

Pathways into and through Higher Education for young people with experience of children's social care

Leon Feinstein, Steve Peck, Marc Wigley, Kathryn Duckworth, Julie Selwyn, Steve McIntosh, & James Robson

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Overview: This report provides new data on patterns of entry to higher education (HE) of young people in England with experience of children's social care.

We draw on national, administrative data for a cohort born in 1998/99 and explore in detail how different groups of young people with experience of social care differ in their progression to and through HE compared to each other and their peers, focussing on descriptive questions such as:

- How do different groups of young people with experience of social care differ in their progression to and through HE compared to each other and their peers?
- When and where do they enter HE?
- What happens to them after they enter HE?
- How are individual characteristics such as sex, ethnicity and having an identified special educational need associated with progression into and through HE?


Groups of Interest: Young people 'with experience of children's social care' includes five groups

- **Care Leavers (Group 1):** Young people who have been in care at some point since they were 14 years old for 13 weeks or more and were in care on or after their 16th birthday.
- **Ever in care (Group 2):** Young people who were in care at any point after the age of 5 but did not meet the statutory definition of a care leaver, including young people who were in care before age 14 but not after and those in care for less than three months.
- **Ever on a child protection plan (Group 3):** Young people placed on a child protection plan (CPP) at any point after age 11 but who were not in care at any point.
- **Ever a child in need for more than 6 months (Group 4):** Young people classified as in need for more than 6 months at any point after age 11.
- **Ever a child in need for less than 6 months (Group 5):** Young people who spent less than 6 months classified as in need at any point after age 11.

Groups of Interest: Comparison groups


- **FSM Population (Group 6):** Young people from the same birth cohort who were not included in groups 1–5 but who were eligible for FSM at any point during the six years before they completed KS4.
- **General Population (Group 7):** All other young people from the 1998/99 cohort who were not included in groups 1–6; that is, young people not in care at any point after age 5 nor designated as in need after the age of 11, and not eligible for free school meals (FSM) during the six years before they completed KS4.

Outcomes: Initial participation in HE – defined as registering for a Level 4 qualification at an HEI or FE college

- Entry to HE by age 22
 - Age 18/19 entry
 - Type of institution attended, including entry into a top-tier HEI
 - Qualification pursued
 - University continuity
 - Degree completion by age 22
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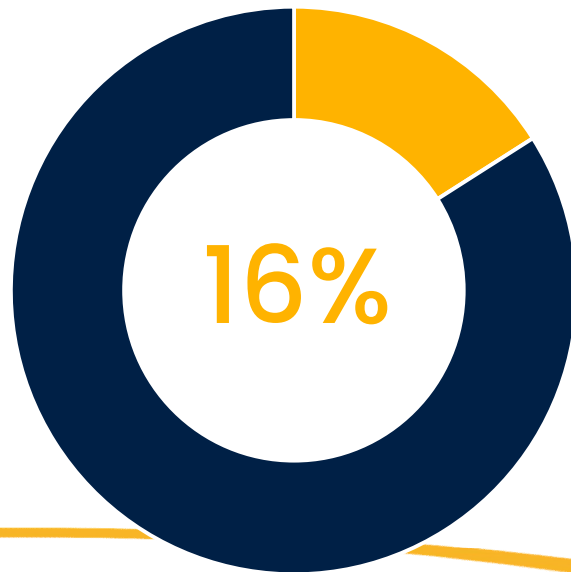
Data: Linked datasets tracking the educational and care-related experiences of children and young people in England from 5 to 22

A single cohort of young people born between 1st September 1998 and 31st August 1999 (n = 556,240):

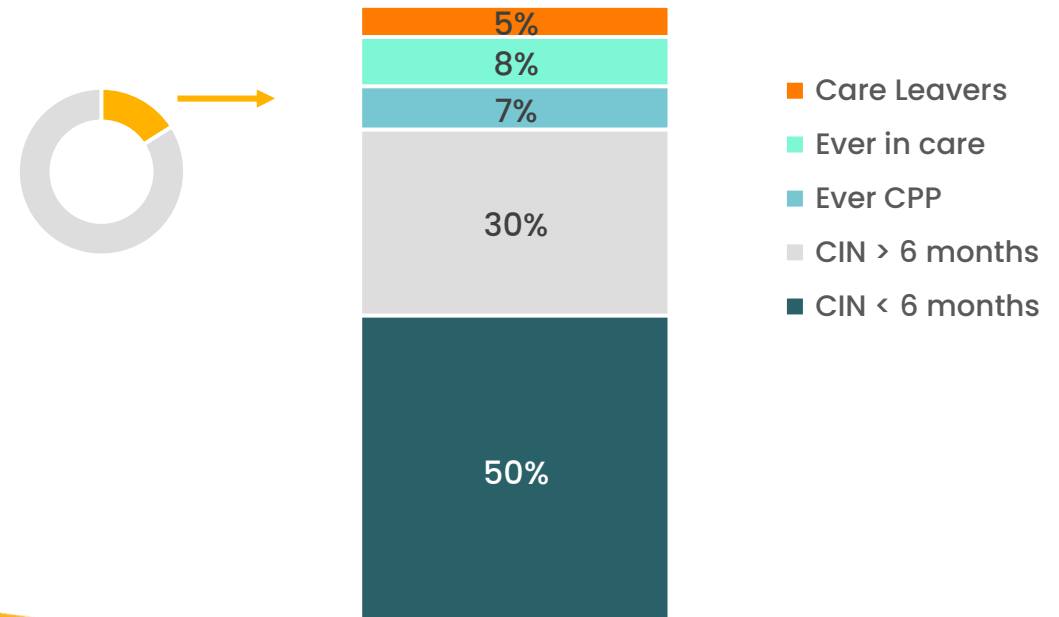
- Children Looked After (CLA) data return (2004 – 2021)
 - Children in Need (CIN) Census (2009 – 2017)
 - National Pupil Database (NPD) KS2: 2009/10; KS4: 2014/15)
 - Individualised Learner Record (ILR) (2015 – 2021)
 - Higher Education Student Statistics (HESA) (2016 – 2021)
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In our sample of 556,240 young people...

Young people with experience of children's social care make up 16% of our total sample



The majority of this population is made up by the two CIN groups, with care leavers making up 5% of young people with experience of children's social care



Across the total sample of young people...

At school:



17% had an identified SEN:

- 13% SEN Support
- 4% Statement / EHCP



- 13% had a fixed period exclusion
- 22% were persistent absentees



54% achieved 5 A* – C grades (equiv.) at KS4

By age 22:



48% had entered HE, of whom:



60% had completed a degree



8% had withdrawn from HE



25% were still studying

Methods

Four key types of analyses:

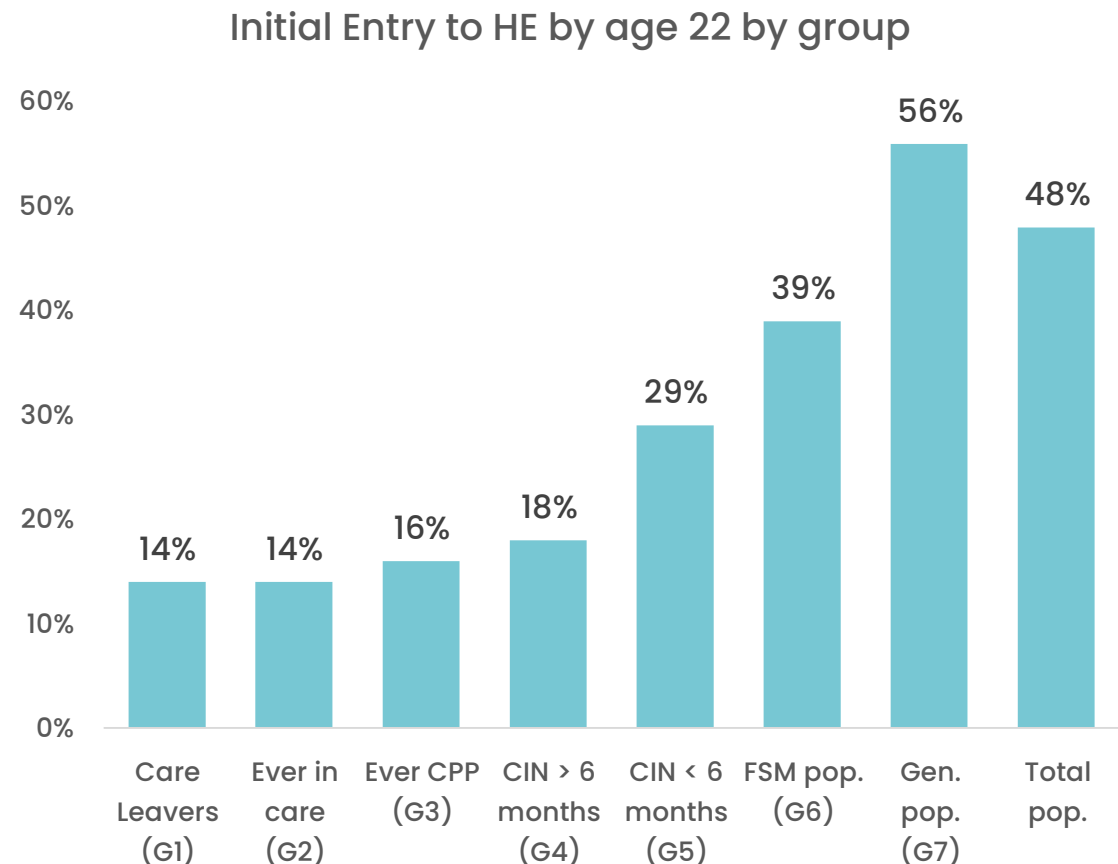
- Bivariate descriptives
- Logistic regression analysis of the relations between the explanatory and outcome variables.
- Pathway analysis of the routes from KS4, through FE into HE, and through HE to degree attainment.
- Further 3- and 4-way crosstabulations of outcomes to explore elements of intersectionality.



Wave 2 Quals at end of KS4	Wave 3 Start of FE registration	Wave 4 Quals at end of FE	Wave 5 Start of HE registration	Wave 6 Quals at end of HE
1. GCSE (High)	1. A levels	1. A levels (> 2)	1. Degree	1. Postgraduate
2. GCSE (Med)	2. Vocational	2. A levels (< 2)	2. Degree Apprenticeship	2. Degree: I
3. GCSE (Low)	3. GCSE	3. Vocational (Level 3)	3. Sub-degree	3. Degree: II:i
4. No Qualification	4. Apprenticeship	4. Vocational (Level 2)	4. Sub-degree Apprenticeship	4. Degree: II:ii / III
		5. Apprenticeship (Advanced)		5. Degree: Other class
		6. Apprenticeship (Intermediate)		6. Sub-degree
		7. Access		7. Continue
		8. Continue		8. Withdrawn
		9. Withdrawn		

Young people with experience of children's social care were less likely on average to enter HE by age 22 than the general population or those eligible for FSM

- HE Entry rates lowest for care leavers and those ever in care.
- Similar patterns were observed for HE entry by age 18/19, entry to a 'top-tier' HEI, and degree completion by age 22.
- Withdrawal rates without qualifications for children with experience of social care were generally double those of the general population and were particularly high for care leavers.
- Across the outcomes considered, the shorter-term CIN group and FSM comparison population were most similar.



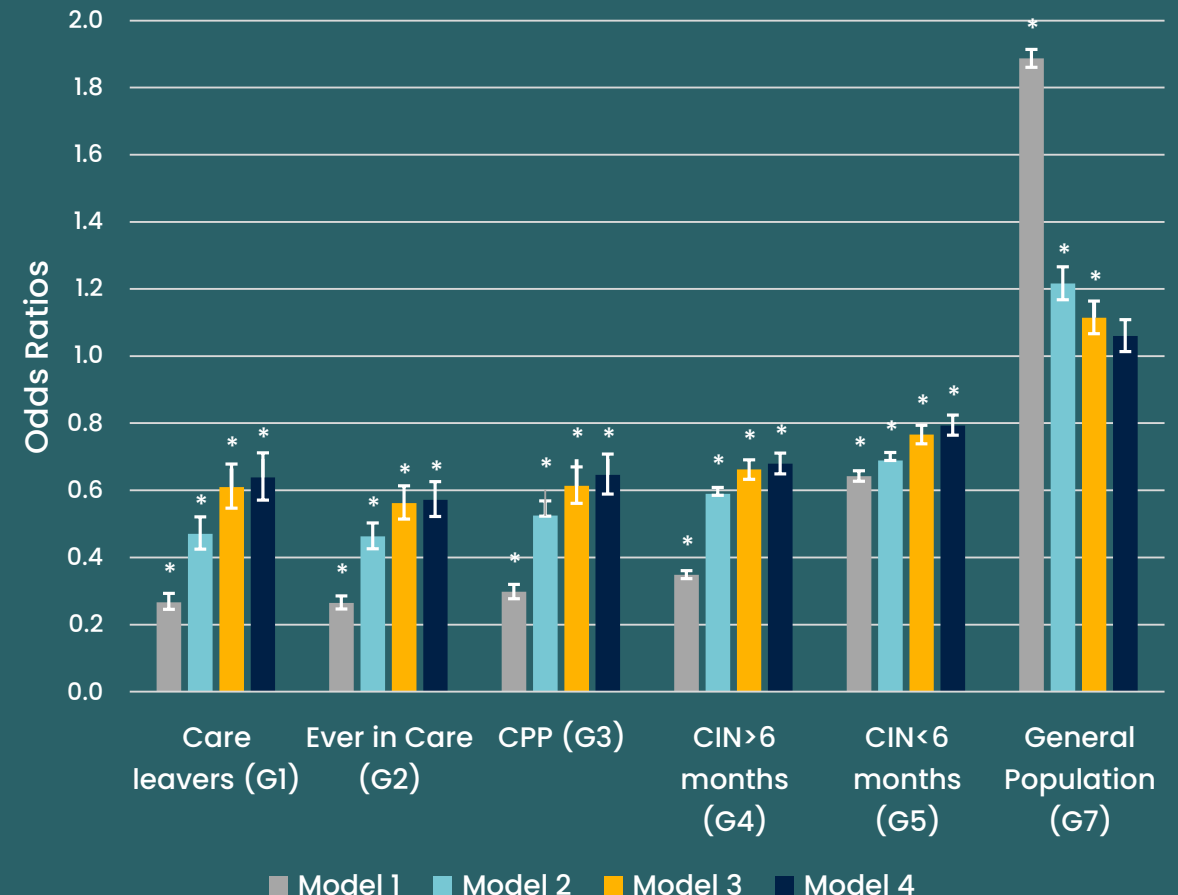
The unadjusted odds ratios observed (Model 1) are reduced with statistical controls, however, holding constant...

- Model 2: sex, ethnicity, SEN status, socioeconomic circumstances, school-type, exclusions and absences;
- Model 3: prior attainment;
- Model 4: location of post-16 study

young people with experience of children's social care were still substantively – and statistically – less likely to enter HE by age 22 than those in the FSM population.

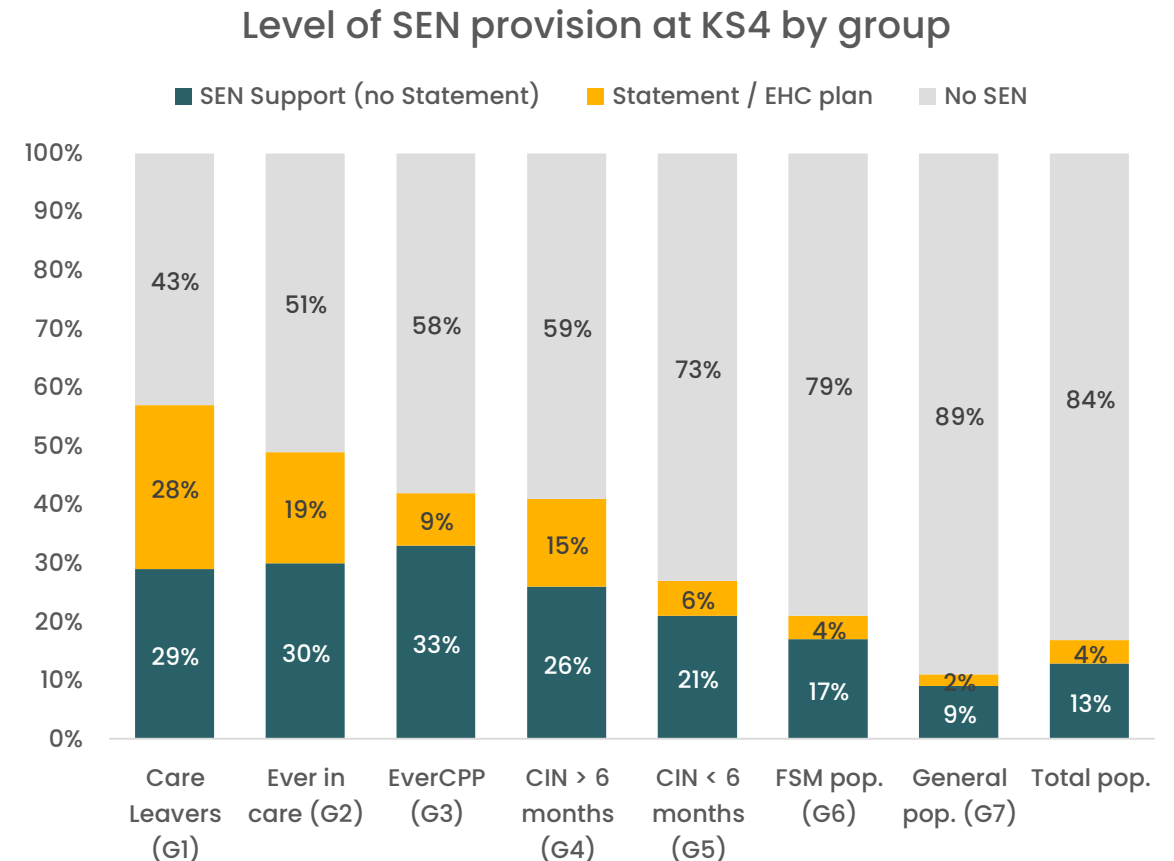
- This is true amongst young people both with and without SEN.

Likelihood of HE entry by age 22, compared to the FSM population (G6)
(Odds Ratios & 95% CIs)



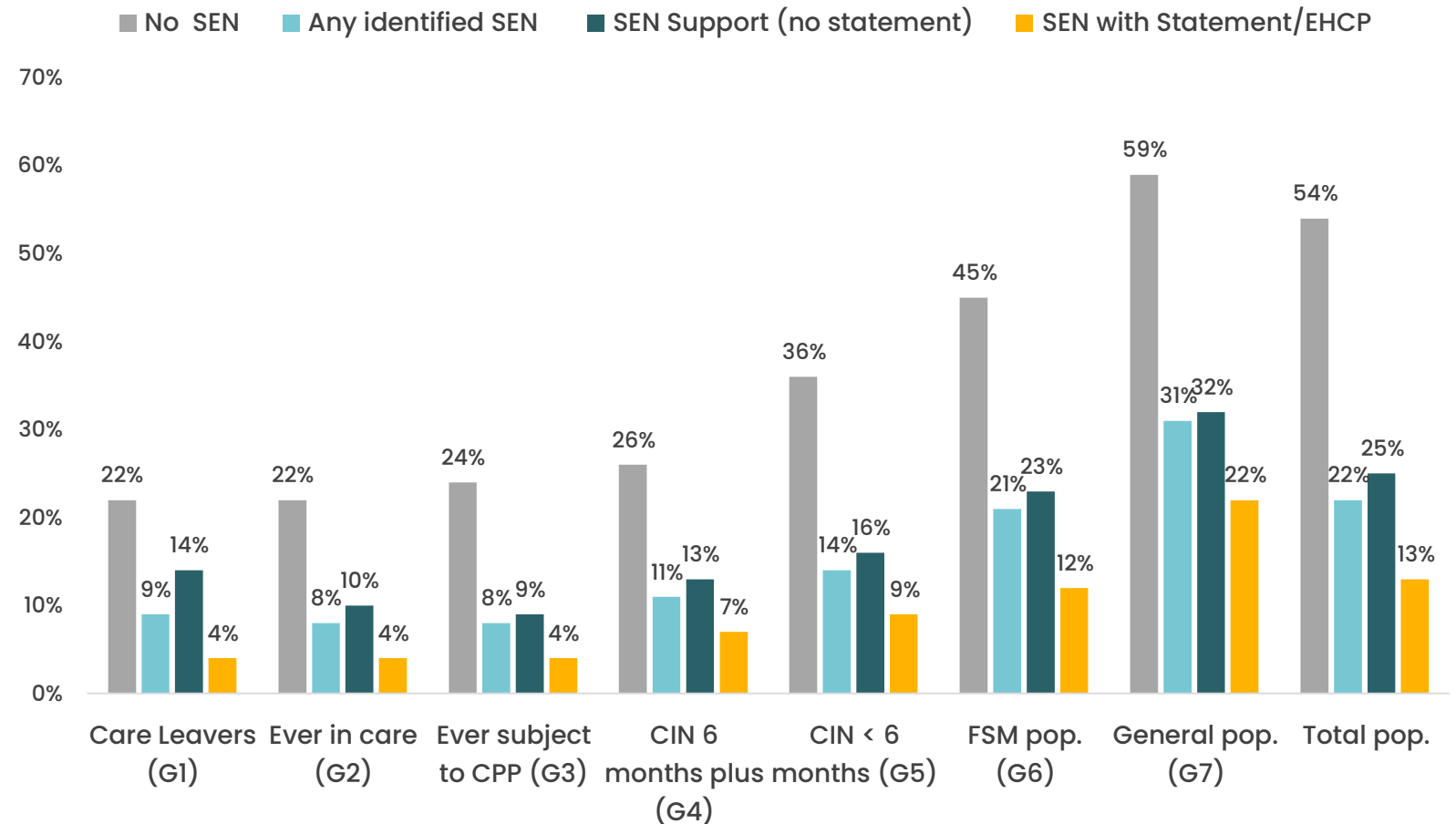
Many children with experience of children's social care also have Special Educational Needs.

- All groups with experience of children's social care comprise more children with SEN than the general population, ranging from 27% for the short-term CIN group to 57% of care leavers
- A higher proportion of children with SEN in these groups had a statement or EHC plan.



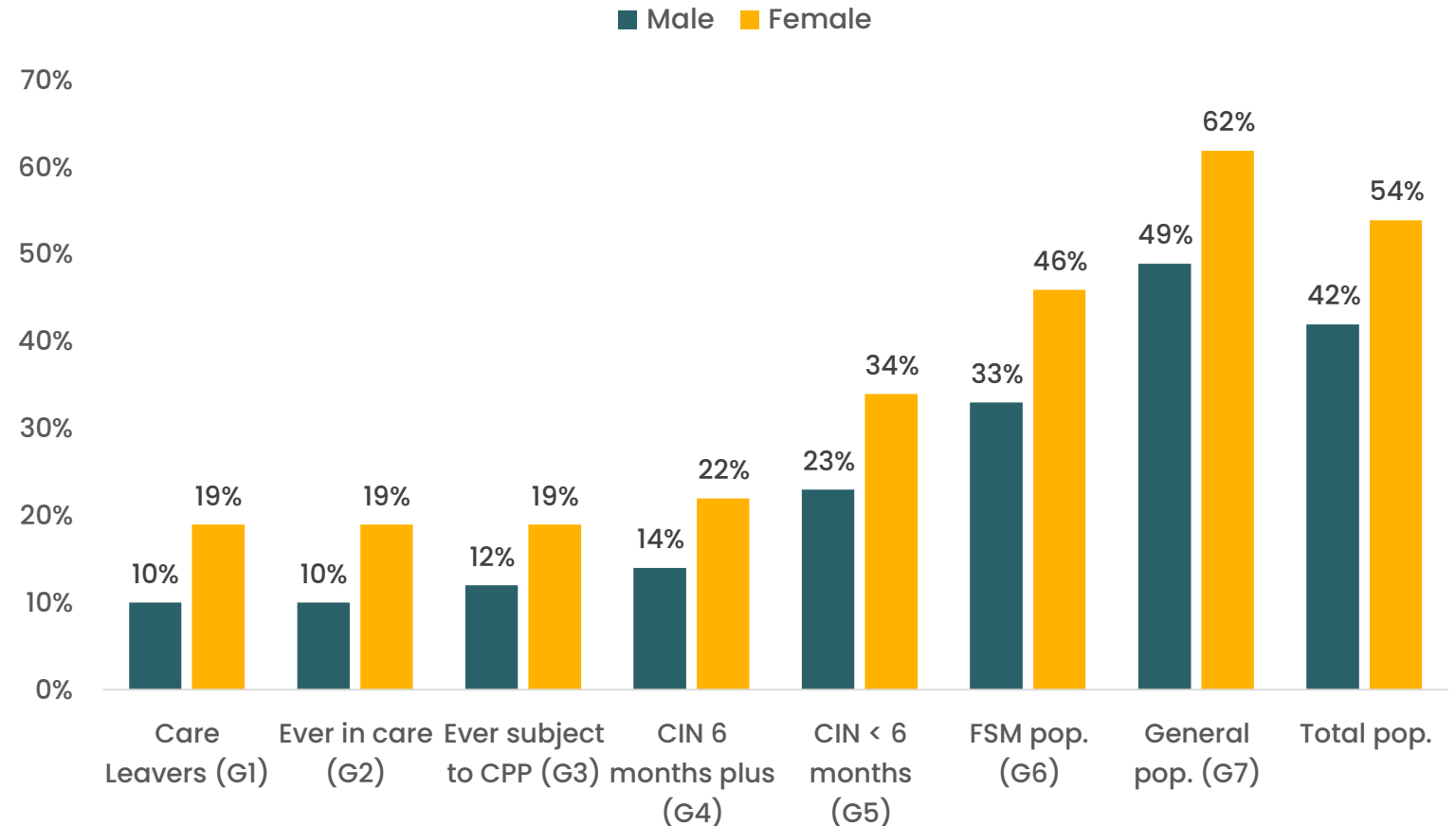
Rates of HE entry and other outcomes varied with SEN status across all groups

- Across all groups, lower proportions of young people with SEN entered HE
- Fewer of those with statements / EHC plans entered HE than those who received SEN Support provision
- This true for disadvantaged groups as for the general population.
- The age 22 HE entry rate for care leavers without SEN was closer to that of the general population than was the rate for those with SEN, particularly those with a statement



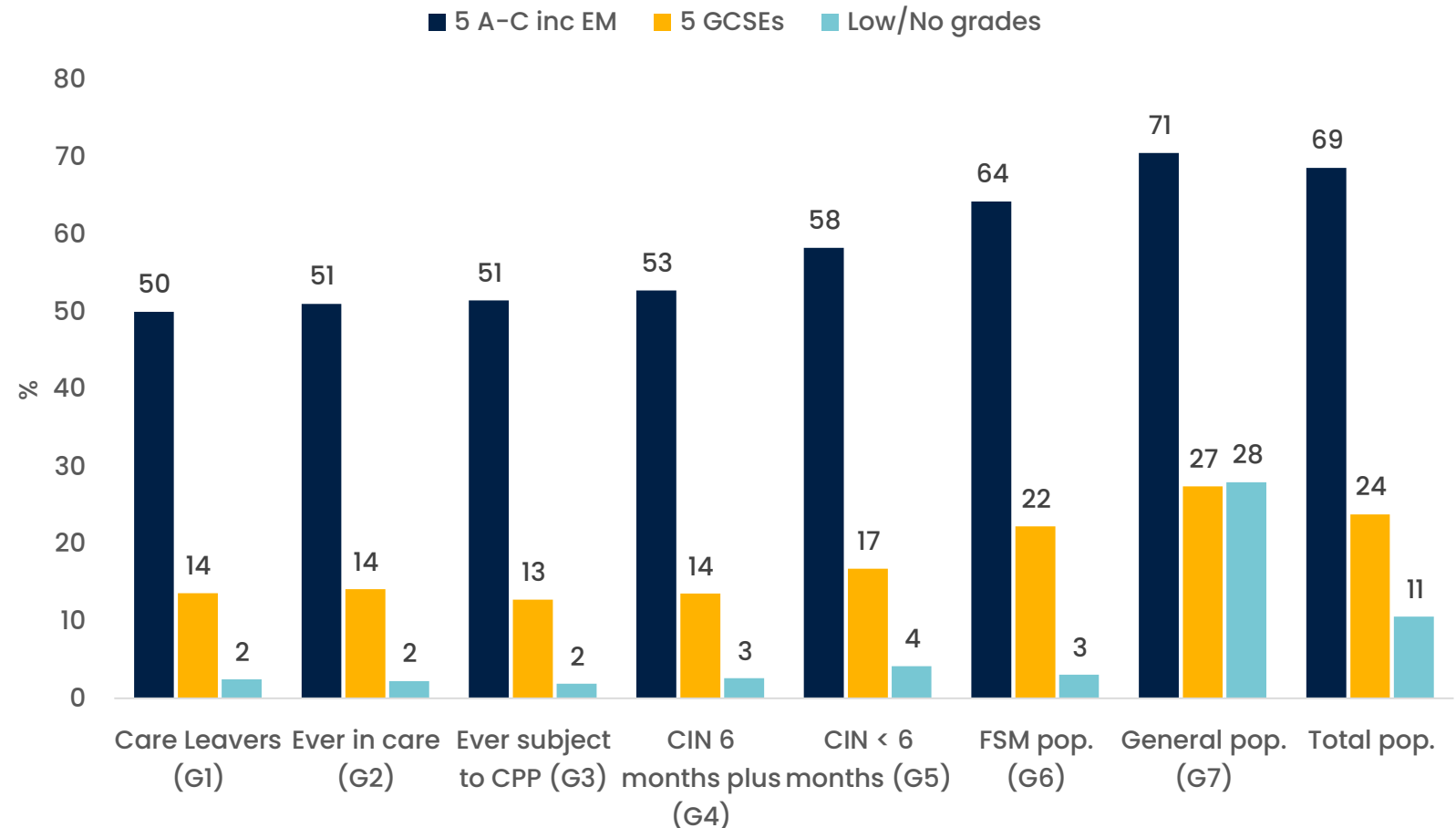
Rates of HE entry and other outcomes varied with sex

- The results also show that for all groups, higher proportions of females had entered HE by age 22 than males



Rates of HE entry and other outcomes varied with prior attainment across all groups

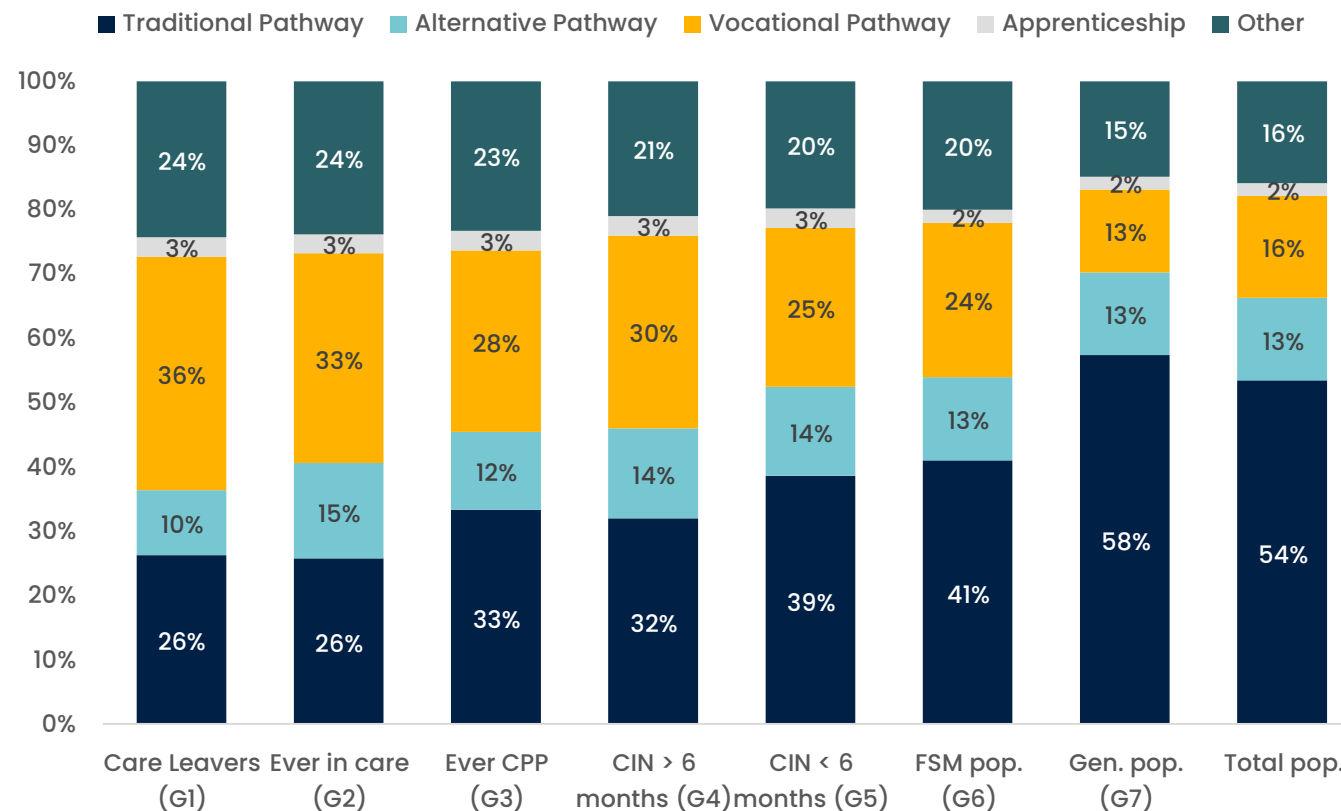
- Across all groups, greater proportions of young people with higher GCSE attainment entered HE than those with either moderate or low KS4 achievement.
- With the exception of the general population (G7), young people with 'Low or No grades' were very unlikely to enter HE.
- Of those with 'Low or No grades' over a quarter (28%) of individuals in the general population (G7) entered HE, compared to 4% or less of those with 'Low or No grades' across the other groups.



Relatively high proportions of young people with experience of social care who did enter HE, took a vocational pathway to HE, particularly care leavers

- Of those who entered HE by the age of 22, over a third (36%) of care leavers got there via vocational post-16 routes, nearly three times as many as from the general population group (13%) and 50 per cent higher than those eligible for FSM (24%).
- Vocational pathways also appear to be routes more commonly taken by males

Simplified Pathways to HE Entry by group



Vocational pathways are defined as those where young people entered HE through achieving vocational qualifications, such as an NVQ Level 3 at the end of FE.

Summary of findings

- Important differences between the groups of young people with experience of social care but also lower rates of entry to HE than other disadvantaged groups.
- Lower HE entry rates are not fully explained by many key characteristics, such as SEN status or prior attainment.
- Vocational qualifications seem to offer good early progression for many with experience of children's social care and others.



Conclusion

- It is striking but not new to find that very many children and young people who have interacted with children's social care services are also very disengaged from education.
- The solution for Universities lies not in reducing academic standards, but in designing more differentiated pathways, and supporting all Children in Need.
- The biggest effect on HE entry and also as an outcome in itself would be achieved by an enhanced FE offer.

