

Institution: Institute of Education
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Young people in care: the support that puts university within reach
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

IOE research, led by Professor Sonia Jackson, has resulted in improved educational opportunities for a particularly disadvantaged and under-recognised group of young people – those from the public care system. The study, *By Degrees*, triggered new legislation and support systems to help these young people get to university and complete their studies. It led directly to a mandatory £2,000 bursary for care-leavers who go on to HE in England and Wales and the introduction of a prestigious quality mark now held by more than half of the UK's universities to highlight the extra support they offer care-leavers. The research is also beginning to influence policy thinking in EU countries.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Context: Each year, some 6-8,000 British 19-year-olds who have been in care set out to make their way in the world. Those who go on to higher education number in the hundreds. Because of their small numbers these students had not been recognised as a distinct group. The principal aim of *By Degrees* was to produce evidence that would ultimately increase the numbers of such young people staying on in education. This influential study was underpinned by 20 years of Jackson's research (the last 12 at the IOE).

By Degrees: From care to university: This five-year research programme (2000-2005), commissioned by children's charity Buttle UK, examined the experience of the one in 100 care-leavers who went on to HE at that time [see references **R2**, **R3**].

Main findings: This and other IOE research [e.g. **R4**] provided clear evidence that UK care-leavers' ability and potential were being systematically underestimated. It showed they were deprived of most educational opportunities open to other young people and pointed to the specific barriers they faced. The main problems identified by participants at the point of application to university were lack of information and advice when choosing universities and courses; changes of residential placement during preparation for school exams; uncertainty about available financial support; and anxiety about accommodation during term-time and vacations. It found that students from care backgrounds struggled to make ends meet. Most took out the maximum student loan and their average debt after three years was £11,235, compared with the national average of £9,210, but only one local authority at the time helped them pay off the debt. Many took on too much paid work and had difficulty completing their coursework and dissertations.

Methodology: *By Degrees* studied 129 care-leavers from three successive cohorts – by far the largest number of students formerly in care ever studied. The participants, who were attending 68 universities, were interviewed on several occasions. Postal surveys of local authorities and HEIs were carried out near the beginning and end of the project and 11 local authorities' representatives were interviewed annually.

Researchers: Professor Sonia Jackson, Sarah Ayaji and Margaret Quigley, Thomas Coram Research Unit, IOE.

Young People in Public Care Pathways to Education in Europe (YIPPEE): This five-country 2008-10 study, undertaken by a team of researchers from Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and England, brought the aims of *By Degrees* into the European arena [**R1**].

Main Findings: Across Europe, young people who have been in care fail to get to university because of "an overriding lack of support", with the separation of education and care in the services for these young people creating a particular barrier. The study concludes that training and selection of foster carers should place much more emphasis on them understanding the importance of education as an integral part of care. It also says that reliable statistics on care and education should be collected across Europe.

Methodology: The YIPPEE researchers examined policy on children in care in European countries. They also surveyed national and local agencies and authorities and conducted a study of 18 to 24-

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year-olds who showed educational promise.

Researchers: The project was led by Claire Cameron (co-ordinator) and Jackson (director), with 13 additional collaborating partners and researchers from the 5 countries.

Other research: Further evidence of the systematic underestimation of young people from care is provided by an earlier study co-authored by Jackson [R4], which showed how exceptional young people were overcoming their disadvantages. Later research by Jackson and her colleagues [R5] showed how local authorities' 'virtual heads' – appointed to help children in care -- could help turn the tide. This study also recommended that they continue supporting young people up to age 25.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1: Jackson, S. & Cameron, C. (2012) Leaving care: looking ahead and aiming higher, in *Children and Youth Services Review* 34(6) 1107- 1114.

R2: Jackson, S., Ajayi, S. & Quigley, M. (2005) *Going to university from care: Final report By Degrees project*, London: Institute of Education.

R3: Jackson, S. & Ajayi, S. (2007) Foster care and higher education, in *Adoption and Fostering* 31(1) 62-80.

R4: Martin, P.Y. & Jackson, S. (2002) Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers, *Child and Family Social Work* 7(2) 121-130.

R5: Berridge, D., Henry, L., Jackson, S. & Turney, D. (2009) *Looked after and learning: evaluation of the Virtual School Head Pilot*, DCSF-RR144.

Grants:

G1: By Degrees (2000-5): Buttle UK, £800,000. Additional funding came from the DFES, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, the Freemasons' Grand Charity, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Pilgrim Trust and, for dissemination, from the KPMG Foundation. Grant-holder: Jackson

G2: YIPPEE (2008-10): EU contribution: €1,413,962, "Youth & social exclusion". Grant-holder: Cameron

Quality Indicator:

By Degrees was selected for inclusion in the Academy of Social Sciences' *Making the Case for the Social Sciences* series (No 8: Longitudinal Studies).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Context: In 2002, a report by IOE academics for the Deputy Prime Minister's Social Exclusion Unit¹ concluded: "The longstanding neglect of the education of children and young people in care has had an extremely negative effect on their life chances and involved enormous costs to them and to society as a whole. Reversing these effects will require substantial investment and fundamental changes in attitudes." In 2013, their life chances, though still straitened, are gradually improving. IOE research has demonstrably helped prompt and underpin the needed changes in attitudes, policy and investment.

Dates of impact: 2008-13, with particular impact at the start and the end of the period, with new legislation taking effect or currently going through Parliament.

Principal beneficiaries: care-leavers, children in care and wider society.

Reach and significance: This research has led directly to changes in the law in England and Wales to increase the financial support for young people from care backgrounds in HE. This is bolstered by better systems in FHE and LAs for helping these young people to stay in education. Most of *By Degrees'* 43 recommendations to central and local government and HEIs have become policy. This means that the 6-8,000 19-year-olds every year who have been in care face fewer barriers to continuing their education, and some 500 of them – who do go on to HE -- have a better chance of completing their degrees. Support for the 89,000 children in care, through Virtual Heads in every LA, is to become law in 2013, as explained below.

¹ Jackson, S., Feinstein, L., Levacic, R., Owen, C., Simon, A. and Brassett-Grundy, A. (2002), 'The Costs and Benefits of Educating Children in Care', Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Working Paper 4, originally produced for the SEU.

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Impact through legislation: *Extra bursary*: Between 2003 and 2012 the proportion of care-leavers in England in HE at age 19 rose from an estimated 1% to 7% (DfE figures). Jackson's work was the first research demonstrating what is needed to raise participation and the only one cited in this context in the *Children and Young Persons Act 2008*, which amended section 23C of the *Children Act 1989* by requiring local authorities to pay a one-off additional bursary to care-leavers of 18 and over who take a course of HE. The memorandum on this regulation change explains that the bursary should be £2,000 and makes explicit the link between the research and the policy change: "The amount is based on evidence [R3] that former relevant children finish higher education with an average of £2,000 more debt than their peers." The document's accompanying briefing paper adds that the research by Jackson and her colleagues "suggests that the more support, including financial, that former relevant children had the greater their chances of success". The regulation took effect in September 2009 but care-leavers who started HE a year earlier were also entitled to the bursary. A companion *Memorandum for Wales*, which introduced the same bursary in the 2010-11 academic year, also makes it clear that the IOE study provided the rationale for the grant (S1 and S2). The findings and recommendations, combined with the power of the evidence presented in an earlier and ongoing intensive dissemination programme, also directly resulted in a tick box on the UCAS form from 2008 to identify these young people for receipt of extra funds and advice. For example, the study pointed out that students in receipt of inadequate support from their LA often took on too much paid work, which conflicted with their academic demands. In a 2013 survey for Buttle UK, 41% of 279 students from care interviewed said they were influenced by the financial support available (S3).

***LA support until age 25*:** The 2008 Act also mandated support from a personal adviser until the age of 25 [R1] and a designated teacher in all maintained schools responsible for promoting the education of children in care (*By Degrees* recommendations). Jackson and colleagues can take considerable credit for such regulations. Brian Roberts, former head of Peterborough's Virtual School, and chair of the English Advisory Committee of the Fostering Network, said *By Degrees* is one of the most widely read "items of evidence" used in promoting the educational achievement of children in care (S4). His conversations with Ministers and MPs, in the coalition and the previous Labour government, had shown they were able to quote from the findings. "The research was central to changes in national legislation that made the educational achievement of children in the care system a statutory priority for local authorities," he confirmed.

***Virtual schools*:** The virtual school concept – positively evaluated [R5] by Jackson and researchers from Bristol, and already adopted voluntarily by most LAs, is to be mandated through the 2013 Children & Families Bill. Every LA will have to appoint a Virtual School Head responsible for the educational achievement of children in care. As the cut-off date for REF impact approached, seven charities, including Barnardo's and the National Children's Bureau, were campaigning for the Virtual Head's duties to extend to young people up to age 25, rather than 18, citing Jackson's evaluation. This change was being pressed in the House of Lords by the Earl of Listowel in advance of a second reading in the autumn.

Buttle Quality Mark: The BQM – based on a *By Degrees* recommendation and supported by care charity Buttle (S6) – has been earned by 88 HEIs in the UK since 2006 – 56% of all HEIs, including 100% in Wales. Praised by KPMG Foundation in an evaluation of the scheme (S3) as "one of the key success stories for children leaving care", it is awarded to institutions that can demonstrate that they have a sufficiently robust strategy in place to support students from a care background. These universities express their commitment in slightly different ways but Cardiff, like many other HEIs, offers care-leavers an extra bursary and provides a named mentor for each student to discuss any concerns they have. Care-leavers are also guaranteed a hall of residence place in their first year (another *By Degrees* recommendation). BQM HEIs offer financial support packages worth between £100 and £6,000 a year – £1,400 a year per student on average. Royal Holloway, University of London offers any student who is a care-leaver free accommodation for 365 days a year (worth £6,000). At Leeds University and other HEIs with the award, student volunteers help young people in care with revision and college applications. Since 2011 the award has also been earned by more than 40 FE colleges and in 2012 an All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry (S5) recommended that the BQM be rolled out nationally to all FHE providers. The evaluation reported strong support from all key strategic bodies in all four UK nations.

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Local authorities' care-leaver policies: The study's findings have informed many LA policy documents and have triggered changes in practice, in addition to those cited above. The Bristol leaving care team became the first to employ a teacher, as recommended in Jackson's research – which emphasised the importance of raising educational aspirations. More than 110 LAs have signed up to the Government's Care-leavers Charter, launched in 2012, pledging they will support these young people until they reach 25 (as recommended in *By Degrees*).

Impact in Europe: *By Degrees* paved the way for YIPPEE (R1), which is now beginning to influence policy thinking across Europe. For example, an EC policy review (S8), based on YIPPEE and other EU projects, highlights the need to overcome the difficulties it documented, such as the financial pressures that force many care-leavers to choose a low-level job over HE. The review recommends that European legislation follows the lead set by England in the wake of Jackson's earlier research, and defines 'care' for children in public care and on welfare as 'educationally oriented'. In line with YIPPEE's evidence, it also says schools and welfare agencies should co-operate over efforts to encourage more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay on in education. In the five YIPPEE countries, researchers have been asked to present the results to politicians, social workers and the public and have given radio and press interviews. Interest is also growing in non-YIPPEE European countries. In 2013, Jackson was invited to speak about her research in Norway and Germany. YIPPEE researchers proposed and contributed five papers to a special issue of the *European Journal of Social Work*, the first articles in that publication on the topic of young people from care backgrounds and HE (February 2013). This is important in relation to the YIPPEE finding that a factor in the poor attainment of children in public care is the low priority given by social workers to educational matters. In Sweden, Skolfam (School Focus in Foster Care), inspired by Jackson's work, is taking hold, first in Helsingborg in 2005, and since 2008 in 10 other municipalities. By 2012, 100% of young people from four cohorts of Skolfam-children in Helsingborg (10 in all) had passed the high school entrance exam, exceeding the percentage for all Swedish children of 87%. In Catalonia, Spain, researchers are working with two regional ministries to continue YIPPEE's data collection for a further four years and a pilot programme to support children in care has begun. Additionally, thanks to YIPPEE, banks in Catalonia have provided grants to enable young people from care backgrounds to continue studying.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact² (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2009/2274/pdfs/ukxiem_20092274_en.pdf
 S2: <http://www.assemblywales.org/sub-ld8398-em-e.pdf>
 S3: Starks, L. (York Consulting Group, 2013) *Assessing the Impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education*, Buttle UK
<http://www.buttleuk.org/data/resources/595/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf>
 S4: Statement provided by former Virtual School head, 2011 (available)
 S5: Timpson, E. (2012) *APPG inquiry: Education Matters in Care*
http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Education_Matters_in_Care_September_2012.pdf
 S6: <http://www.buttleuk.org/pages/quality-mark-for-care-leavers.html>
 S7: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *A Better Education for Children in Care*, a Social Exclusion Unit report
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/SEU-Report.pdf.pdf>
 S8: European Commission (2011) *Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society: Policy review of research results*. See p. 74. http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/social-inclusion-of-youth_en.pdf

² All web links accessed 11/10/13