. Something has to be done with that. With my disability, I am only finding out about it at a later stage. I can’t rely on things, I can’t go to secondary mental health services or to the doctor because again there is no corporate parenting—that has only just come out. That did not help five years ago, and there are people left behind right now. My point is, what will happen to those people you have already left behind? They will continue using your resources again and again because they have not had the correct support at the right time. That’s something I am interested in.

Young person C: I just want to say that, aside from that, there’s tuition and the amount of money given towards our education. For example, I have to move around quite a lot, so now I need the extra support, but the parents of a lot of kids my age I know pay for tuition—a lot, or most people actually. Tuition is good, but when you’re in care and you ask for tuition, you get given a tutor who comes to your house, but a lot of times they’re not properly qualified and they’re not very good. I had a tutor, but I could not keep her because I was teaching her things. I said, “That’s not how it’s meant to work. You’re meant to tutor me and teach me. There shouldn’t be things that you don’t know and I do. That clearly says that you’re not going to be able to do a good job.” I didn’t say that to her, but of course I had to notify people that I needed a new one. That was last year maybe, but I still don’t have a new tutor. They are in the midst of looking for one right now, but I feel that if more money was given to those type of things, to help kids in care, it would really help them to excel.

Chair: I will bring in Miriam to chair the questions on stability in education and she will bring in other colleagues who want to ask questions.

Q256 **Miriam Cates:** Thanks, Rob. One of the things that you said is how much you have had to move around. For kids who are not in care, most stay at the same school their whole time, so I was wondering, have you had any gaps in education where you have been missed out?

Several witnesses: Yes.



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Q257 **Miriam Cates:** So you have missed out on learning. During those gaps, did you get given an alternative?

Young person A: No.

Young person C: I got moved for no reason from one of my foster placements when I was in year 8. That is when I got moved to [place name redacted]. I was doing well in school and in that school from September to February, but during the February holidays I was told I was going on respite, but I didn't end up going back. I got moved from there to that placement in [place name redacted], and ended up staying there until about the end of the school year, I think, until I got moved to my other placement, where I live now. Even then I could not go to school, because you have to apply for schools, so I could not start school again until year 9—

Q258 **Miriam Cates:** So you missed how much? A couple of terms of education?

Young person C: Pretty much. I really wanted to go to school, and I asked. What I was told, after asking, was that I couldn't go to school, but that the next best thing was to do it online on the computer. It was an alternative, but it wasn't school. It was a tutor, I guess, on the computer, but I couldn't interact, I didn't have a class and I was very isolated from everyone and everything I couldn't understand it easily because there were communication and wifi issues and all that. Then I asked for a tutor to be brought to the house, and one was. When I complained, saying that she wasn't adequate—she honestly wasn't—I got told that I was ungrateful, I should be happy and that they had gone out of their way to do this. I said, "I am not disrespecting her or being horrible." I just said simply that I wanted someone who will teach me the correct things.

Q259 **Miriam Cates:** Why couldn't they give you a school place, even if it was temporary?

Young person C: I asked that. They could have done, but I just feel like it would have been too much paperwork for them. When I asked why, the reasoning for that was, "Oh, we don't know when you are going to move to another permanent placement." I said, "That's fine, but for the meantime?" If you went down the road, there was a school five seconds away. I am sure they had places because it was quite a big school. I said, "I'm more than happy to go there, even if it's for maybe a month or so. At least I don't have to miss out on stuff." Because when I went back in year 9, everybody had already started their GCSEs. I had 30 minutes to pick what I wanted to do. That wasn't too much of an issue, but it was more of a thing that I hadn't learned all that fundamental stuff that they had learned prior, and I never actually got to catch up on that.

Young person B: I missed about two years of education due to the instability of moving placements. That was mostly because I don't think the local authority knew who I was half the time, if I'm honest with you. We would have the education, but when you moved property—I was in a private home, so that's £3,000 per week, so you can just imagine how much money goes into these private companies and I wasn't in education.



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Q260 **Miriam Cates:** Was that two years in one chunk? Or was it over the course of all your different moves?

Young person B: It was from when I was five to when I was seventeen and a half, which was the time I was in care for, and it would be about two years overall. There was no other offer because I was in [place name redacted], but I was a [place name redacted] child. I was told that the funding wasn't there—"You're a [place name redacted] child, so [place name redacted] should pay."

Q261 **Miriam Cates:** So no tutor to your house?

Young person B: I think they tried to do it online, but this was going back maybe 10 years. I'm not saying that it wasn't there, but it wasn't there, or they just wouldn't provide it.

Q262 **Chair:** When you keep getting moved around schools, do any of you have any real choice or consultation?

Young person B: Never. It's only just come out that you can put the forms in.

Young person A: Sorry? What do you mean?

Chair: When you keep getting moved around schools, do you get any choice or is there any genuine consultation?

Young person A: About what school you move to? No. You just get put there, like when I moved to [place name redacted]. Year 11 is kind of the crucial year in secondary school, because that is when everything is meant to be tied up together, but I got put into a school that was like a care school, so every year was in that school. There were probably five or six kids, but there was year 8 kid, a year 6 kid, a year 5 kid and two year 11s, so I was very limited as to what I could do in that school, because they had to facilitate for every single year, whether that's primary or secondary school.

I wasn't interacting with kids my age. I was limited as my maths, English and arts teacher was the same teacher. There were probably about three teachers in that school. In a way, I saw it as both a benefit and a disadvantage, in a sense. Even though I wasn't in a normal school, because I was very independent I was like, "Yeah, okay, I'm going to get my GCSEs sorted," but a kid that's not like me, who is not independent and does not really want to have that change, is going to crumble. I have seen kids that have failed like that, you know what I mean?

Chair: Young person C, do you want to say something else?

Young person C: Before I got put into my new school in year 9, which wasn't very good—the Ofsted rating was good, of course, but what schools do beforehand is send away the naughty kids on a trip or they get kids to behave for an incentive. They will be like, "If you don't behave, Ofsted is coming. You will have to behave because if you don't you're not going to get this or that." So the kids are on their best behaviour and it's not exactly real, if that makes sense.



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The school that I went to wasn't very good. There was a huge problem there. I would have liked to have picked what school I went to, because I had never even been to the area that the school was in before. I had never heard of the school or been told anything about the school. I just got told I was going there. I was like, "Okay. That's fine, but could you not find anything else?" Beforehand, I thought I had first priority for schools, and that was not the school I would have chosen. I got told that I didn't and that was the school that I had to go to because it had been picked for me and it was the only one that had space. I was happy to be accepted into a school and finally get to go to school. After that, I did question it, but I didn't complain too much. If I had the choice, that is not the school I would have picked. Even near that school there were far better schools that I could have gone to. I am sure they could have made an extra space for an extra pupil.

Q263 **Miriam Cates:** Young person D, you didn't go into care until after you had done your GCSEs. Did you get any choice about college?

Young person D: I already knew what college I was going to go to. I was quite lucky that I didn't move out of the city; otherwise I would probably have had different options and have had to make different choices. Yeah, I did have an option about what school I went to, but with the course, because of my grades, I didn't have a choice.

Q264 **Miriam Cates:** Final question from me: when you were in education, was it a problem getting to school on time every day and completing your homework—doing those normal administrative things? Did you get any support with doing those things?

Young person B: At 16 to 17 you would normally be in a care facility if you were going to college, so there is a transition period. I was looked after in [place name redacted]; the place was closed by Ofsted when I was 16. I went to another care home and they would take me to college every morning. You don't really feel it, because you are quite young at the time, but as you get a little bit older you can feel that you need to have emotional support as well. I was literally left at 17 and a half at the YMCA—just left. The college transition just failed completely; I had no support in completing that task with my whole heart.

Q265 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I am interested in all this moving about. All of you have spoken quite powerfully about movement and the effect that it has. What causes all this movement and what do you think people can do to reduce the number of times you move and give you more stability?

Young person C: I think one thing is that there is a lot of abuse in placements. A lot of foster carers aren't checked properly before they become foster carers, and because a lot of the abuse goes on in the home there are no witnesses to say what has happened—it's your word against theirs. As you're a child in care you are looked at quite negatively a lot of the time, and because they are DBS checked what you say is sort of disregarded. You're told, "Oh well, we checked them beforehand. We used really good checks on them and they are fine," but if that was the case then they wouldn't do the type of things that they do, because they would



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be generally good people. Some of these people are honestly very bad people. It makes you feel, "Maybe I am the problem. Is there something wrong with me?" It causes you to move around quite a lot.

Personally, for me, I don't accept abuse. Every time somebody would do something to me, I would report it and say I didn't want to live there anymore. There was one time when, I don't know what happened, but I just got moved. I was told something about the place not being checked properly—I don't know. Apart from then, every other time I have chosen to move. I would not have wanted to move if I was treated properly and with care and respect.

Q266 **Chair:** When you say abuse—has that happened quite a bit?

Young person C: Quite a lot, yes. If it is not physical it is mental, which happens quite often. A lot of the time it is not actually physical; I would say that I have only been physically abused or assaulted in a placement twice.

Chair: This is from other—

Young person C: Yeah. A lot of time it is actually mental abuse. As a child I would say I was quite happy; I did not have too many mental health problems. I have been to foster placements where you would think the people are the nicest people on earth—you honestly would—but living with them, they are completely different to how they seemed at first. That is obviously not my social worker's fault; I can't blame her because these people do put on a really good show. It just goes to show that the intentions of someone wanting to become a foster carer should always be questioned. I have even had foster carers tell me outright, when I was eight years old, "Young person C, we need you to stay. We need the money."

Young person A: Same.

Young person D indicated agreement.

Q267 **Kate Osborne:** I am quite shocked to hear some of what you said there, as an ex-foster carer. I know that the process that foster carers go through is very in-depth. What shocked me is that you said there, "I was only abused twice." It is awful that you would experience that at all. What do you think could be done in terms of ensuring that foster carers are better checked? What would you like to see put in place?

Young person C: Personally, I don't really think anyone is to blame, apart from the people who become foster carers for the wrong reasons, because I know how thoroughly checked they are. It's scary, because if they can really go through all that just to abuse a child or get money, it really shows how desperate some people are and what lengths they will go to. But I personally feel that what could be done are random checks. Obviously, foster carers are aware of when social workers are coming to visit, and they put up a show.



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Also, children should be listened to more often. If a child makes a report about a foster carer, they should not be immediately disregarded, and it should be looked into. I made a report when I was, I think, 11 years old about a foster carer grabbing me by my wrist and physically pulling me. I asked her to stop, and she said no. I said, "You're hurting me," and I went and told my school. The police went and did a little search, but obviously there was nothing to prove my claims, because she had not left any substantial marks. I got disregarded, and the whole investigation just got shut down.

Q268 **Kate Osborne:** What about the support that foster carers get? In your experience, did you see your foster carers get support?

Young person B: They get none.

Young person A: On your question beforehand about what can be done, I know that in my local authority, they put young people on the panel sometimes when it comes down to picking foster carers. I have been on several panels, even when it comes down to social workers and practitioners.

I feel like it is working, because when I sit on a panel sometimes, I sit with a bunch of people who are within that work field. Sometimes the candidates that they feel are suitable for the role—I don't feel that they are suitable. I don't see the passion in them, I don't see the drive in them, and I feel like that is why we end up with foster carers and social workers who are not actually passionate about what they do but just want to be in that role or are doing it, like Young person C said, for the money. I have been in a placement where a carer has literally said to me, "I need my pay cheque from you, so you need to stay here."

I think we should be putting young people on the panel—young people who are suitable and who have been through the experiences that we have been through—so that we can ask them questions and see if they match with how we feel. At the end of the day, a lot of foster carers might not have experienced the things that young people have gone through, but if I do not see that you are able to support a young person or to give me proper answers on why you want to do this role, you should not be in this role. You might have a clean DBS check or whatever it might be on paper, but if you are not actually full of passion to do the role, I don't think you should be there.

We should have young people on the panel, and I also feel that foster carers should get some type of support when it comes down to the children they have, because, again, each child is different. You are going to experience different young people. I feel like sometimes foster carers might or might not get an attachment to the child, and sometimes you have to go into that. Like I said, I was very independent, so I didn't want a foster carer. A care home was best for me, because I did not want a family as such.

Kate Osborne: Thanks, Young person A.



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Young person D: Going back to that same question, many of us in this room have experienced being in a foster placement just for the monetary benefit of the foster carers. I don't think that that should be on offer. Foster carers should be in a position where they can support a child without being paid for it. That might be controversial, but I did not want to feel like a cash cow, and yet I was.

Young person C: What I was surprised to find out is that a lot of the money they get given is to go towards the child. Yes, they do get paid quite a bit of money to look after the child, but a lot of the money comes from what the child needs. That comes down to the clothes, food and water they use, as well as electricity. It is a contribution towards that, because having an extra person in your house is costly. However, a lot of foster carers do not use it for the right reasons.

Again, linking it back to education, I feel that loads of things like that cause a breakdown in placements, which, again, causes a breakdown in schooling, because you have to go. If you have to move, say, I don't know, halfway across London, you can't attend the same school. It's nearly impossible. So, I feel like if foster placements—not just foster placements, but places in general—were more equipped to just keep kids happy and stable mentally, then there would not be so much of this movement within schools.

Young person B: On that point, foster carers do an amazing job, the majority of them. They do not get any support. You might go for a year of getting all of that stuff, but you have nothing. A young person comes to you and, again, with stuff like myself, I was constantly put in restraints because maybe my disability wouldn't allow me to understand a situation properly. How can the foster carers know that? Are they ever trained? I have never seen that. You do pay a lot of money for these facilities or placements or whatever to help you. There's nothing there. You drop a kid off and they give you 10 minutes to meet each other with your social worker. Occasionally it might be another carer, whatever it is. Then you're gone and you have to deal with that person. You don't know them. It's so awkward.

Could you imagine waking up in the morning and you're in a different place and you're like "Oh my"? I don't even want to go down for a drink. Even now, I stay predominantly in my bedroom, because that is what I'm used to. That's my room; that's where I am. So for me, they need constant support, making sure that they— They can be our voice too. I really do champion good foster carers because they are amazing, and they do great jobs—most of them, the majority. But yeah, they need people around them to help them. They need education—things to make sure that we are going into education—and they can be our voice.

Chair: I am just going to bring in Ian.

Q269 **Ian Mearns:** It seems to me that the evidence that you are giving us this morning will form part of our report. Although it will not ascribe individual names, it will be part of that evidence base. It seems to me that each



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individual story that you have would actually make in itself a very good and powerful case study to include within the report. I am wondering whether there is some way we can facilitate that. A case study on each of you—if you are willing to do that—would be really powerful in terms of the evidence and the recommendations that we can put to the Department and to Ministers.

Young person B, going back to your experience in college, it seems to me that you had a very poor experience in terms of the way in which the college was able to care for your welfare needs—your pastoral care within the college setting. I know from personal experience that there are other colleges in busier urban areas where they are better at doing that and have a better understanding and have more youngsters coming from care settings through their books and through their classes on a regular basis. I am just wondering whether your personal experience is basically down to where you were and the location you were in and, therefore, the social mix that you were in as well.

Young person B: I went to college at 17 and a half and re-entered at 23, so I have two periods of transition, both in the same local authority and both with the same college. They still knew nothing about me, other than that, “We can have a bursary.” There is no—I am not sure what goes on in the colleges, but they do not know anything about it, especially in my district, [place name redacted]. I don’t know about anywhere else. You are managed by the local authority but then you have this “corporate parent”. The education don’t know what they’re doing, the housing don’t know what they’re doing, and the GPs don’t know their role. So you tell me who’s micromanaging that? Nobody is. There is nobody.

You have to champion us young people to come in and volunteer and be those people next to those social workers and next to those community people—to be that person. We can do that. We volunteered, we come here; we want to make change. That is how I would say to go into your primary schools, your secondary schools and your colleges, to try and give back experience to somebody at the college so they have a core person to go to.

Q270 **Ian Mearns:** I have been involved from the local authority perspective before I was an MP. Okay, some of my experience goes back a number of years, but it did seem to me that social workers in particular were much more interested in the care aspects of looking after the welfare of the young person and making sure that they were physically being looked after, but many of the mental health and in particular the educational aspects of that development were not really being concentrated on. That might have changed in many places over a number of years, but I am sure that there are still some bad examples out there.

Young person B: It is such a postcode lottery.

Ian Mearns: Absolutely—I am sure that it is. Young person C, did you want to come back in?



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Young person C: I just wanted to ask something. I heard that ever since the Labour party has been out of power in the country, university for children in care is not 100% free, which it was in the past. Is that true?

Ian Mearns: University?

Young person C: In the past, when the Labour party was in power, university for children in care and children from disadvantaged backgrounds was either cheaper or free, but from what I know, that is not now the case. Is that correct?

Ian Mearns: I must admit, I do not know the technical detail on that.

Young person D: It is not free any more.

Ian Mearns: I do not think it was.

Kim Johnson: But it was cheaper because there was not £9,000-worth of tuition fees, and you used to be able to get support from local authorities in the form of grants. That is what happened back in my day.

Ian Mearns: To be fair, though, Kim, we let the cat out of the bag by introducing £3,000 tuition fees, which is much to my regret and has been ever since.

Chair: There are grants, though.

Kim Johnson: There used to be things such as the education maintenance allowance for young people, particularly those from more disadvantaged communities, who were able to get £30 a week to help with transport and other things.

Young person B: Who knows that, though? Who knows about the bursary? Who do I go to? If we can apply for different bursaries, where do we go to apply for them? I do apologise Patrick; did you want to say something?

Patrick Ward: Your local authority, as you have alluded to, is your corporate parent. Any decent local authority should make sure that you can go to university for free. They should be providing that. That is the responsibility of a local authority, as it is with any corporate parent. You should never be told—no one in care should ever be told—that you cannot do the form of education that you have chosen because of costs. They need to make the costs available.

I thought your points were brilliant, but I want to pick up on one thing in particular: the idea that someone said you should be grateful for something. You should not be grateful; these are your rights.

Young person C: That's what I said.

Patrick Ward: We work for you. We should be grateful that we are getting the opportunity to do it, and part of that is ensuring that you get your choice of education and that you are not charged for it. That should



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be the commitment of anyone in my position, any of my members nationally. I would certainly support anyone who tried to demand that right from their local authority.

Ian Mearns: It is too late for those of you who have been through the system, but from Young person C's perspective, for instance, the local authority from which you originally came has corporate parenting oversight and a virtual head. They are the ones who should be helping you through this whole process.

Chair: Just to be clear, the UCAS website says that there are grants for care leavers.

Young person B: But then you have to wait five weeks to speak to a social worker who might forget about you because they have 50 other case notes on there.

Young person A: That is literally what I was about to say. Coming from [place name redacted], I know that social workers are under a lot of strain when it comes down to how many cases they have for young people. That then becomes—I do not want to say the word “excuse”—a way for them to say that that is why they do not communicate with you often, or the kids that are seen to be independent do not get checked up on every now and then; they just get left to their own devices.

Not once did anybody tell me about any charities that could support me when I was in school. I didn't even know I could get a bursary in college, so when I first started, I didn't get no money. The money that I was working for when I was doing my night shifts was paying for that. I even got myself a car because I needed to, as I went to college in [place name redacted] and was placed in [place name redacted]. I never knew about all of those things until people I started meeting from my own friendship groups at college were like, “You know can get money for uniforms for work? You know you can get a bursary for your lunch at school?”

Not once did my social worker tell me that. Now, when I have gone to her and said, “Where was I meant to get this information from?” she is like, “I'm so sorry. I was meant to give you an information pack about these things. I just have a lot of cases on,” and stuff like that. I understand that, because they do get a lot of cases, but I feel that, again, maybe local authorities need to put things in place so that their social workers are able to have more resources—so they are able to actually take care of their cases, because, yes, I might be very independent, and I might be able to get by, but at the end of the day I am still a looked-after child. I am not an adult yet. I shouldn't have to deal with the fact that, you know, because I am working I can take care of myself. No. I wouldn't have been able to find out about Become unless I had joined youth groups that gave me the information. If you are a child who is not open like that, how are you ever meant to know?

Chair: Young person D, you wanted to say something.



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Young person D: I have a couple of questions. In my local authority, we have something called the pathways team. Do you guys have anything like that in your areas?

Q271 **Ian Mearns:** What does it do, Young person D? That's the thing.

Young person D: I was expecting this to be a nationwide thing. Because it is not, I think it should be. Essentially, when you turn 16, they help you gain independence. You have taster flats or trainer flats, which I think some people in this room have had. When you are going to education, they cover your rent and give you various bursaries and stuff like that. I am surprised that that is not available nationwide. I think that is something that must change immediately.

Q272 **Chair:** Patrick, do you know about this?

Patrick Ward: Yes, I do. I know your area very well, Young person D. You are fortunate—you come from an area where there is excellent provision for this type of thing. What you are talking about is not available nationally and it should be. I think a lot of what is being spoken about here is that things can be a bit of a postcode lottery. What is good in one area is not good in another. If it is good enough for children in your area, it should be good enough for children in every area, right? Absolutely.

Young person D: I think there is a problem with the pathways team in general, in that it is not consistent and there are failings in it. It was just by chance really. When I started my game development course, there was another lady on that course who was also a care-experienced person. Her experience with the pathways team was completely different to mine. Her pathway worker was unsupportive. She wasn't given help to get into independent housing. Because of it, she had to quit.

Patrick Ward: It is our job to make the system work for individuals. It is not the job of individual children to fit in with the system. It is back to this idea of not being grateful. We have got to make it work for one individual, then change our service to make it work differently for another individual.

Q273 **Chair:** Young person D, do you mind me asking which council it is? If you don't want to say, that's fine.

Young person D: Yes, sure. It is [place name redacted] City Council.

Q274 **Tom Hunt:** I have a specific question about special educational needs. Young person B, you referred to having had not a positive experience. It is a question for all of you. First, if you don't mind saying, do you have special educational needs? If so, how has that influenced your experience and to what extent do you feel as though you have got the support you have needed throughout your experience?

Young person B: I am currently waiting to get tested for autism. This is something that has probably been known to me for a long time, but being a female, masking it, it can come across to other people differently or can present differently. I cannot get into secondary mental health. The GPs literally hate me because I have no rapport with them. It is absolutely



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disbarring. You go to a college, and you haven't got an education and health plan, because the local authority hasn't done it. You are kind of left with nothing. Where do I go to get that assessment so I can help myself in the future to get skills that I can use for my electrician job? Because the skills I am good at I can do. That is one of the most frustrating things that I can say to you—that I still haven't got my education and health plan.

Q275 **Tom Hunt:** You never had one?

Young person B: I had one—they just didn't do the transition.

Q276 **Tom Hunt:** So you lost it.

Young person B: Well, it's not lost—they just didn't do it. Leaving care, they didn't do it. They didn't transfer it. I am still waiting. That is from 16, and now I'm 25. And I have a complaint going through. This has been 18 months that I have had my complaint. I can't get my case files. They have lost most of my files, and I still can't get my education plan. There is nowhere for me to go and get funding to get this assessment, which by the way takes about 18 months. You are sat there being criticised at every angle—"You're on your own, you're 25." Well, I'm sorry—I was, you know, 24 one day before my birthday; I'm not going to be changing in one day. If you haven't done your job, you have a responsibility to keep. They haven't done it, but there is no responsibility. My local authority has been told many times by Ofsted, but Ofsted doesn't even matter to me. They can go in and read the paperwork—that's it. Even if they speak to us, they don't value us.

Young person C: I just want to say that schools don't really help with mental health. They don't consider that kids in care might have different mental issues, but they don't accommodate them necessarily.

Q277 **Tom Hunt:** That is a very important point, and something that I was going to ask about a bit later on. In terms of special educational needs, you had a plan, Young person B, but that did not involve your being diagnosed for autism or not.

Young person B: No, because statistically it is more coming out now about autism in females. The way I would present is very much agitated. I just didn't understand what was going on because I was moved so many times. That can present in a different way. And no, it doesn't happen. Even on leaving care, they will not handle that transition at all. That was when I was in college, when I went back into education. There was nothing there; there was no connection. They would say, "Apply to a charity" because I needed a laptop. Why am I applying to a charity? You are technically my parents. I needed a laptop to do my work, because it was just at the start of coronavirus, but they wouldn't have it. I had to wait six months to get funds from a charity. That is the kind of things that we are dealing with. There is no way that GPs will take any responsibility, unfortunately.

Q278 **Chair:** The care home wouldn't give you any laptop?



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Young person B: We were in private care homes, so again it is different. They don't risk assess it. You see a social worker, maybe on a statutory visit if you're lucky—

Q279 **Chair:** They wouldn't give you a laptop or a tablet to work on. Is that what you are saying?

Young person B: No, well not when I was there, and not when I applied for it two years ago.

Q280 **Chair:** You asked for it from them?

Young person B: I needed it. I needed the 18th wiring edition, which is something that I need for my course. They refused it.

Q281 **Chair:** When you asked them, what did they say? Why wouldn't they give you one?

Young person B: They said, "There's no money. There's no money left to spend," and they helped pay for my rent at the time. At the time universal credit was not supporting looked-after children in that transition. It ended up local authorities taking it on. There was something wrong—there has always been something wrong with UC, but that is another subject. Again, you couldn't go back to education on UC. That happened two years ago; it has changed now.

Chair: Thank you. Before I bring in Young person D, I am going to bring in Kate—you have finished, Young person C, have you?

Young person C: Yes.

Chair: I am going to bring in Kate, and move on to the next bit, but hold your thought, Young person D, because we will bring you in.

Q282 **Kate Osborne:** I just want to ask about your future ambitions. We know that young people in care struggle to stay in education and sometimes have difficulty in going on to further education or into training. I just wondered if you would share with us your thoughts about the direction in which you see yourself going and what problems you have, or possibly foresee, in achieving that?

Young person A: For me, future-wise, my ultimate goal is to be a TV and radio presenter. Music and radio have been my whole life. I remember when I came back from [place name redacted] to college, I literally said to my local authority, "I'm not going into another foster placement. I'm not going into another care home. I want to be in a semi-independent flat, because I don't feel that any of them have worked for me. I have worked better by myself." I made my demands. I pretty much just kept on running away until I got what I wanted. I got my flat, went to college, studied radio. Now, to be fair, I have had a few appearances on BBC and ITV and I have my own podcast, and I am now a radio presenter for a volunteer station, a urban station. They remember when I was in college, I was the first student to ever have an urban radio show, because my



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college wasn't very diverse, so it was something new that I was bringing to the table.

As my journey has gone on, I have also found love for working with young people. That is why I work with the Mayor of London's office and the London violence reduction unit. That has literally turned my life around for the best. They have made me realise that there are some people out there who actually want to see young people win and do well for themselves. They're constantly giving me hope that I will be able to achieve the things that I want to achieve, whether that is in media or starting up a business to help young people.

Q283 Kate Osborne: It's great to hear that you are getting that support and encouragement. Earlier on, you said that there were people around you who were telling you that you couldn't or wouldn't achieve. In what environment was that happening? Who was saying that to you?

Young person A: School. I got manage-moved a few times when I was in [place name redacted]. My grades were good. I can hold my hand up and say that I was definitely a troubled child, but that was due to things that were going on at home: my parents were divorcing; I ended up with my dad, and that is ultimately what put me into care. When I went to my first managed move, the headteacher literally said to me that I would end up in this drawer; she had this drawer of kids in her school—the females ended up pregnant; the boys, or some of the females, ended up in jail. She told me I would end up in this drawer once I left this school; if my behaviour didn't improve, I would end up in this drawer. She accused me of stealing a girl's phone. I was the new girl, and apparently because I had problems at my other school, I was seen to be the culprit of the situation, even though I never did it. I was quite angry at the fact that I was being stereotyped, just because I moved from a different school.

It ended up with me being excluded, and I moved into a PRU. When I was in the PRU, it was literally said to me, "This is it. You're not going to get better out of this. You might as well just complete it, deal with what you have to deal with here, and that's it." There was no pathway plan for what I could develop into. I would never have expected that, five years from that day, I would be working at the Foreign Office or with London's violence reduction unit.

Q284 Chair: How did you get your placement in the Foreign Office?

Young person A: There is a fast-track scheme. There are opportunities for care leavers, but it is whether they have the knowledge to find them.

Chair: What happened?

Young person A: I was working with a group called [name redacted], which is under [place name redacted] Council. That is where I have my panel meetings with social workers and stuff. A lady there—I think she's a job adviser—said, "There's a fast-track stream for care leavers at the Foreign Office, and I think you should apply for it, because you'll be good for it." At first, I thought there's no way that I'm going to get a job in the



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Foreign Office—me! I work for Tesco.com; I don't know anything about the Foreign Office at all. She said, "Just apply for it—just do it."

I remember sitting and doing my application, and I said, "If I get through to the first stage, I will take it seriously." And I did. I remember going to the big Foreign Office building, and being like, "Woah, this is crazy!" I sat in my interview, and my hands were sweating. Then I got a call. It was when covid first happened, so I wasn't able to go into the office when I first started; I had to do it all from home. They gave me a job in travel advice, and since then my contract has been extended. It was great. I have said that to young people I know who want to get a good job. It pays well.

Young person D: Before I go on to the points that I was going to make, that comment about your teacher—with the pictures of the men and women—kind of felt like a stab through my heart, as a young parent myself. That's awful.

Young person A: I know. It goes back to how I am as a person. That is what's driven me to where I am today: I am going to show you that that's not what I'm capable of. But again, I could have crumbled at that point; if I was a young person who was able to break down, that could have been my life there and then.

Kate Osborne: All credit to you, Young person A.

Young person B: Sorry to interrupt you, Young person D. On my electrical course, I do not want to be a domestic electrician; I want to be industrial. National Grid and Great Western Electrical have just switched over. They have done different things and they're switching over. There are no apprenticeships—you could google it right now—no industry placements being offered in the south west.

Never mind that we have a nuclear power station that has just gone up; never mind that we have got Gravity, a brand-new invention zone. There are no apprenticeships. You can look anywhere you like; they are not there.

Q285 **Kate Osborne:** Is anyone helping you with this?

Young person B: I am 25 years old. You can go to the jobcentre, but they are not accommodating to people with educational needs because they will just put you on the other side of things and not bring you in. There is no connection. I cannot get out to EDF, even though they have got this massive thing, or National Grid or Great Western. They are all private companies.

Young person D: Going back to what you both said, I think it highlights a bigger issue with care experience and healthcare. Not a lot of residential homes and foster carers are really trained to understand the illnesses people can get. When I was in a residential home, I started coughing quite a lot. I had a rare syndrome. I was lucky that I listened to myself and



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said, "I am going to the doctor's," and luckily it wasn't anything serious. But it was completely overlooked, and that needs to change.

Going back to what Young person B said about universal credit, I think that it should be extended. When I was 17 and I moved into independent housing, they were almost reluctant to help me. We ended up staying there for an hour or two, literally just waiting for them to say whether or not they would support me and cover me. Prior to that, I was living on £60 a week. Something needs to improve with the funding of care-experienced people, because we are quite vulnerable. We need support.

Q286 Kate Osborne: Did you want to tell us anything about your future ambitions?

Young person D: Sure. When I finish my current course, I am going to get my bachelor's degree in games development and creative media. I am hoping to either become a teacher or go into the industry.

I almost feel like, where I am today, I have got by myself. I know that I am probably not the only one who feels like this.

Q287 Tom Hunt: Seeing you all today, you all seem like strong characters, in a good way—if something is not right, you are prepared to call it out and demand what is right, and so on. It seems to me that if you did not have those character traits, then sadly—

Young person A: We would be left behind. Your ability to adapt is always criticised.

Q288 Tom Hunt: So you mean that it is largely dependent on whether you have those character traits.

Young person A: Yes. I feel like you need people like us in this room to advocate for young people, care leavers and looked-after children. Without characters like us, you can't stand for them. When I work with London's violence reduction unit, I stand on behalf of young people, of young Londoners. I am that advocate. Our experiences are going to help shape the lives of the new generation, to help the younger generation be the best that they can be.

I feel like sometimes you have to realise that there are root causes to all of these problems. With early intervention, if we nip those in the bud earlier on, we are able to save a young person's life. It is vitally important for their development, their growth. As you said, every young person is unique, different in their own way, so not everyone is going to be like us or feel confident enough to sit here and speak with all of you, because they are just not like that.

Kate Osborne: I agree with you there.

Young person C: I feel like a lot of care kids are not able to go to university, as well. I know that there are bursaries, but is there a chance to have everything at university covered? Even down to the UCAS and first-choice applications. And not just for that; even during college and



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sixth form, you have to pay for the accommodation you stay in yourself. That should not be done. It is not fair for the student to have to go to work and then go to college after.

Q289 Chair: Looking at the UCAS website briefly, because of your previous question, it looks like there is substantial support for children in care, but you need help with applying—getting good people to advise you and to speak to the student finance company. But there should be substantial funds for you. I know that you want to do an apprenticeship. Is that correct?

Young person B: Yes, electrical industry.

Q290 Chair: There are bursaries for apprentices as well.

Young person B: I'm 25—cut-off point.

Young person A: When you are a care leaver, you go up to 25, so you don't get— That is something that Become is trying to enable. After 25, should you just be dropped?

Young person B: If the local authority has not put in things that they're supposed to put in, they should not drop you. I cannot get an assessment, so when I go and fill out an application, I take a whole day to do it. My cover letter has to be very bespoke to that company, and that is so frustrating because I cannot do it. I can come here and talk to you openly and willingly, because I have been used to this; this is my normal. But filling out a piece of paper—

Chair: Thank you for the 25 point, because we should reflect that in the report.

Q291 Dr Caroline Johnson: Thank you all for all the interesting comments and stories that you are telling us. Several of you have used the phrase, "We went into care late." Others have talked about outcomes from earlier intervention. I just wonder, when you say "late", for many of you it was late in childhood, but do you think that the interventions that were put in that led to you going into care were made too late, and that things could have been done earlier to prevent the situation in the first place? Young person D is nodding very hard.

Young person D: I absolutely agree. When I was younger, our family were under a child protection plan. I was sexually abused when I was a kid, and it was completely ignored. The police did nothing. It was so obvious—all the signs were there. We were on a child protection plan. The social worker should have done something, but there was nothing. I have literally just written down early intervention; it has to be improved.

Social workers need to be able to look for the signs more accurately. I am just surprised. I have never had a very good experience with social workers. I know that some people probably have—quite a few people may have. But for the most part I think the problem lies probably with social workers, police not understanding signs, and education providers not



understanding signs. Early intervention should be improved, if that answers your question.

Q292 Dr Caroline Johnson: It does, and it reflects my experience as a paediatrician seeing children in hospitals. Does anyone else want to come in on that?

Young person A: Overall, the reason why I ended up in care was because my home life was poor and my school life was poor—simple as. I literally feel like, as I said earlier, if I didn't break down to that support worker at my school and tell her what was going on in my life, I probably would not even have got the help that I needed. Again, she was not even a social worker, but she went to the ends for me. She literally said to me, "You're not going home tonight. I'm keeping you—I'm taking you to [place name redacted], and we're going to stand there until they find you somewhere to stay. You're not going home." From that point on, I said to myself, "Do you know what? There are good people in this life."

If it wasn't for her, I probably would not have been able to get myself out of my home situation, but my social worker—I have had the worst social workers ever. I didn't speak to my social worker. I would refuse, especially when I was living in [place name redacted], because she would have to take the train down to come and see me. The relationship was just terrible.

If I had better early intervention at school, especially because I was at a PRU— I think to myself, "A PRU is a school where these bad kids are meant to end up, but there is no extra resources in these schools. If we are meant to be troubled kids, are we not meant to get more support because we haven't been able to work normally in a normal school? Isn't there meant to be facilities like mental health workers or youth workers, or extra activities for us to enable our behaviour to get better?" But there was literally less.

Q293 Dr Caroline Johnson: Did nobody attempt to do anything before you went to the PRU? There was nothing before that, or earlier on than that?

Young person A: No. I just think I was literally moving from school to school. Usually when you move to a new school, you get like a two-week trial to see if it is going to work out at that school, but I feel like when you are on that two-week trial you are constantly just looked at as to whether or not you are suitable for that school.

So, you might be even OK for that school, but because they might feel that you're not working to the abilities of the school or living up to the standard of how a pupil in their school will work, they might not necessarily keep you in your two-week trial. So—yeah.

Chair: Okay. We will move on to the next session. We will try to finish in 10 to 15 minutes—

Young person B: Is it all right if I say something?

Chair: Sure—just briefly, if you can.



Young person B: My local authority would get paid money when they had me in care. I got took into care and then about seven years later all my siblings were took into care. They all got moved around. There was no intervention. You go on one word of a social worker. It has been proven that the courts don't work; it has been proven that social workers lie. Intervention has only been in the process now because it's costing local authorities too much money. There is no such thing before of them doing it. There was nothing. I could not see my siblings; I didn't see my siblings for four years. That's something that needs to be put in the education as well.

Chair: Thank you. Kim, please, if you want to start.

Q294 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks all. The next section and the next lot of questions are about leaving care, and the transition to independent living. Some of you have already spoken about some of the positives. Young person D talked about her experience in [place name redacted]. Young person A spoke about just being left.

I would like to hear from you guys about what we need to include in the report that helps and supports young people, whether it is about help and support with benefits, or help and support with funding and bursaries to education and destinations. Maybe, Young person C, you can begin.

Young person C: I forgot what you just said—sorry.

Q295 **Kim Johnson:** It was about that transition from leaving care into independent living. I think some of you have spoken about it, saying it's a bit like falling off the edge of a cliff for some people. So it is about letting us know what you think needs to be in place to prevent that from happening? What support—and who delivers it? What preparation did you have as young people?

Miriam Cates: Young person C is only 16.

Kim Johnson: Oh, yes—sorry.

Young person A: She could probably say what she would want, or what she would expect.

Young person C: Basically, my only fear really right now is that when I do leave care eventually—because I am 16, so within the next two years I will be leaving care; in fact, I think it is exactly in two years, because I turned 16 last month. I honestly feel like I'm not going to have the same support, and that scares me, because at 18 you are nowhere near old enough to be by yourself at all. That might be the legal age to be an adult, but certainly mentally and emotionally it is not the age of an adult. Even at 21, I don't think you're really an adult, honestly.

A lot of people live with their parents until they're 25, so I feel like just being chucked out at the age of 18 and being told, "Oh, well, you're grown now, you're an adult, you're a big person", is just scary, because it's like, "What am I supposed to do? Where do I go?" Even the housing that I'm told they will give me is very secluded, or semi-independent, and is with other people. Other children are a concern as well, because a lot of



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children in care—not all, but some—I have met are very unpredictable and can be violent. So it really makes me wonder. Either I go live by myself and maybe something can happen and nobody knows, or I go and live with a bunch of new kids and they could do anything, and I’m going to be sleeping there.

Young person A: When it comes down to the transition, I think there needs to be help, whether people are going into semi-independence or elsewhere. Whether that is training them up to learn how to cook, pay bills, know where your electrics are in your house—I remember that when I first moved into my first semi-independent, I wasn’t in a home where there were other kids; I was literally in my own semi-independent. My rent was paid and that was under a group called Young Futures.

However, I still had to pay for food and my travel, and all that stuff; those things weren’t taken care of. But I never got the resources before I moved in, so I never knew how to cook; I didn’t know how to do my gas and electric. I didn’t even know little things like where to go if I had a power cut. Those are things that the company I was with—Young Futures—gave me when I was in that property. I am thankful for them because, at the end of the day, I had a good worker who would come and check on me once a week, and I had therapy sessions. Those are things that I feel should be implemented for all young people that go into semi-independent, but some of them don’t want to. They don’t have that and then they get to 18 and they have to leave care and move into their own property, so the property side of things needs to be implemented early on—for example, knowing about how to bid on a house and whether or not you need to travel to that location to see it.

On bidding, when you bid for a house, you literally get a picture of the outside of the house, and that is it. You don’t get to see the inside or the area around it. Being a more advanced young person, I thought, “I am going to write down these addresses and travel to them, and see if they are local to my college, see if I can see inside and it looks OK, and see how I am going to get around”. That is me using my initiative. No one is telling me that. Also, it is thinking about, “Are you going to be able to afford your rent? Is universal credit going to cover it?” Because they might cover the rent, but are you going to have enough money to buy your food and pay for your electric?

Chair: I will bring in Young person D, who is waiting patiently.

Young person D: I want to go back to what Young person C said about group homing, and I think there absolutely has to be better regulations. When I lived in a group home, I lived with a big selection of people. We would see armed police at our door every now and again. Someone was going to jail for beating up a grandma—pretty much to death. There were paedophiles—bearing in mind that that paedophile was pretty much underage himself, but that is what I heard. I think that there needs to be better regulations because I don’t think I was suitable for that house, and I feel like it put me in danger.



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Ian Mearns: With respect, Young person D, that sounds like a house that would not be suitable for anyone.

Young person B: They already have that implemented; they just don't regulate it. Going back to leaving care, you say, "What can we do in place of that?" Well, it is in place. It is just who manages that. Because who do we go to? The Government tells the local authorities they are not doing their job properly and they need to improve, then it just goes on and on and on.

Q296 **Kim Johnson:** You made a valid point before, Young person B, about some of the difficulties—universal credit and accessing it. I think that that is part and parcel of that transition from leaving care into independent living. I think what you have all said today raises issues and concerns about the lack of consistency. Young person D talked about support in her local authority that is not available elsewhere.

Young person B: Your home setting-up allowance should be the same everywhere, by the way. I got £1,200. I am in care now and you get £2,000, so £1,200 to pay for a whole flat was not sufficient. It is nowhere near enough. You can't carpet the facility. I have just used rugs. I've moved into my property and been there for years now and still haven't got a carpet because I can't afford it. Those kinds of things need a plan, especially if you are leaving care.

Young person A: This is my point about preparing the child before they go. Every child should maybe be put on a programme—a five-week programme or however long it needs to be. Every child needs to be prepared for what it is like because, at the end of the day, if you are a normal child who is not in care and you are growing up at home with your parents, you get comfortable, I suppose, but as a child in care, you need to be prepared for these things in life. Young person C is only 16, and it worries me because I can feel her worry, because I have had friends who have worried about moving out. Where do they get support for that worry? How do they feel like, "OK. I have everything I need"?

Q297 **Ian Mearns:** Young person A, it sounds to me like what you would want to see would be a transitional supported living phase, where you have an independent unit that is still connected to your children's home. You would still have those connections there, but you would be living independently but being supported before you go totally independent.

Young person A: Definitely.

Young person D: Going on what you said, in some areas—I am not sure if it is all areas—there are taster flats available, but personally I don't think that that is enough. You stay there for four weeks. You get basic training.

Ian Mearns: Four weeks is not enough.

Young person D: Yeah. You don't get any help planning meals. If I didn't already have an interest in cooking, I would be eating very poorly. You



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don't get taught much about that. There is so little that you actually get taught. Even though it is a stepping stone and it is very close to a residential home, it is not enough. I do not think they realise that the stuff that they know as a given—

Q298 Kate Osborne: Do you get help with budgeting and things like that?

Young person D: It was very basic. Most of the fully fledged adults in this room have skills that they already know that they do not think to teach people, and that is what we're missing. That is why we can get into debt so easily. Statistically speaking, we are likely to get into debt, because we were not taught.

Young person B: With the local authorities and matching up with GPs, all that corporate parenting, you have made a transition to all these different sections and now everybody is going, "Who is responsible?" If at 16, 17, 18 and 19 you get one person from the college, a social worker and the leaving care worker together to manage the people, that would bring the Government into the local community, and vice versa. That is my suggestion. I know Josh MacAlister is on the same page—ish.

Q299 Kim Johnson: I have a final question for you. Did any of you have a single adult there as a support for you?

Young person C: Some of the adults who work with children in care are generally good people, but some of them do not have the children's best interests at heart, or they group them or stereotype them. I have even heard a lot of people in my life say, "You're not my child, so it does not really matter", and I'm just like, "All right, but you have chosen to do this job. You have chosen to help children in care. If you don't want to help, based on the fact that I am not your child, why not stay at home with your children? Why work with other people's children?" It honestly makes no sense to me.

A lot of kids in care do not feel they can get close to adults because, even in care homes, a lot of the things you see are written down, and they are not always written down correctly. On paper, some of the things people have written about me look awful, and that is not how it has happened. I am just shocked. I'm like, "You know full well that didn't happen." Because a staff member doesn't like you or because they have something against you, they will write it, and it can go from them being like this with you to literally despising you. They are in power and can write what they want, so it makes a lot of children feel that the more they know about me, the worse it is. If I get too close to this person, the next day they can turn around and write whatever they want about me.

Q300 Chair: If it's okay, I'd like to ask you all whether there is anything that you would want to change in our report to make things better. I know we have discussed a lot of it today, but are there one or two things that you think the Government have to listen to? Can I put you on the spot, Young person D, and start with you?



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Young person D: Sure. I absolutely feel that there need to be improvements to education. The fact that it is common for colleges and universities to not track care-experienced people because we are so little needs to improve. We still exist. It is important. I am not sure how anybody else feels about this, but I feel there should be an introduction to discrimination laws regarding care-experienced people, because when it comes to careers and things like that, if we have “care-experienced” on our record, that could put us at a disadvantage, and that is not right at all. We need to have some sort of protection, otherwise it will be so much more difficult for the people who come after us.

Q301 **Chair:** What you are saying is that that should not have to be on your applications or whatever.

Young person D: I don’t know how to say this—

Q302 **Ian Mearns:** It seems to me, Young person D, that you are saying you are stigmatised as care-experienced, as opposed to being advantaged by it.

Henrietta Imoreh: I think you are trying to say it is a protected characteristic.

Young person D: When it comes to the majority of the protected characteristics—disabled people, LGBT people, people of colour—those people have discrimination laws, which are regularly upheld, but we as a group are classified under a protected characteristic that is not tracked and not upheld. We have no laws.

Young person A: For me, I think it will be on Kim’s point, about how to help a child trying to do that transition into semi-independence and into moving into adult life. For me, that is something that I feel needs to be upheld and looked at, because at the end of the day, these are our young people—they are going to be the next generation of amazing adults and they need to succeed in life. In order for them to do that, they need to have a placeholder and they need to be taught about how to actually live in this adult world, whether that is not getting into debt, knowing how to run a household, getting a job, keeping a job, learning how to do your CV. These things need to be implemented from Young person C’s age. She is 16. She needs to be taught about how to actually live life, because if they are not, they are going to go out into this world worried and in fear, or they are going to turn to crime or ways that they shouldn’t, and it just goes in a spiral from there.

Q303 **Chair:** Thank you. Young person C, what one or two things would you change to make things better?

Young person C: This might be a bit of a stretch, but I feel that growing up in care, you go through so many things that you honestly shouldn’t have to—awful things—so maybe requesting something at the end of it. Obviously, it wouldn’t make up for it, but it is something that you have always wanted to do. Nothing ridiculous, but say, “Oh, yeah, I want to travel to this country.” I really want to travel, but I’m not sure if I will be



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able to within the next few years, because I am going to have to save up to live, to buy a car, to do lessons—for all the necessities that I need.

When I am 18 and I am finished being in care, it is going to be 10 years that I have been in care. I am not saying, “Oh, you should be rewarded for it”, but just something, so you can be like, “At least I get something for it.”

Q304 **Miriam Cates:** Are you talking about being giving money? Or are you talking about a make-a-wish sort of thing—a trip or a choice or something?

Young person C: Yes, just an opportunity. Not money in hand, but—I don’t know—if you want to go to Rome or something, for that just to be paid for. It can be different for everyone.

Young person A: Something to work towards—something to look forward to.

Q305 **Chair:** Thank you. Young person B, please.

Young person B: Mine would be help with foster carers, so they are updated, managed and educated, because they are not educated. The education would be going into the colleges. We can do that. We are here right now. Use us to your advantage. We are here at every local authority—they just choose not to use us. We can go in to educate them. So that would be for that transition.

The DWP need a lot more learning on disabilities, care leavers and everything else, and there needs to be somebody who is held accountable in our local authority to merge them all together, instead of going, “They are responsible; they are responsible; I will wait for a referral; I will wait for a referral.”

Q306 **Chair:** Finally, Young person D.

Young person D: Just going back to what you said about increasing training with foster carers, I completely agree. Adding on that, I think there should be increased pay and training to residential home workers. Nobody is going to go to work with a positive attitude wanting to actually help a child if they are paid peanuts. I don’t know what people think about that.

Young person B: That is up to the private companies that get paid £3,000 a week to increase it.

Q307 **Ian Mearns:** We have Patrick here, who is a virtual head, who looks after the educational aspects of children’s welfare within local authorities. I am wondering whether there should be a virtual parent, so, from a social work perspective, the management of the foster carers and the care in the care homes is totally separated from the pastoral care aspect of the child, so you have an advocate not just on the educational side but on the welfare side for the child, as well as those people who are managing them through the system. I am throwing that at you.



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Chair: Then I am going to bring Young person C in finally. Patrick, first.

Patrick Ward: It does exist within the system, because you have the independent reviewing officer, who is supposed to be bringing them all together. However, the problem is that they are often managed within local authorities, so they are not genuinely independent. Looking at the powers of that particular role, that could be the professional you are describing, if the system worked a little bit differently.

Chair: Last word to you, Young person C.

Young person C: On Young person D's point, I do not agree that if they are paid peanuts, they will not want to work with kids. I feel that if someone wants to do something, it should not matter how much they are getting paid, as long as they can get paid to live adequately. If they honestly want to do it— even if they were getting paid nothing—they would do it, because that would show that they are not in it for the money and that they genuinely have an interest in doing it.

Young person D: I feel like that is a fantastic point, and I completely agree. The passion of people who want to work in residential homes is great, but I also think of the people who are looking for a job but can find only that job. We should foster passion, expand on it and compensate them well for it.

Young person B: If it is not regulated, you are not going to get what you want out of it. You are paying £3,000 a week, and you are not putting any commitments on them. That isn't justice.

Young person A: I have had great carers in a foster care home and residential, so I will always say positive things about them. I have literally had an amazing time being in a residential care home. Most of the workers there helped me change my life. They listened to everything, including my cultural needs. I demanded money for my hair when I was in [place name redacted], and to buy food. That made me feel at home. I had about four carers who stretched their arms and legs for me. That is why I sit on panels to this day, to make sure that people are like that, regardless of their pay. There are people who have done that and shown that it can be done, if they have the passion to do it.

Q308 **Chair:** Thank you so much; we are in your debt. I have been Chair of this Committee since 2017, and it has been one of the most incredible sessions I have ever attended as Committee Chair. I really appreciate all of you for giving up your time. We will try to reflect everything you have said in our report, and we will send you individual copies when it has been published. I hope that when the report is published, which will probably be in the spring, you look at it and think that we have listened to all of you. Very good luck in everything that you do, and I really wish you well. Thank you very much.