

Care Experienced Children Statistical Briefing 2024

March 2024



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Care Experienced Children

Statistical Briefing 2024

March 2024

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Content: This briefing on care experienced children in Wales updates our previous [statistical briefing](#) of January 2023.

It uses published data to set out a range of information about care experienced children, parental factors, social services expenditure and workforce information. Where these are measured and published it also sets out outcomes for children and young people. It uses data from a range of publications and also from third sector organisations to supplement official statistics published on [StatsWales](#). It identifies some aspects of the policy areas where data is not published.

Policy context: In May 2023, the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee published its report [If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people](#). This followed on from the report of the Senedd Petitions Committee about [Supporting care experienced parents](#). You can read more about this scrutiny in our article [Radical reform of services for care experienced children](#).

Terminology: Whilst the term 'care experienced children' is now widely used, current Welsh Government statistics refer to 'children looked after'. This has a legal meaning and refers to children under 18 who are 'looked after' by local authorities. This briefing therefore uses the terms 'children looked after' and 'looked after children' when referring to that data.

Disclosure: The [StatsWales](#) data relating to children looked after may be rounded to the nearest 5 to avoid disclosure. The totals of some tables may therefore not match.

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At a glance

These statistics, their sources and the accompanying notes are set out throughout this report:

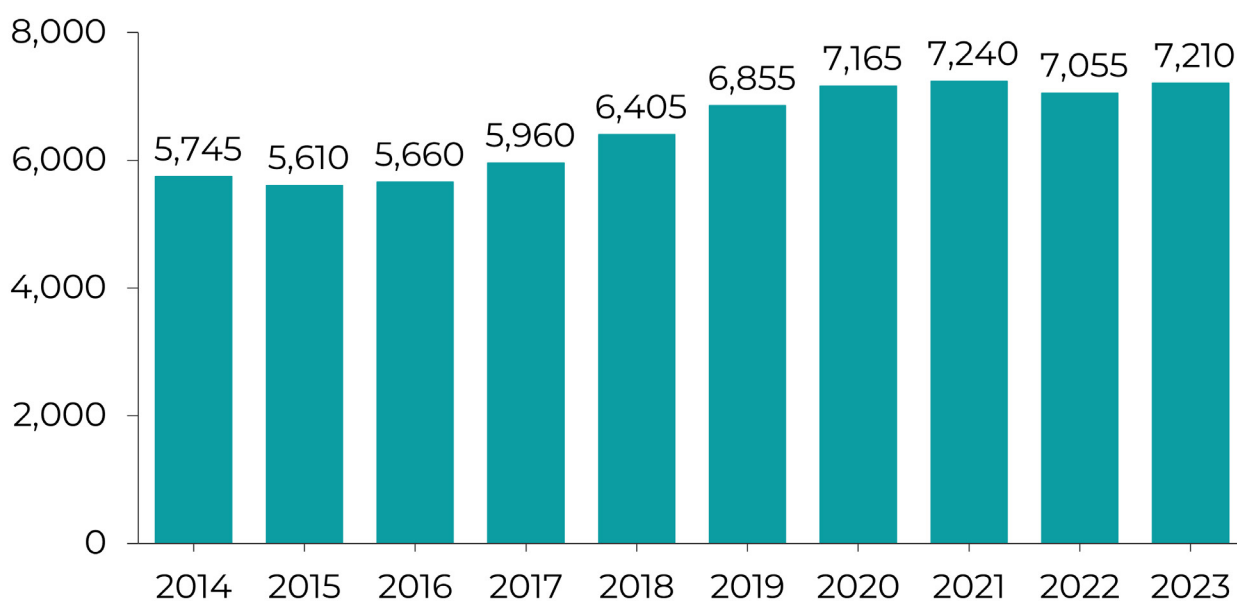
- 7,210 children were looked after by Welsh local authorities as at 31 March 2023, an increase of 26% since 2014. **The care rate in Wales** increased by 83% between 2003 and 2022, with more than 1% of children under 18 currently in care (see **Figure 1.1: Children looked after at 31 March**).
- The rates of looked after children varies between local authorities from 52 per 10,000 of the population aged under 18 in Carmarthenshire to 200 per 10,000 in Torfaen (see **Map 1: Looked after children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18 at 31 March 2023; by area**).
- In the year to 31 March 2023, 26% of looked after children had lived in two or more placements during the previous 12 months (see **Figure 2.1: Children looked after at 31 March by placement type; 2022**).
- Data on children achieving 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including maths and English or Welsh first language shows that looked after children have lower educational attainment when compared to pupils eligible for free school meals and all pupils in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (the latest available data) (see **Figure 2.4: Percentage of children achieving the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and Mathematics at key stage 4 2016/17 to 2018/19**).
- There are no routinely collated or published statistics about the number of care experienced parents who have their own children temporarily or permanently removed. Information collected by Senedd Committees suggests at least a third of care experienced parents had their own birth children removed from their care (see **Children of care experienced children**).
- Latest figures for 2021-22 show that 301 care leavers were homeless in that 12-month period. Published statistics do not tell us what percentage of the relevant population of young people leaving care this is (see **Accommodation and homelessness**).
- Real-terms expenditure on looked after children services increased by 57% between 2013-14 and 2022-23 (see **Figure 4.1: Total social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services; 2013-14 to 2022-23 (£ thousand)**).

1. Entry into care

The number of children looked after

As at 31 March 2023 there were **7,210** children looked after in Wales, which compares to 5,745 on 31 March 2014, an **increase of 26%**. In 2021 there were 7,240 looked after children in Wales, the highest number recorded since 2003. Between 2022 and 2023 there was a 2% increase of 155 looked after children.

Figure 1.1: Children looked after at 31 March

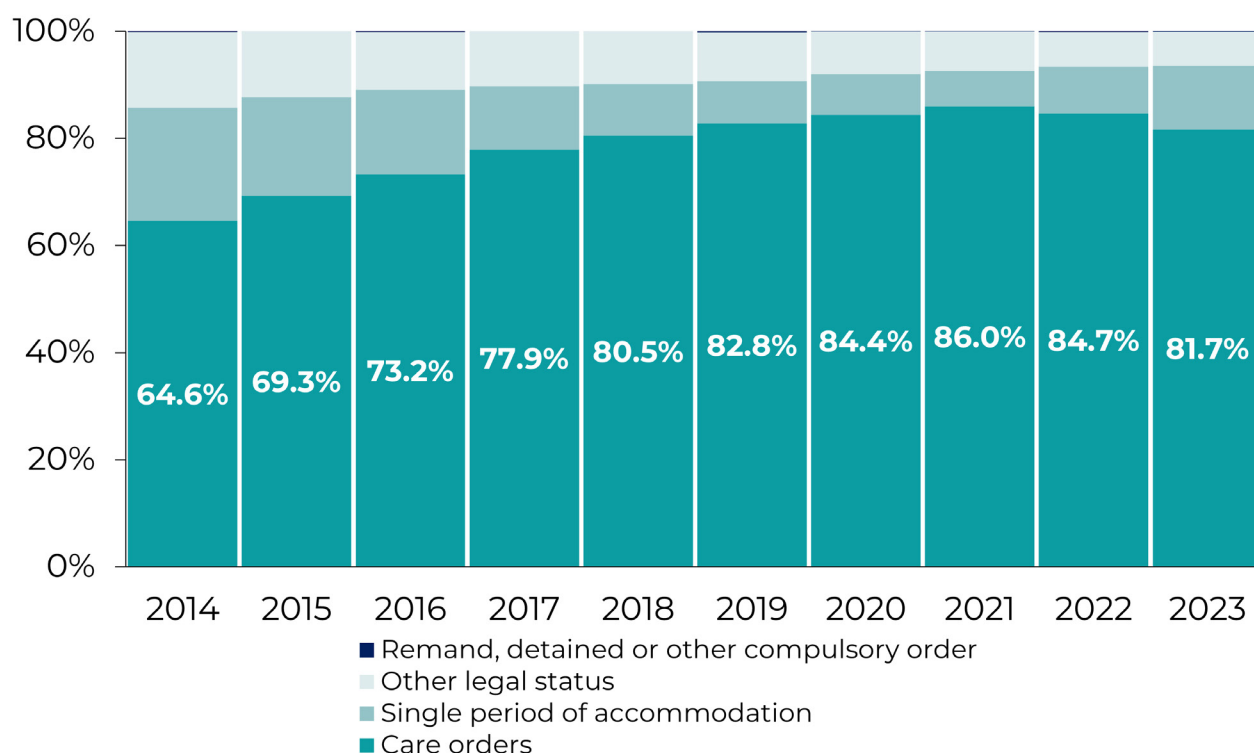


Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age](#)

Legal status

Children looked after include those on care orders and other children provided with accommodation by local authorities. Some children are also looked after because local authorities provide accommodation for respite purposes - these children are not included in the figures below. Data for the last 10 years shows that the percentage of looked after children on care orders has increased from 64.6% (3,710) in 2014 to 81.7% (5,890) in 2023.

Figure 1.2: Percentage of children looked after at 31 March by legal status



Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and legal status](#)

Looked after children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18

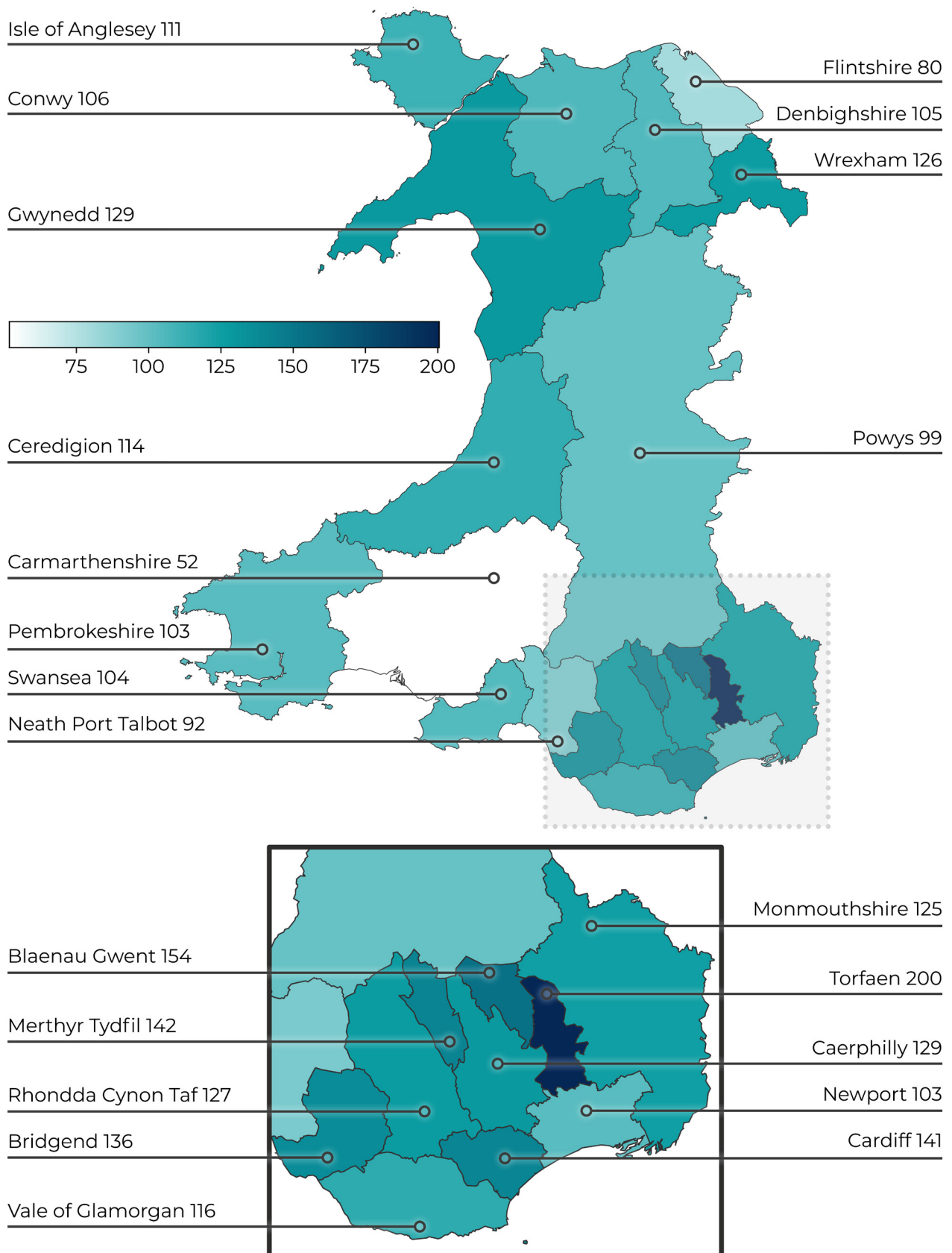
On 31 March 2014 there were 91 looked after children per 10,000 population in Wales, increasing to 117 in 2021 and decreasing to **116 per 10,000** in 2023.

Local authority variation: Looking at the number of looked after children aged under 18 per 10,000 population by local authority as at 31 March 2023, **Torfaen** has the highest rate of 200 and **Carmarthenshire** has the lowest rate of 52 looked after children per 10,000 population aged under 18.

Rates in England: In England the number of looked after children per 10,000 population aged under 18 increased from 66 per 10,000 in 2019 to 71 **per 10,000 in 2023**. The 2023 rate in England (71 per 10,000) is below the rate for Wales (**116 per 10,000**) although the [Department for Education’s statistical release](#) states:

Data is collected and published independently by each of the four countries in the UK. Although there are similarities between the data collected by the four nations, there are also differences which may be down to different policies and legislation, and differing historical data collections.

Map 1: Looked after children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18 at 31 March 2023; by area



Sources: Wales - StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 population aged under 18 by local authority and year](#)

England - Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions 2023](#)

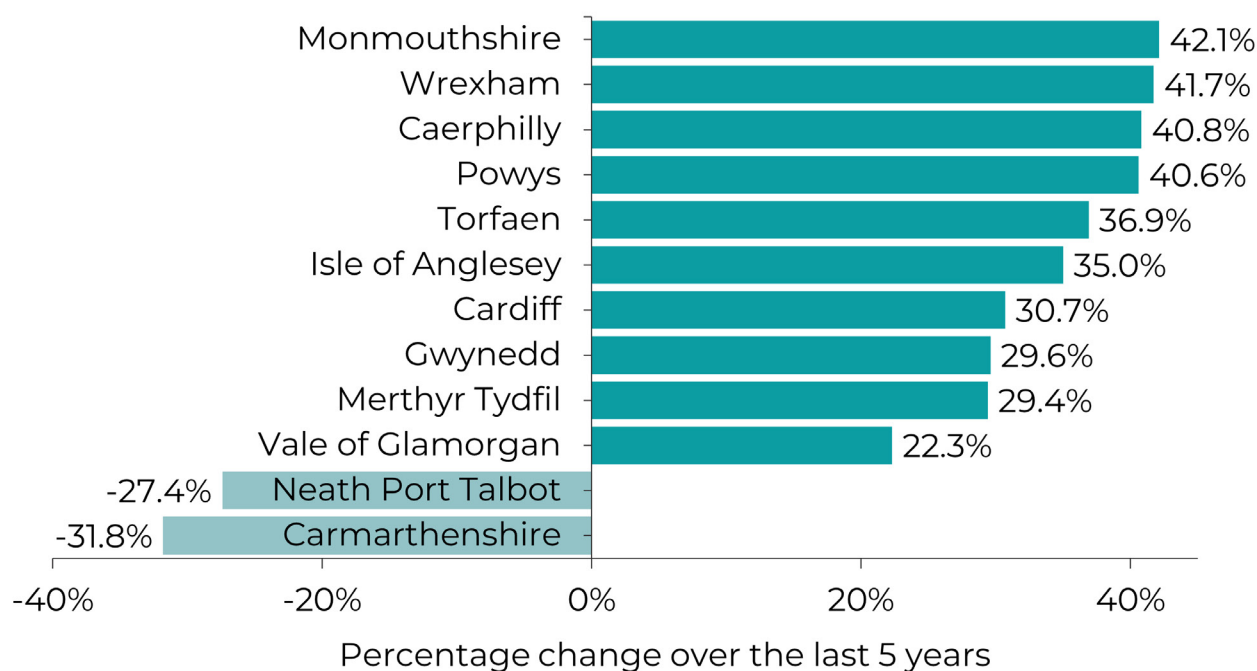
Notes: Rates per 10,000 aged under 18 are based on ONS population estimates.

Care rates

The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) published [Children’s social services and care rates in Wales: A survey of the sector](#) in September 2021. In the report local authorities were identified as having decreasing care rates if they had reduced the rate of children in care by 10% or more over the last five years. Local authorities were identified as having increasing care rates if the rate of care had increased by more than the Welsh average (21%) over the last five years.

The WCPP’s report explains in the analysis that they have excluded local authorities which, despite having a large increase or decrease, had a lower or higher care rate than would be expected when deprivation is taken into account. Pembrokeshire falls into this category with a high rise but still comparatively low care rate.

Figure 1.3: Local authorities with increasing and decreasing rates of care selected for comparison (WCPP Report 2021)

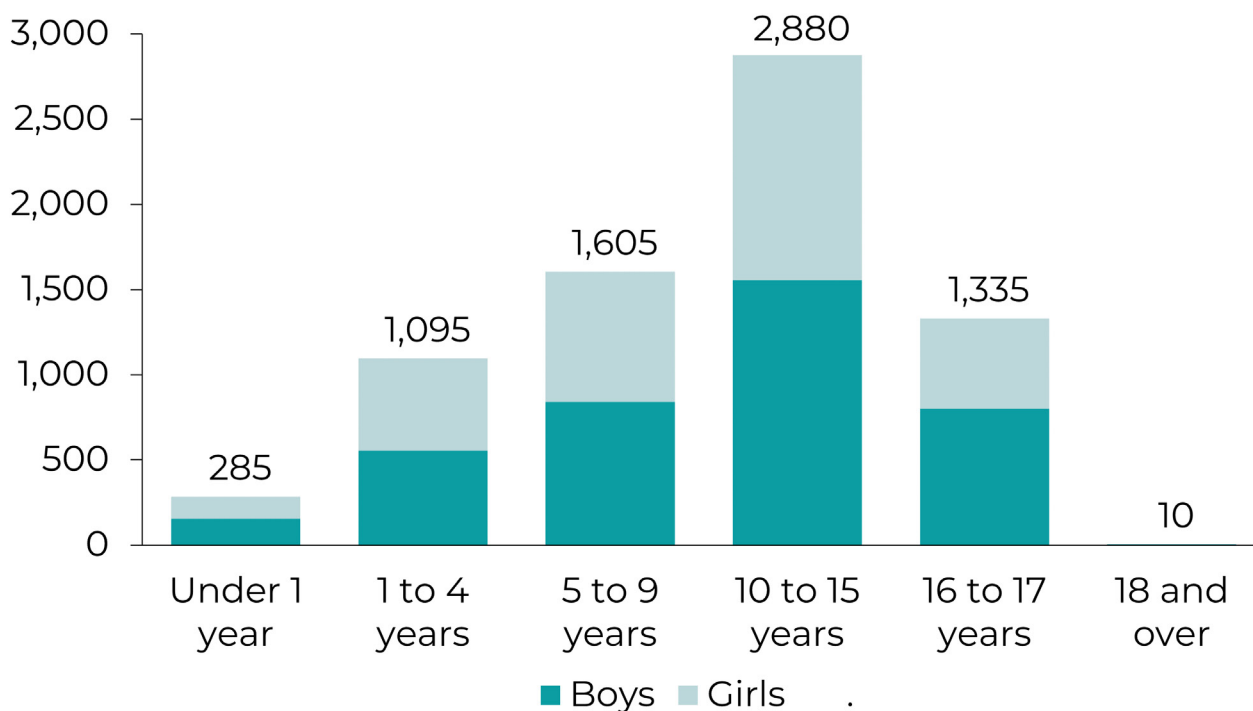


Source: Wales Centre for Public Policy, [Children’s social services and care rates in Wales: A survey of the sector, 2021](#)

Gender and Age

Statistics on the number of looked after children by gender and age are available on StatsWales rounded to the nearest 5. This means that some of the totals may not match those in other figures. Boys make up 54% of the total number of looked after children. Over half (59%) of all looked after children are aged 10 or over.

Figure 1.4: Percentage of children looked after at 31 March 2023 by gender and age



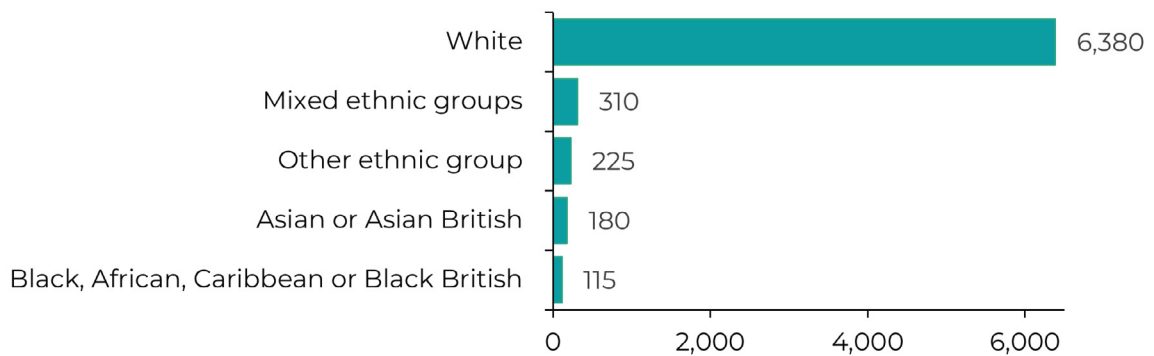
Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age](#)

Ethnicity

Where ethnicity was known, 88.5% of children looked after in 2022-23 identified their ethnic group as white, 4.3% as mixed ethnic group, 3.1% as other ethnic groups, 2.5% as Asian or Asian British and 1.6% as Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

Data from the 2021 Census shows 90.2% of 0-17 year olds were from a white ethnic background, 3.6% were from mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds, 1.3% from other ethnic backgrounds, 3.7% were from an Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh ethnic background, and 1.3% were from a Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African ethnic background.

Figure 1.5: Children looked after at 31 March by ethnicity; 2021-22

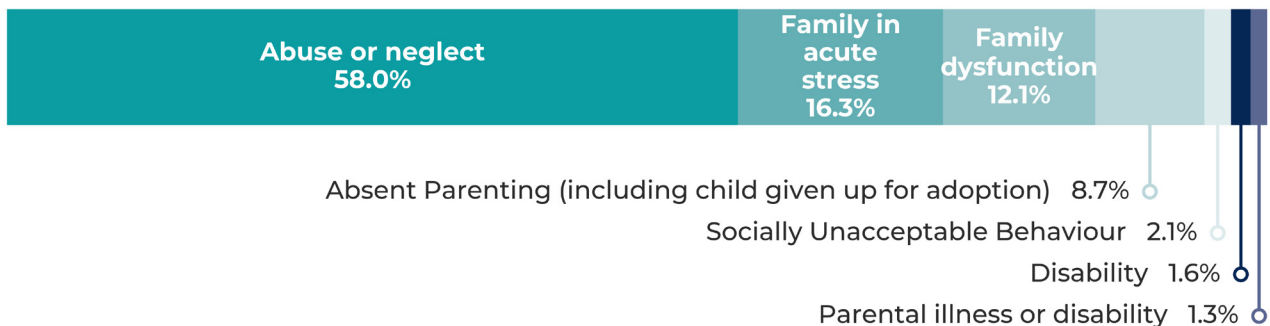


Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and ethnicity](#)

Reasons for children needing to be looked after

Data on children starting to be looked after by need for care shows that **abuse or neglect was the reason 58.0%** of children (1,105) started to be looked after, followed by family in acute stress (16.3%, 310) and family dysfunction (12.1%, 230).

Figure 1.6: Percentage of children starting to be looked after by need of care in Wales; 2021-22



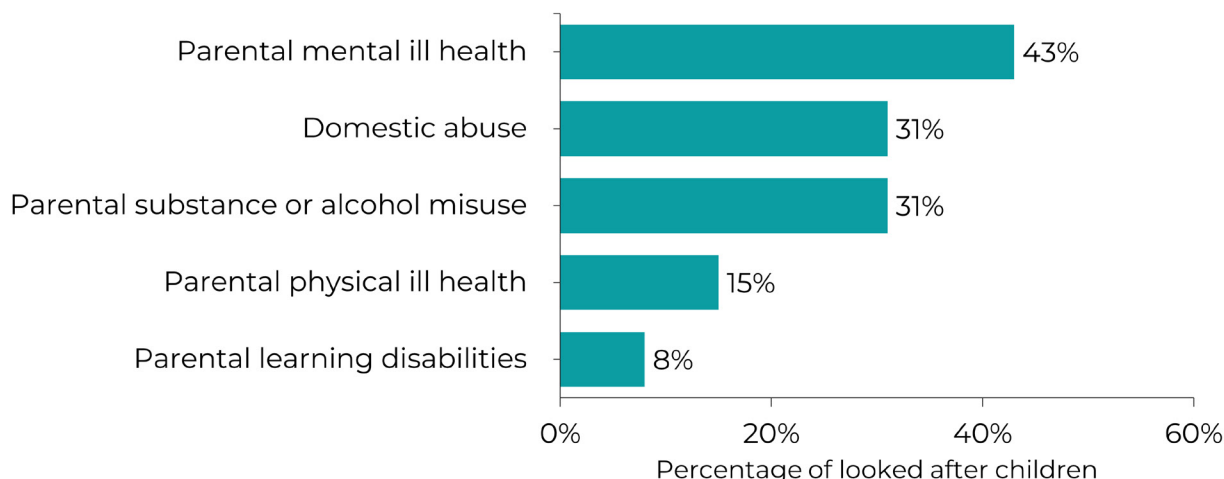
Excludes adoption disruption which was less than 5 children (0.3%).

Source: StatsWales, [Children starting to be looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and need for care](#)

Parental factors

The Welsh Government collects some data that measures the ‘characteristics and attributes’ of children looked after by local authorities. Data for children looked after as at 31 March 2022 shows that parental mental ill health (43%) was the most common factor, followed by domestic abuse (31%) and parental substance of alcohol misuse (31%).

Figure 1.7: Parental factors of children looked after as at 31 March 2021



Source: StatsWales, [Parental factors of children receiving care and support by measure and year](#)

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

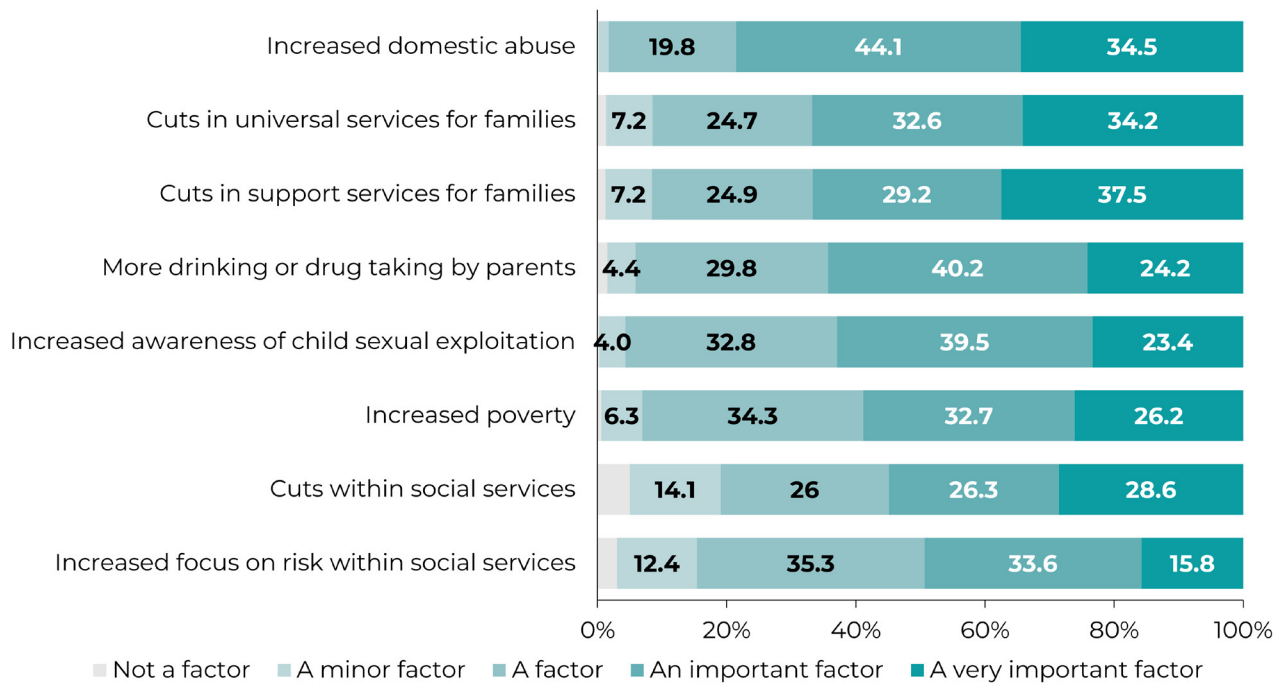
Latest statistics on [Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being looked after at 31 March by local authority](#) show a large increase on the previous year. The all Wales number has increased from 110 children in 2022 to 260 children in 2023. As in the previous year, Cardiff has the highest number of children however the spread across other Welsh local authorities has increased in the latest figures.

Factors influencing care rates

The Wales Centre for Public Policy [Children’s social services and care rates in Wales: A survey of the sector](#) report analyses the results of a survey of 792 social workers and leaders in children’s social care across Wales. It found that the care rate in Wales increased by 83% between 2003 and 2022, with more than 1% of children currently in care.

The survey sought to understand what those working in the sector believe may be driving care rates and asked about which factors most influence the increase in care rates in Wales. Figure 1.8 shows respondents felt the biggest drivers for increased care rates were **increased domestic abuse with 78.6%** of respondents saying this was an important or very important factor. This was followed by cuts in universal services for families (66.8%) and cuts in support services for families (66.7%).

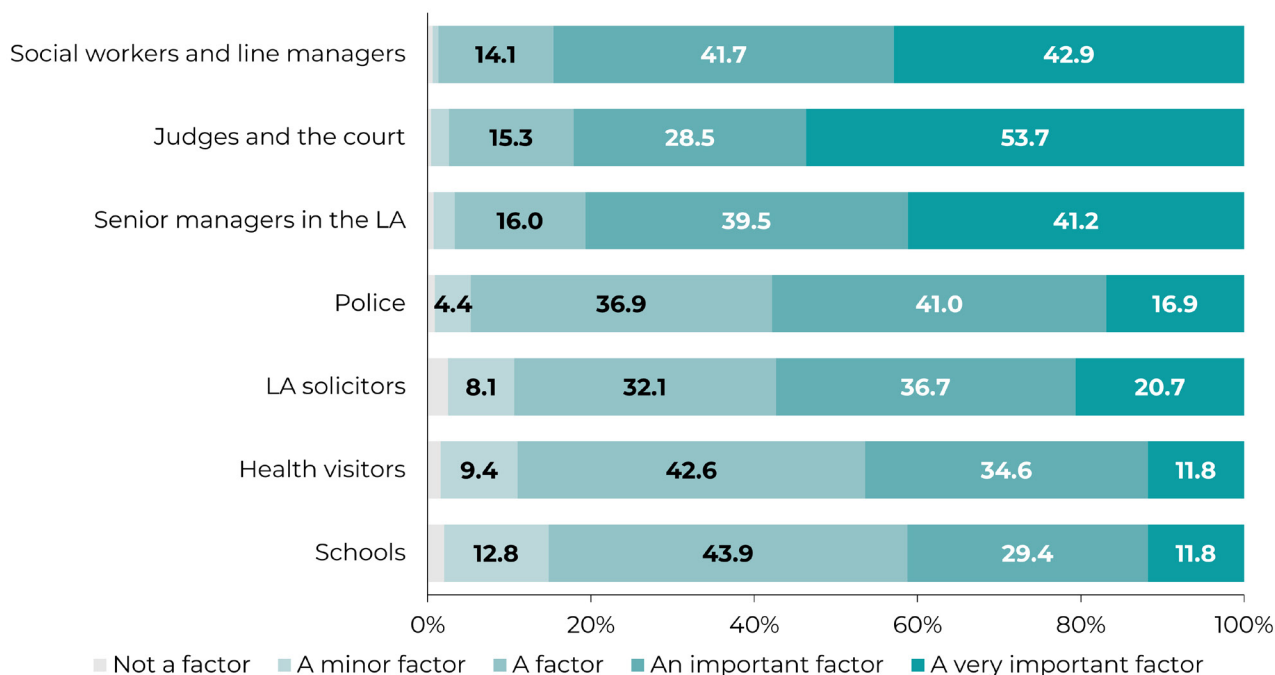
Figure 1.8: The proportion of responses to factors influencing care rates



Source: Wales Centre for Public Policy, **Appendices: Children’s social services and care rates in Wales - A survey of the sector** - Table D1

Respondents were then asked which agencies or groups most influenced the likelihood of children being in care in their area. Respondents were most likely to state social workers and line managers with 84.6% stating this was an important or very important factor. Followed by judges and the court (82.2%) and senior managers in the LA (80.7%) as set out in Figure 1.9.

Figure 1.9: Respondents’ views about the influence of agencies or groups on care rate in their local authority



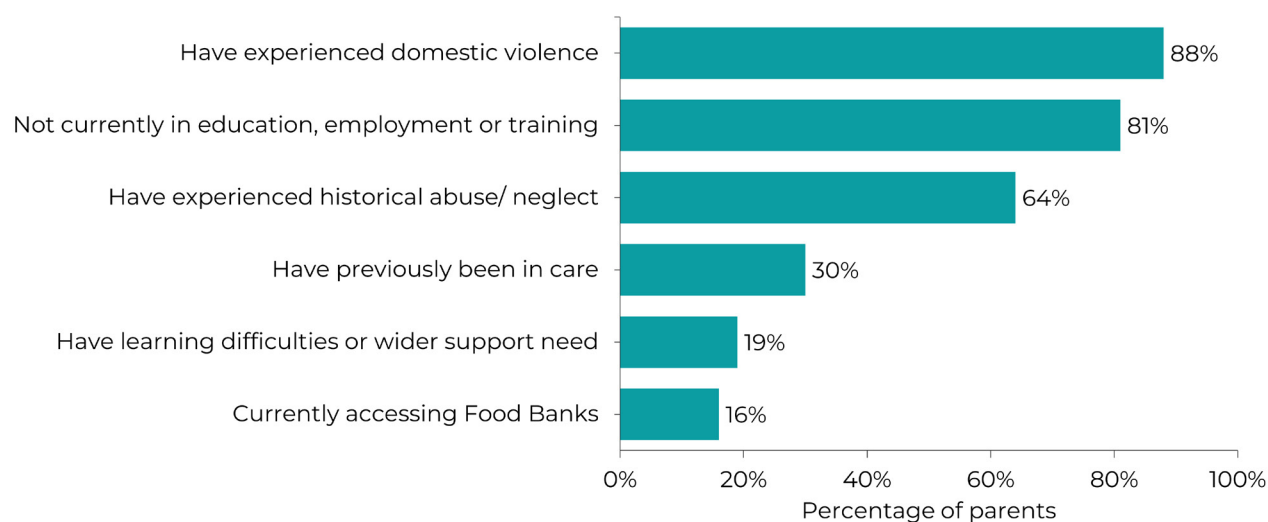
Source: Wales Centre for Public Policy, **Appendices: Children’s social services and care rates in Wales – A survey of the sector** – Table D2

Parental advocacy provider statistics

Barnardo’s Cymru’s **Reflect Project** provides support to women (and partners) that have had one or more children permanently removed from their care.

It collects the presenting and historical needs of parents of looked after children. Figure 1.10 sets out information from 2022-23 and shows **88% of parents had experienced domestic violence** and 64% had experienced historical abuse/neglect.

Figure 1.10: Presenting and historical needs of parents of looked after children 2022-23



Source: Barnardo's Cymru

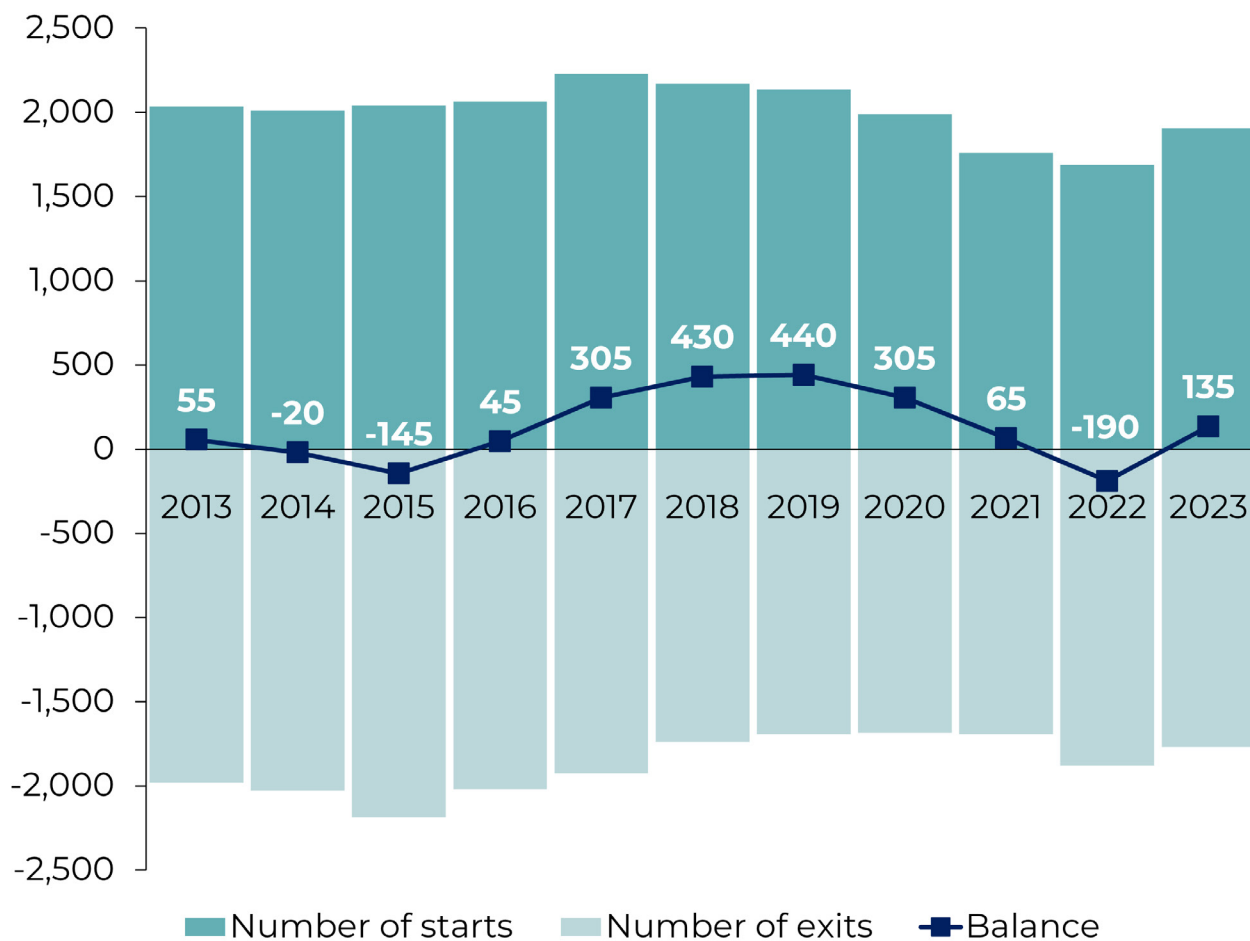
The balance of flows into and out of the care system over time

Figure 1.11 shows the number of starts and exits from the care system and the balance of children remaining in the care system from 2013 to 2023.

Between 2013 and 2020 there were around 2,000 entries of children and young people into the care system each year, peaking at 2,230 in 2017 and reducing to 1,690 by 2022. From 2022 to 2023, the number of entries increased to 1,905. The number of children and young people leaving the care system decreased from 2015 to 2020 and then started to rise in 2021 and 2022. The number leaving the care system in 2023 was 1,770.

The 'balance' between 'starts' and 'exits' is shown by the trend line in Figure 1.11. In 2015 and 2022 there were more 'exits' than 'starts' resulting in what the Wales Centre for Public Policy's (WCPP) methodology referred to as a 'negative balance'. In the other years there was a positive balance with more starts than exits. In their analysis, the WCPP caution that the two measures are not directly comparable as one covers the whole year and the other is a snapshot.

Figure 1.11 The balance between flows into and out of the care system over time across Wales



Sources:

Starts - StatsWales, [Children starting to be looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and need for care](#)

Exits - StatsWales, [Episodes finishing for children looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and reason for finishing](#) (not including Episode ceases and new episode begins on same or next day)

Balance - starts minus exits using the methodology from Wales Centre for Public Policy, [Children looked after in Wales: Flows into and out of the care system](#)

Babies entering care

In December 2023, Nuffield Family Justice Observatory published research on [Understanding care pathways and placement stability for babies in Wales](#).

The report is the seventh in the Born into Care series, and the first to use data

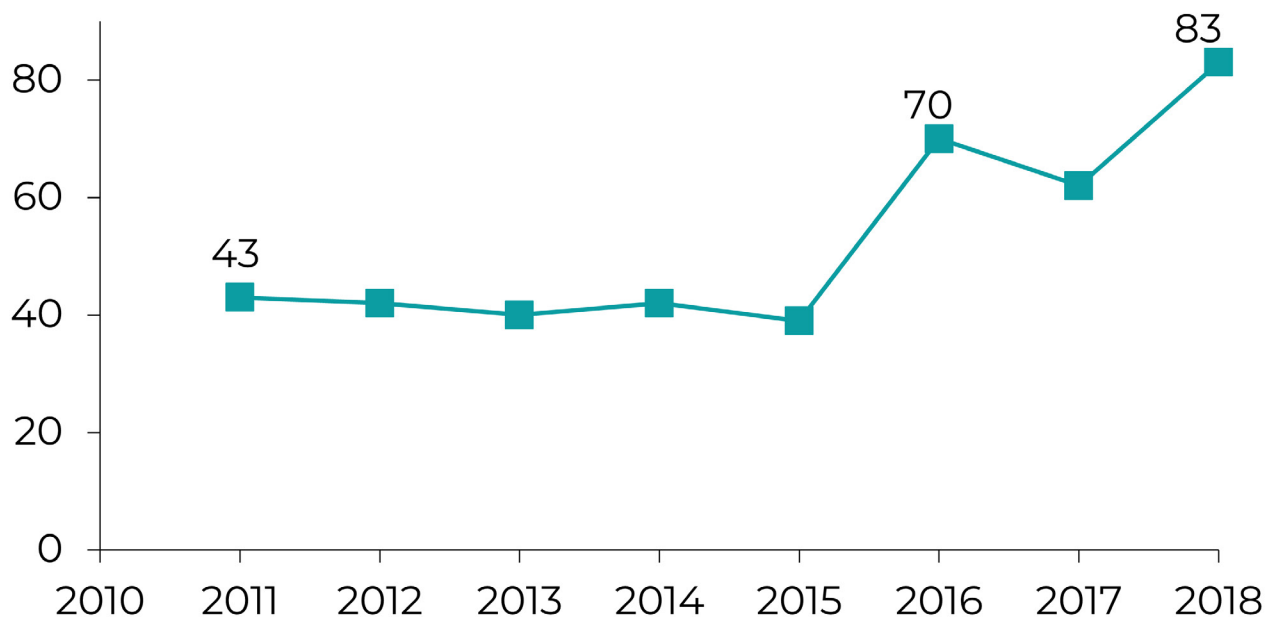
collected by local authorities on all children in care to understand the care experiences and outcomes for babies under a year old. Children under a year old are referred to as babies and babies under 2 weeks old are referred to as newborn babies.

It found that between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2021 in Wales, 6,333 babies entered care for the first time. Of these babies, 45% (2,879) were under 4 weeks old. Over one third (38%, 2,430) were newborn babies.

- In 2020/21, 353 babies entered care for the first time – an increase of 54% since 2003/4, when 230 babies entered care for the first time. The number of babies entering care in the intervening years fluctuated. For example, 347 babies entered care in 2009/10 compared with 276 in the previous year, rising to 451 in 2018/19 before dropping off again in 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- While the number of babies under a year old in the population has been declining in Wales since 2012, the number entering care over time has increased.
- The highest recorded incidence of babies entering care for the first time in Wales over the study period was in 2018/19, where 141 babies per 10,000 of the population entered care. By 2020/21 the incidence rate had declined slightly to 120 per 10,000, up from 74 per 10,000 in 2003/4.
- There was considerable variation in the incidence rates of babies entering care for the first time between the 22 local authorities in Wales, with 7 local authorities having higher than average incidence rates, and 9 local authorities having lower than average incidence rates. There is a link with area deprivation, with the proportion of babies entering care increasing with greater levels of deprivation, although this finding needs to be treated with caution as data on deprivation was missing for 20% of the sample.
- Within the three designated family judge (DFJ) areas, there was little variation in incidence rates between local authorities in North Wales, some variation between local authorities in the Cardiff and South East Wales area, and considerable variation between local authorities in Swansea and South West Wales.

Using the 2019 report, Figure 1.12 below shows the number of newborn infants subject to care proceedings within two weeks of birth per 10,000 live births, by year. There were around 40 per year from 2011 to 2015. From 2015, there was an overall increase to 83 in 2018.

Figure 1.12 Newborn infants subject to care proceedings within two weeks of birth per 10,000 live births in Wales



Source: The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory [Born into Care: newborns and infants in care proceedings in Wales](#) October 2019

Children of care experienced children

There are currently no routinely collated or published statistics relating to the number of care experienced parents who have their own children temporarily or permanently removed.

The Senedd Petitions Committee has taken evidence on a petition calling for **[Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents' care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement.](#)**

As part of this, Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru provided **[snap shot data from the Swansea](#)** setting out information about 380 care experienced young people in touch with the local authority as of March 2022. It suggests that of these, 21 were parents and 14 had their children remaining living with them. From the cohort of care experienced parents, 5 were under 18 years of age at the point of birth (the youngest being 15) and 16 were aged 18-22 years. This appears to suggest that **a third of care experienced parents had their birth children removed.**

In the report of its Inquiry into Care Experienced Children, **the Children Young People and Education Committee** said that:

NYAS and CAFCASS Cymru told us there is no way to know for sure how many care experienced women are having children and how many of those children are going through child protection processes.

It wrote to **the Chair of All Wales Heads of Childrens Services Group ADSS Cymru** requesting additional information but was **told** that Wales data was not available.

This followed on from the report of the Senedd Petitions Committee about **Supporting care experienced parents**. Dr Louise Roberts, part of CASCADE, the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre at Cardiff University provided that Committee with an overview of the five-year research study undertaken between 2014-2019 exploring the challenges faced by care experienced parents. The Committee found that:

The data shows that 26 per cent of children were separated from both biological parents. However, without routinely collected data, it's not easy to decipher what the figures means.

The Petitions Committee recommended:

The Welsh Government should ensure that data is routinely collected in relation to how many young people in care or who have left care (up to the age of 21) become pregnant, and how many of their children remain with their parent/s, placed in foster care or with family members or placed for adoption. Learning about the outcomes for families is important to inform our understanding in order to further develop support systems and plan services accordingly. In the interim we welcome the Deputy Minister for Social Services' offer to undertake a snapshot survey of experienced care parents across all local authorities.

The Welsh Government **response** to the recommendation in June 2023 was to 'accept in principle' saying it "does not currently have in place the data sources to collate data outlined in the Committee's recommendation" and saying:

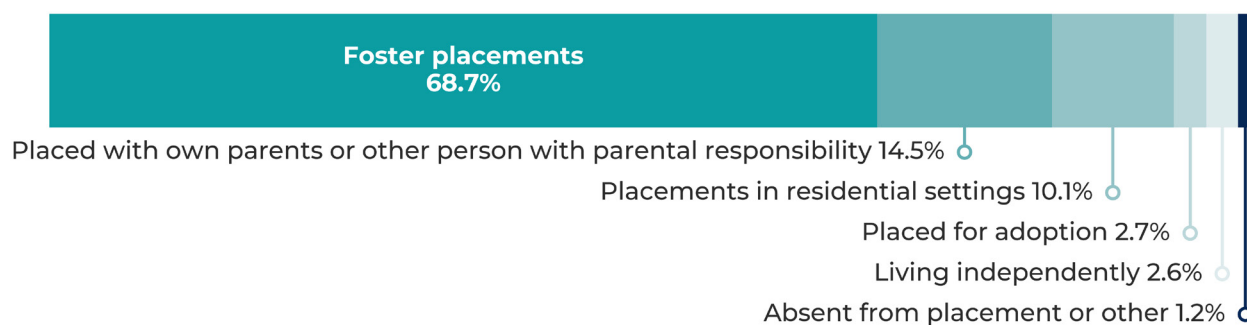
The Welsh Government will actively explore availability of the data with the Knowledge & Analytical Service and local authorities. In addition, the Transformation Delivery Group will consider the collation of this data as part of its work on metrics for children's services.

2. In care

Type of placement

Of the 7,210 looked after children in 2023, the majority (68.7%) were in foster placements, followed by being placed with their own parents or other person with parental responsibilities (14.5%) and 10.1% were in placements in residential settings.

Figure 2.1: Children looked after at 31 March by placement type; 2023

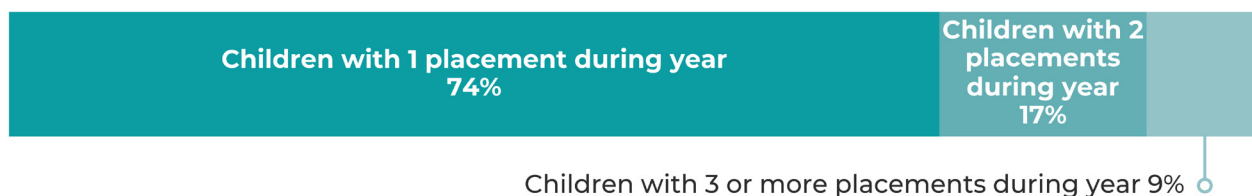


Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and placement type](#)

Number of placements during year

Nearly three quarters (74%, 5,350) of children looked after had one placement during the year to 31 March 2023. This means that **26% of children looked after had two or more placements in the previous 12 months**. This is made up of 1,190 or 17% of children looked after that had two placements and 670 or 9% of children that had three or more placements.

Figure 2.2: Children looked after at 31 March by number of placements during year; 2023



Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, number of placements during year and measure](#)

Location of placement

Over half (63.5%, 4,580) of children looked after had their placements inside their local authority, **25.5% (1,835) had placements outside of their local authority** in Wales and 6.5% (470) were placed outside of Wales.

Figure 2.3: Children looked after at 31 March by location of placement 2023



Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and location of placement](#)

Adoptions of looked after children

In the year to 31 March 2023, [data](#) shows that 245 looked after children were adopted. Over two fifths (43%, 105) were adopted in 2 to 3 years, 31% were adopted in 1 to 2 years, 16% in 3 to 4 years and 6% in 4 to 5 years. The majority (69%, 170) of looked after children adopted in the year to 31 March were aged under 1 year.

Changes of school during the year

The [Social Services Performance and Improvement Framework data](#) includes data on the number of children looked after on the 31 March who experienced **one or more changes of school** during the year (excluding transitional arrangements, moves associated with adoption or moves home). Latest figures for 2021-22 show **that 413 children moved once or more in that 12 month period**. Published [statistics](#) suggest this 413 children are from an approximate total of 5,021 compulsory school age children who are being looked after by Welsh local authorities.

Educational outcomes

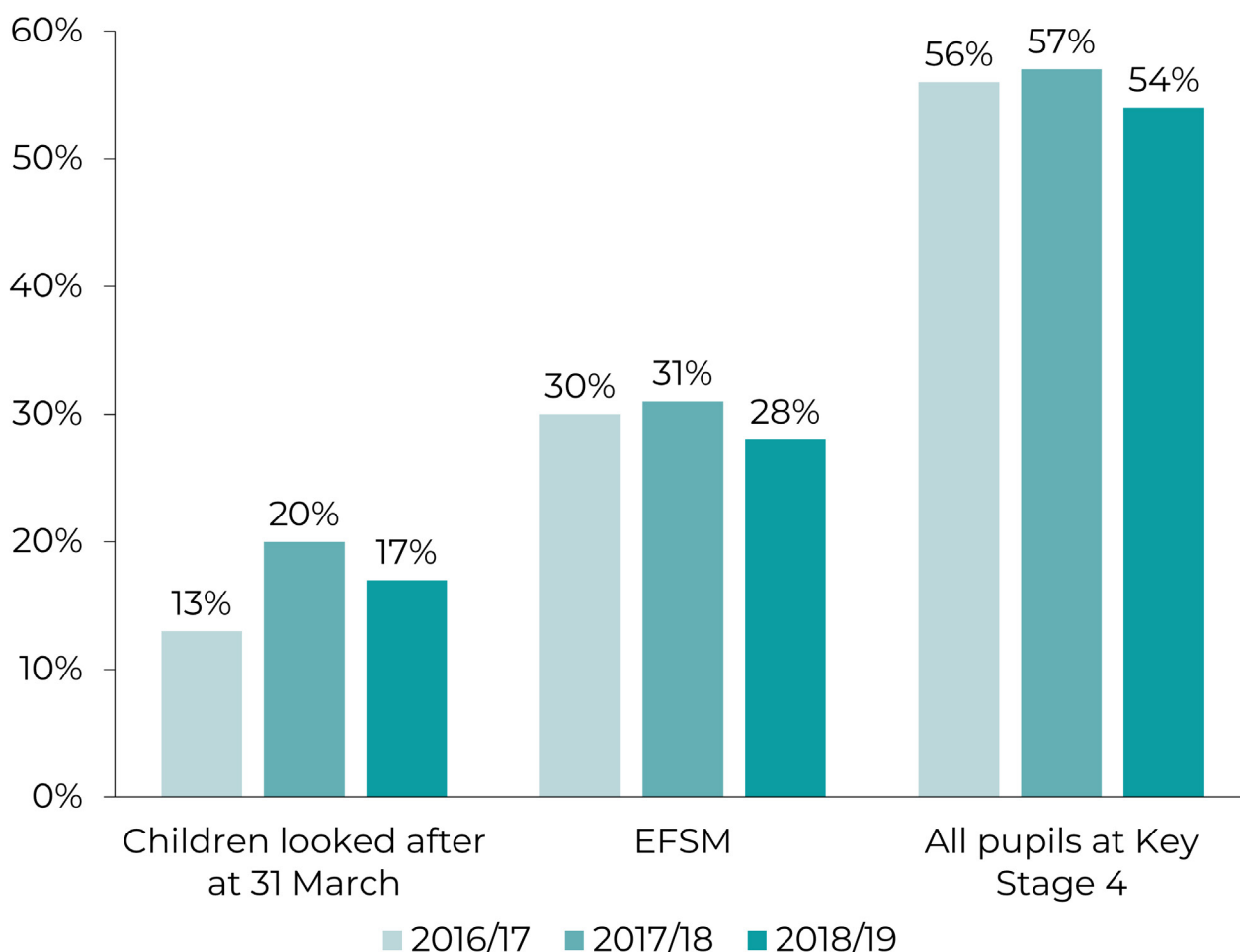
There is very limited data published on the educational experience of looked after children, for example the number of school moves they experience or the educational outcomes they achieve during their school careers. See the section of the briefing on leaving care for post-18 outcomes.

There is some historical data available on educational outcomes at key stage 4

which we have compared to educational outcomes for all pupils and for those pupils eligible for free school meals, which will continue to be used as the proxy measure for deprivation until the roll out of universal provision.

Figure 2.4 below shows the percentage of children achieving 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including maths and English or Welsh first language. Looked after children have lower educational attainment when compared to pupils eligible for free school meals and all pupils in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Figure 2.4: Percentage of children achieving the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and Mathematics at key stage 4, 2016/17 to 2018/19



Sources: StatsWales, [Educational attainment of children receiving care and support by measure and year, Key Stage 4 Interim Measures by Year, from 2018/19](#) and [Key Stage 4 Interim Measures by Year, from 2018/19](#)

(a) Includes all pupils aged 15 at the start of the academic year

(b) Figures for children looked after are for the year at 31 March rather than the academic year

(c) Level 2 inclusive threshold is a volume of qualifications equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including maths and English or Welsh first language

(d) Pupils who are looked after may also be eligible for free school meals (EFSM). In 2017, 30% of looked after children were EFSM and 32% were EFSM in both 2018 and 2019

3. Leaving care

The **Social Services Performance and Improvement Framework** includes data on the number of care leavers in categories 2, 3 and 4, by local authority who have completed at least 3 consecutive months of employment, education or training in the 12 months since leaving care. It also includes **statistics on Pathway Plans**.

There is also some limited historical data published on the outcomes for looked after children when they have left care: **Care leavers**.

Accommodation and homelessness

The **Social Services Performance and Improvement Framework** also includes data on the total number of care leavers who experience homelessness during the year (as defined by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014) by local authority. Latest figures for **2021-22** show **that 301 care leavers were homeless in that 12-month period**. Published statistics do not tell us what percentage of the relevant population of young people leaving care this is.

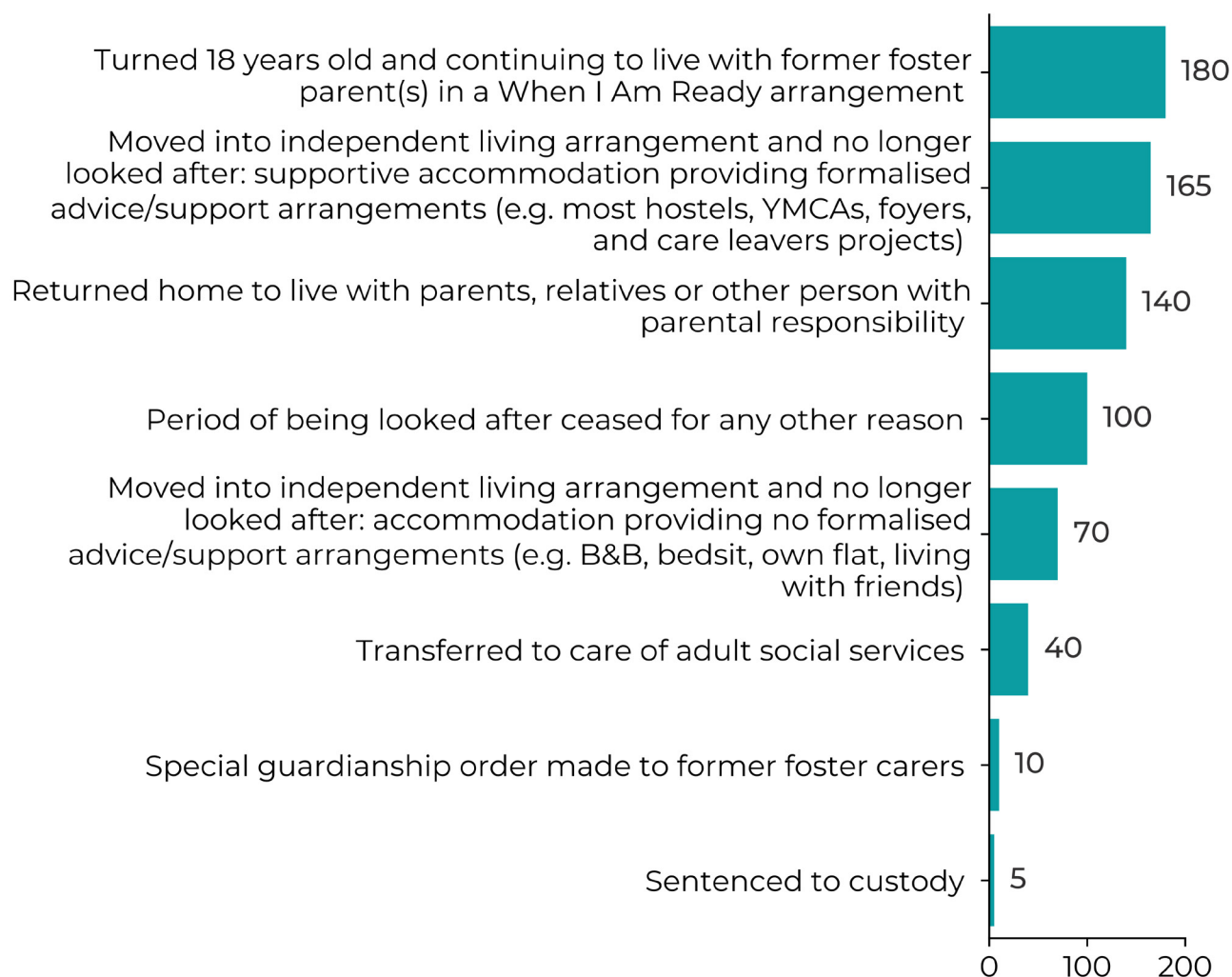
There are concerns about the number of care leavers who experience **homelessness**. The CYPE Committee 2023 report found that ‘care experience was a “predictable route” into homelessness and indicates that as many as 1 in 4 care leavers are homeless when they turn 18’. On that basis, a recent **CYPE Committee letter to the Minister for Climate Change** set out its response to the Welsh Government’s consultation on the White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales.

Data from the **looked after children census** suggests of the 700 children (aged 16 and over) who ceased to be looked after at 31 March 2022, 670 (95.7%) were categorised as being in suitable accommodation.

Reasons for finishing being looked after, aged 16 and over

Of the 710 episodes finishing for children looked after (aged 16 and over) during the year to 31 March 2023, 180 finished due to turning 18 years old and continuing to live with former foster parent(s) in a **When I am Ready Arrangement**. A further 165 moved into independent living arrangements and were no longer looked after, while 140 returned home to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility.

Figure 3.1: Episodes finishing for children looked after (aged 16 and over) during the year to 31 March by reason for finishing



Source: StatsWales, Episodes finishing for children looked after (aged 16 and over) during the year to 31 March by local authority, gender and reason for finishing. Numbers were suppressed for groups with less than five children. These include adopted (adoption order granted by court on date episode ceased); and special guardianship order made to carers other than former foster carers.

Care leavers on their 19th birthday

This Welsh Government data set has not been updated since 2016.

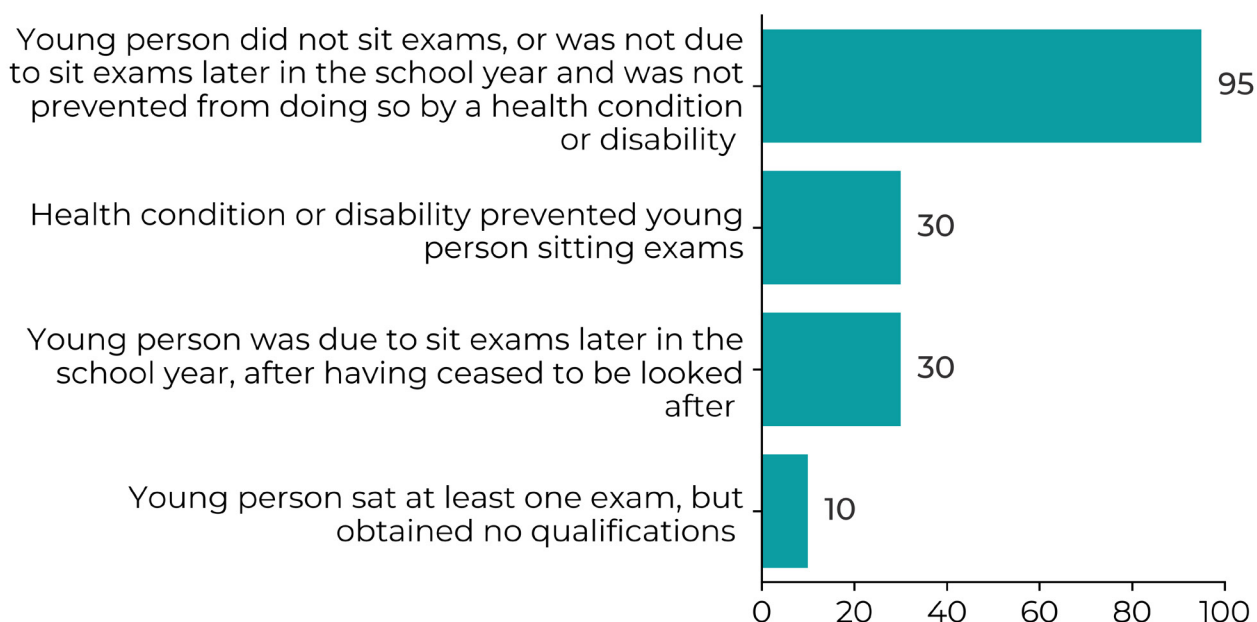
- The majority of care leavers (93% of 495) were in touch with the local authority (in line with statutory responsibilities) on their 19th birthday during the year ending 31 March 2016. These **figures** are no longer updated.
- Over a third of care leavers (39% of 465) were not in education, employment or training on their 19th birthday during the year ending 31 March 2016. These **figures** are no longer updated.

Children aged 16 and over ceasing to be looked after and reason for no qualifications

This data is no longer updated but the **latest published data** from 2016 shows that 23% of children aged 16 and over ceasing to be looked after during year ending 31 March had no qualifications.

The most common reason was that the ‘young person did not sit exams, or was not due to sit exams later in the school year and was not prevented from doing so by a health condition or disability’ (95 out of 160).

Figure 3.2: Children aged 16 and over ceasing to be looked after during year ending 31 March 2016 by reason for no qualifications



Source: StatsWales, Children aged 16 and over ceasing to be looked after during year ending 31 March by local authority and reason for no qualifications

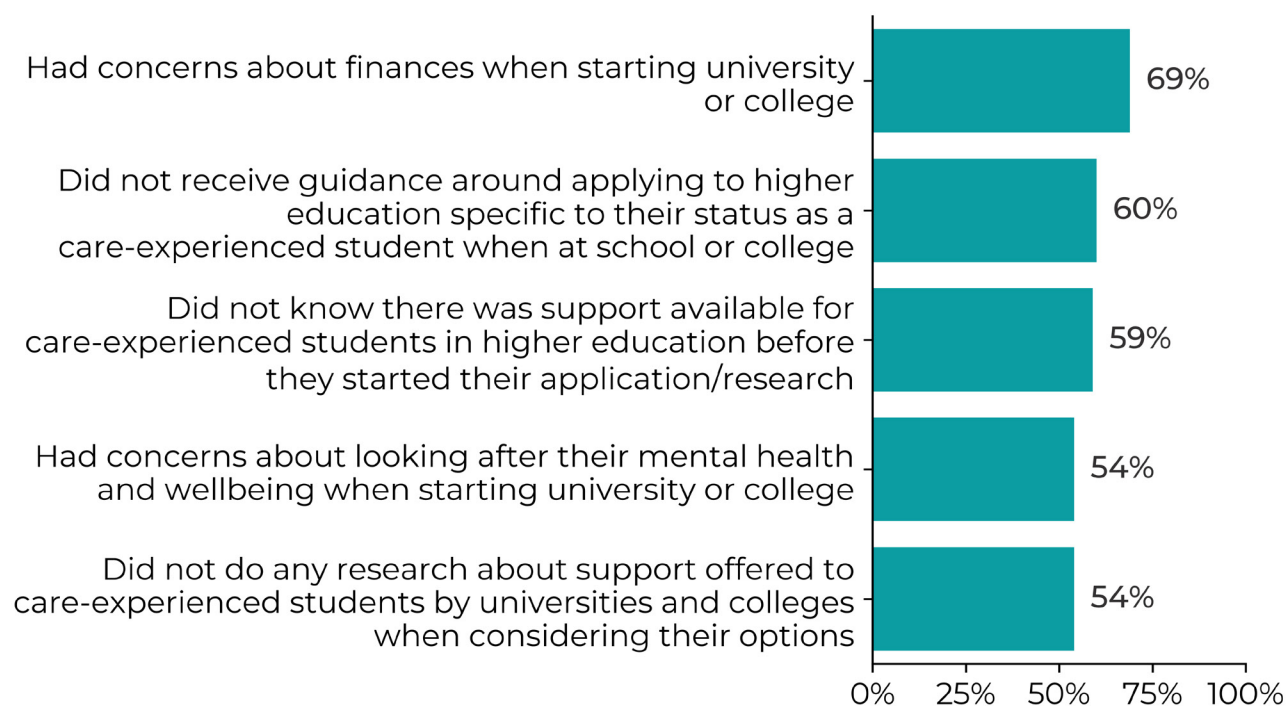
Care experienced students in higher education

UCAS published the findings of their UK wide survey of 8,930 care experienced individuals who applied to HE in 2022, and a survey of 500 applicants who shared that they had a care background ahead of starting their studies in Autumn 2022.

The UCAS report, **Next Steps: What is the experience of students from a care background in education?**, details 69% of care experienced applicants had concerns about finances when starting university or college. 60% did not receive guidance around applying to HE specific to their status as a care experienced

student when at school or college.

Figure 3.3: Percentage of care experienced UCAS applicants in the UK; 2022



Source: UCAS, [Next Steps: What is the experience of students from a care background in education?](#)

Health and well-being

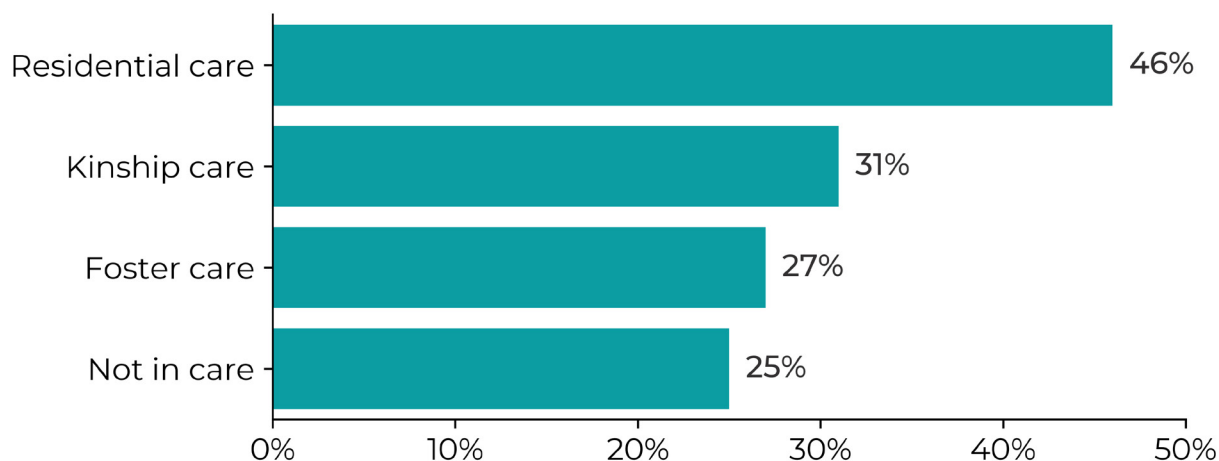
Despite concerns about the prevalence of mental health and well-being issues among the care experienced population, there appears to be no routinely published official data.

In January 2020 DECIPHer at Cardiff University published [Young People ‘Looked After’ in Wales: findings from the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey](#). It sets out the findings for young people ‘looked after’ in Wales relating to wellbeing, risk behaviours and school belonging. The survey is an online self-completion survey and measures self-reported health behaviours and wellbeing outcomes among adolescents aged 11-16 years.

The two figures below show young people ‘looked after’ were more likely to have drunk alcohol in the past 30 days or have been exposed to bullying in the past

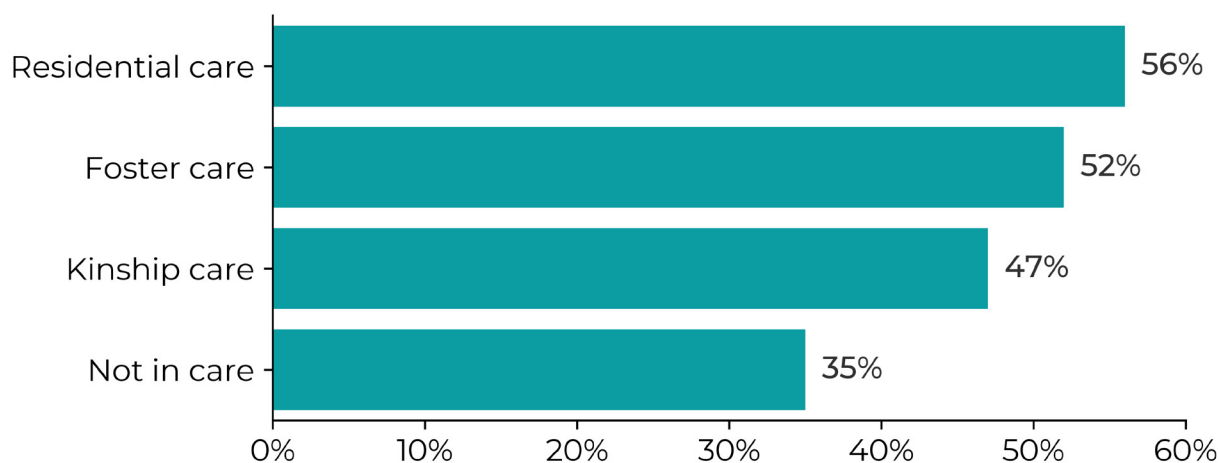
couple of months. Those placed in residential care showed the highest rates in both cases.

Figure 3.4: Percentage of care experienced young people aged 11-16 who have drunk alcohol in the past 30 days by care status



Source: DECIPHer, [Young People ‘Looked After’ in Wales: findings from the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey](#)

Figure 3.5: Percentage of care experienced young people aged 11-16 exposed to bullying in the past couple of months by care status



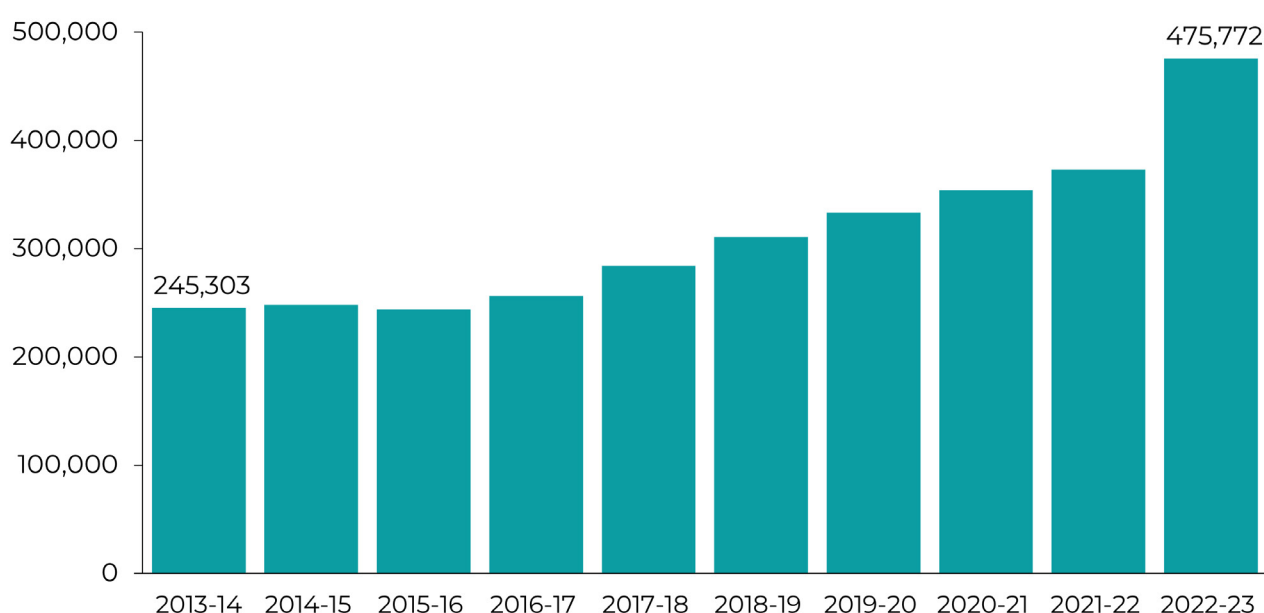
Source: DECIPHer, [Young People ‘Looked After’ in Wales: findings from the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey](#)

4. Cross cutting

Social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services

Social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services is available from StatsWales. Data from 2013-14 to 2022-23 shows that **expenditure has increased by 94% in cash terms to £476 million in 2022-23**. In real terms (taking inflation into account) expenditure increased by 57% between 2013-14 and 2022-23.

Figure 4.1: Total social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services; 2013-14 to 2022-23 (£ thousand)



Source: StatsWales, [Social services revenue expenditure by client group \(£ thousand\)](#)

Workforce

[Social Care Wales](#) is the regulator of social care in Wales and describes its **role** as including data and research. It has responsibility for:

‘...providing national leadership and expertise in social care and early years, leading on developing and regulating the social care workforce, service improvement, data and research to improve care and support.’

Its [Data Portal](#) provides data about the [children’s services workforce](#) data up to 2019. These 2019 figures are also published on Stats Wales and show the whole time equivalent numbers of staff working in local authority social services departments.

Table 1: Whole time equivalent staff of local authority social services departments; 2012-13 to 2018-19

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Total residential staff for children and young people	422	409	379	396	364	386	407
Total social work local authority staff for children and young people	2,487	2,485	3,259	3,191	3,230	3,265	3,509

Source: StatsWales, [Whole time equivalent staff of local authority social services departments \(all years\)](#)

Social Care Wales also published a [Social care workforce report](#) in 2022 which discusses social work teams and their vacancies and turnover:

Frontline teams reported 703 vacancies (451 in children’s social work teams, 243 in adult social work teams and five in teams that work with both adults and children). (...) There were 201 vacancies reported in children’s residential care and 67 posts held vacant, representing 3.9 per cent of the overall social care vacancies in Wales. In 2021, the corresponding figures were 141 vacancies with 61 posts held vacant.

The report also looked at turnover by service area in the social care sector in 2021 to 2022. It notes that while the turnover figures suggest a marginal increase in the number of workers in social care in Wales, their estimation of the total number of staff suggests a decrease. The table below suggests service areas working with children had experienced a positive net change from 2021 to 2022.

Table 2: Staff turnover by service area; 2021 to 2022

	Joiners	Leavers	Net change
Residential care - children	496	372	+124
Social work teams - children	802	686	+116

Source: Social Care Wales, [Social care workforce report 2022](#)

Social workers support foster carers

The Fostering Network published a report, [State of the Nation's Foster Care 2021: Spotlight on Wales](#), which analysed the responses to their survey from 256 foster carers from Wales. Respondents noted that continuity and capacity of social work staff was the one thing they would most like to change to make foster care better. Over the previous two years, 53% of foster carers had the same supervising social worker, 29% had two, 12% had three and 6% had four or more.

Caseloads, recruitment and agency staff

Chapter 2 of the CYPE report, [If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people](#), includes a section about the local authority children's services social care workforce as relevant to care experienced children (pages 25-37).

It includes sub sections on caseloads, recruitment and retention, and the use of agency staff. The report says:

- Statistics provided by Social Care Wales (SCW) set out that the number of vacancies in children's social care increased in 2022 by 38.3% to 639, over 50% of which were vacancies for qualified social workers.
- These statistics also showed that SCW estimated that in 2022, 41.9% of all children's services social workers worked primarily for an agency, with 85.6% of those agency workers filling vacancies for qualified social workers. (note this figure of 41.9% was an error by Social Care Wales and the actual figure as of September 2023 was corrected to 17.5%).
- There were two letters from the [CYPE Committee](#) (and [follow up](#)) and a response from [Social Care Wales](#) about the statistics on workforce and agency staff.

The CYPE Committee report went on to make two recommendations (numbered 1 and 2) about the social care workforce for care experienced children.

The report also pointed to the availability in England of annual statistics on the **Children's social work workforce** and the **Children's social work workforce: attrition, caseload and agency workforce**.

Advocacy

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide advocacy services to some groups of children, specifically 'looked after children', 'children in need' and 'care leavers'. This entitlement is communicated to them via an 'active offer', where their social worker actively refers them to their local advocacy provider.

There are plans within the **Social Services Performance and improvement Framework** to publish data on advocacy provision.

The Welsh Government's National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA) includes a core Service Specification which outlines the service to be provided in regional contracts commissioned along the Health Board Regional footprint. Currently, independent professional advocacy is provided by the two registered advocacy organisations in Wales - **TGP Cymru** and **NYAS Cymru**.

Both these organisations have contributed their data to the fourth pan-Wales annual report detailing **Issue-Based Advocacy (IBA)** activity and the third capturing Active Offer activity. Whilst this is unpublished, the data was provided to us to include in this briefing.

- During the year a total of 3,099 children and young people accessed Issue-Based Advocacy and 1,267 of these 3,099 were children looked after.
- This 3,099 is a decrease of 18% when compared to last year and is the lowest number of children and young people referred for IBA since collation of the All Wales figures began.
- A total of 1,329 children and young people accessed advocacy during the year who had never previously accessed advocacy support. This is the lowest number accessing IBA for the first time.
- 567 new referrals were received for the active offer from children looked after.
- The number of all children and young people eligible for the active offer was 2,717 (although data was not submitted from all local authorities) and the number of active offers received was 1,784.
- For the fourth consecutive year, support at meetings remains the most popular issue requiring advocacy support (1,459 issues), followed by contact (672 issues)

and then homelife (535 issues). Once again Social Services was the largest referral source (1,563), accounting for 50.4% of all referrals received. This was followed by self-referrals (1,114 referrals, 36% of referrals received).

- Services say they observed an increase in the number of issues requiring medium and high level involvement this year compared to last, with 151 issues requiring medium level involvement (122 last year) and 54 requiring high level involvement (48 last year).

The CYPE report, **If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people**, recommended that the Welsh Government should introduce legislation to provide children in care and care leavers with a statutory right to long-term, independent advocacy support on an 'opt-out' basis. It said:

Each child should be assigned an advocate when they enter the care system to provide long-term advocacy support across a range of issues, and continue until the child ceases to be a 'care leaver'. Children and young people could opt-out (and then opt back in later) if they wish, but must have an allocated advocate or provider at all times during their time in care.

Residential visiting advocacy

The NASA says that if there is a local authority run children's home in the region a visiting advocacy service will be included in the regional contracts. This does not apply to independent providers. The 2019 report: **Out of Sight - Out of Rights? The Provision of Independent Professional Advocacy in Children's Homes in Wales** estimated that the vast majority of children's homes in the independent sector 'do not have residential visiting advocacy arrangements in place' and 'are not aware of the right of children and young people in Wales to access independent professional advocacy'. It says:

around 5-10% of children's homes provided by the independent sector do also contract a residential visiting independent advocacy service with residential advocates visiting the institution once or twice a month to get to know the children and provide independent support if the children want it.

Availability of data

The Welsh Government collects and publishes a range of data relevant to care experience:

- **Children’s services**
- **Children looked after**
- **Local authority social services**
- **Social Services Performance and Improvement Framework**

Both the CYPE Committee report, **If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people**, and the Petitions Committee report, **Supporting care experienced parents**, raised concerns about the availability of data. Both made recommendations.

Chapter 2 of the CYPE report (pages 49-54) set out its findings about data collection and said:

The lack of robust data collected about various aspects of the care system, its workforce, and children with care experience has been a consistent theme across our evidence gathering.

The report lists what it refers to as the “most significant gaps in published data” (pages 50-52) and suggests “much of this data is routinely published and collected in England”. The report also references the work of Helen Hodges and Dan Bristow, on pages 14-15 of the WCPP 2019 report, **Analysis of the Factors Contributing to the High Rates of Care in Wales**. It includes a table of comparative data about looked after children which is collected and published across the UK.

Before its report was published, the Committee asked the Welsh Government for **further written information about data collection**. In response, the Welsh Government pointed to work underway.

The Deputy Minister, Julie Morgan MS, **rejected the Committee’s suggestion that** “gaps in data were hiding problems and preventing us from developing solutions.” The Welsh Government also **rejected** the Committee’s suggestion for radical reform of data collection:

RADICAL REFORM 4: Place formal data collecting duties on all relevant public bodies, third sector and independent providers to collect comprehensive data on at least an annual basis relating to the care system, and at least quarterly relating to the social care workforce. The

data should be verified and published by the Welsh Government - at least annually for data relating to the care system, and quarterly for data relating to the social care workforce - for policy development, implementation and evaluation purposes.

In June 2023, the Welsh Government **said**

The Welsh Government undertakes a range of data collections regarding children's social care. It has three annual data collections, two of which are at the individual level and cover all children receiving care and support and another focusing specifically on children looked after. There is also a large data collection of local authority performance and activity, which includes over 50 data items on children specifically. Care Inspectorate Wales will also speak to children and explore their experiences as part of their inspections. The Transforming Children's Services Delivery Group is currently reviewing data collation as part of its work on metrics for children's services to more effectively measure progress as we transform children's services in Wales.

Following this response, in July 2023 the Committee wrote and **requested**

In relation to each point of data not currently routinely collected and published in Wales (as set out on pages 50 to 52 of our report and the WCPP report), a narrative on the Welsh Government's rationale for this not being necessary / possible / helpful to shape policy response in Wales.

This was not provided and in its **response the** Welsh Government said:

The Transforming Children's Services Delivery Group will be establishing a sub-group including members with a statistical background to review the data currently collated, the barriers to collating any data and identify gaps in current data collection. The Group will also work to better understand what data is needed and achievable to collect as part of population needs assessments which can be factored into local authority planning including as part of their placement commissioning strategies, preventative strategies and service delivery.



