



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

YIPPEE young people from a public care background
pathways to education in Europe

YIPPEE

Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe

The first comparative study of young people who have been in state care as children and their post-compulsory education

February 2011

INTRODUCTION

Setting the scene

More and more young people across Europe are staying in education after the end of compulsory school. But for those young people in the care of the state, the picture is very different: very few of even the 'good' students stay in education. The pressure is to get a job and be economically independent far earlier than most young people living with birth families. The YIPPEE project set out to investigate what helped and what obstacles were in the way of completing further and higher education.

Objectives of the research

Continuing education after the end of compulsory schooling is becoming the norm for European citizens but some groups are highly socially and materially disadvantaged and for them accessing tertiary education is far more difficult. EU policies have recognised the role of young people in Europe's future by setting targets to increase the proportion of young people in tertiary education to at least 40 percent; to reduce the number of young people who drop out of school to ten percent or less; to increase the rate of youth employment; and to reduce the numbers of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Young people who were looked after by the state as children are particularly likely to be disadvantaged, first by the circumstances of their childhood and second by their experiences in state care. This disadvantage is acutely visible in comparison with all young people at the stage of tertiary education. The aim of this research was to establish what was known about young people who had been in care and their post-compulsory educational pathways in five EU countries, and to identify what factors both within the care and education systems and in the young people's lives facilitated entry to and retention in further and higher education. Funded from the Youth and Social Exclusion strand, it was hoped that the case of highly

disadvantaged young people in state care would draw attention to more general lessons for engaging socially disadvantaged young people in European societies in post compulsory education.

The countries were selected to represent different welfare regimes: Sweden and Denmark (social democratic or universalist); Spain (conservative corporatist); the UK (liberal); and Hungary (a representative of a post communist European state in transition). With differing rates of investment in education and different approaches to children in public care, the team hypothesised that more universalist welfare states would demonstrate greater success in retaining young people in tertiary education. This turned out to be only partially true.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Scientific Evidence and Analysis

This policy brief discusses the evidence for young people with a public care background in relation to three EU policy objectives:

- Increasing the proportion in tertiary education;
- Reducing early school drop out;
- Reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion through increasing employment.

How do we increase the proportion of young people in third sector education?

Among all young people who were in public care in the partner countries, participation rates in further and higher education ranged from 3 – 13 percent. Of the young people in the study, who were selected for their educational promise or motivation to continue studying, 25 percent were, at the time of fieldwork, on or had completed bachelor programmes, and a further 42 percent were on vocational or training programmes.

The highest proportions participating in bachelor level education were in England, Denmark and Sweden; the lowest in Spain and Hungary. For all those in education, delay was extremely common, often not through choice. They had often missed periods of schooling, had caring or other responsibilities for families before coming into care, and/or there had been little or no expectation of continuing in education from their educators or carers. There was a strong sense of determination often expressed as ‘doing it on my own’ and a strong desire to not repeat the life circumstances of their parents. Most of the young people wanted to fit in with society and shared the norms of society although they often felt rejected by it.

Across the five partner countries managers interviewed were largely in agreement about the barriers to continuing education for young people from a public care background. These were:

- Lack of a basic school education
- Missed long periods of schooling
- Birth families did not value education

- Lack of attention to education when selecting placements for children in care
- Carers are not educated themselves
- No-one there to 'root' for them: lack of a sympathetic guiding figure in their lives
- Care professionals do not expect children in care to succeed in education; instead focus on housing and practical support
- Policy neglect of the particular needs of this group; seeing them as 'the same as anyone else'
- Failure of societal support leading to focus on economic survival over acquisition of skills and knowledge
- Rigid education systems that do not permit non-standard pathways.

Solutions in partner countries included the following:

- Strong national and local policy support, backed up with financial resources either within care system or in education system
- Tailored support: 'we gaze on every child to see what would make a difference'
- Agreement with a bank to offer study grants to young people from public care
- Having a teacher employed within social services support teams with a focus on post-compulsory education
- Freely available and free higher education
- Flexible and individual upper secondary education programmes
- Highly educated carers and educators who have high expectations and forge constructive relationships with young people

How do we reduce early school drop out?

Many of the young people interviewed had had periods of time out of education although few had dropped out altogether as they were selected for having had some success in education. Early school drop out is associated with lack of educational qualifications and we know that a substantial proportion of young people in care in England (about half) and Denmark (about 20 percent) at age 16 do not gain school leaving qualifications, compared to almost none of the whole cohort. In Sweden, about half of those young people from public care who enrol on upper secondary education programmes do not complete them.

From the evidence in the YIPPEE project, reducing early school drop out among children in care would require a much greater focus on education from the moment a child came into care. This means care and education policy and professional practice would need to 'join up' much more effectively. Study informants said that in some cases

social workers waited until a child was 'settled' in a new placement before beginning school, missing valuable educational time, or placements were made without consideration given to educational opportunities in the neighbourhood. Many informants thought it was most important to ensure stability in a child's life through early intervention, achieved through good matching of carers and child, fewer placements overall and an educational focus to placements. The role of a guiding adult to be constantly interested in the young person's life should not be underestimated. These findings concentrate on the most disadvantaged in society and are likely to apply to all socially excluded young people.

How do we increase employment among young people?

In this study, employment was largely associated with being in education. Only a few young people were unemployed; by far the majority were doing something and were motivated by wanting to make a contribution to society. Educational participation was to a large extent a protector from social exclusion. Those in employment and education were also, at least in England, engaged in informal learning through voluntary work and leisure pursuits, and were socially integrated through friendship and organisation-based networks. Young people had normative future goals: to complete education, get a good job and, eventually, settle with a partner and raise a family.

To increase employment among young people with at least some qualifications would appear to require:

- Increased participation in post-compulsory education
 - Increased participation in voluntary work, non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Although not common in all countries, in England this was often possible through care leaver support systems.
 - Housing and support that is sufficiently flexible to enable moving house to access education and/or employment.
 - Leaving care support that enables continued study without being obliged to get a job to survive.
 - Accurate, constructive and ambitious guidance.
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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

Recognising the issue of young people emerging from the public care system and their educational potential and pathways is a first step to making policy that addresses the inequalities experienced by this group. For too long, this small but significant population, whose fortunes are the responsibility of member states, have been neglected.

I. For EU policy makers

- Reduce statistical invisibility by creating EU wide indicators that require the number of young people in public care for 12 months or more at age 16/18 years to be recorded, together with their placement type and their educational qualifications.
- Ensure this group is mentioned as one among those who are likely to be disadvantaged when drawing up social inclusion, higher education, youth, family and childhood policies.
- Develop a Europe-wide policy, highlighting the education of young people in and after public care as a key issue for social integration.
- Encourage further European studies of young people in public care to stimulate a body of knowledge in the field, particularly to identify the role of professionals and partner country policies in showing positive ways forward for this group.

II. For national governments

- Record, on an annual basis, the number of young people in care and their educational qualifications and placement types.
- Synchronise care and education systems so they work together to provide maximum support and encouragement. This is especially important at critical time points such as those leading up to public examinations. Including a teacher within 'care' teams responsible for the 16+ age group is an effective use of resources.
- Fund further and higher education participation from the public purse, including equipment, travel and accommodation required.
- Provide ongoing financial support for children in care with no family support to enable take up of educational and informal learning opportunities.
- Recognise the inequality of educational opportunity as a children's rights issue.

III. For the care and education professions

- Define 'care' for children in public care as 'educationally oriented'.
- Ensure that all practice considers the educational implications of placement decisions and action taken.

- Educate carers and educators to have high expectations of young people in care and of themselves as practitioners.
 - Deinstitutionalise and personalise all contact with young people who have been in care: see them for the individuals they are.
 - Make sure guidance to young people about educational options, finance, housing and so on is well founded, and decoupled from the need for economic survival.
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RESEARCH PARAMETERS

YiPPEE (Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe) was an EU funded 7th framework programme project conducted in five member states with the aim of investigating the educational pathways of young people who had been in care as children and identifying how to retain more of them in education.

What methods were used?

This study used a three phase and mixed methods approach to address the research question.

Phase I was a State of the Art literature review and comprehensive glossary of terms (available on the YiPPEE website), which revealed that this topic has been barely studied in most European countries; study visits and a survey of national and local agencies and authorities to try to establish a baseline of participation in post compulsory education among young people known to have been in public care. National statistics were available in only three of the five countries, again indicating an absence of attention to this topic.

Phase II. The main empirical phase focused on examination of local and national policy and collating the views and experiences of managers, young people aged 18 – 24 who had some evidence of educational promise or motivation, and adults nominated by the young people as having made a difference to their educational lives.

Phase III was a dissemination phase, including seminars with EU policy actors, national conferences, a regular briefing to stakeholders and a website where reports and news are posted.

What are the limitations of the data?

Because of differences in the way care and education systems are organised in the partner countries adaptations of the research design were necessary in each case. Eventual data sources included 36 interviews with managers, 372 telephone screening interviews with young people, 170 biographical narrative interviews with young people plus 135 follow-up interviews a year later, and 112 interviews with nominated adults.

There was a low response rate at the screening questionnaire stage in four countries; in the fifth, differences in the organisation of services prevented use of this method and potential participants were contacted directly by known support workers. More young women (n =115) than men (55) responded to the request for interview which probably reflects more willingness to take part in research as well as being more likely to being engaged in education. Finally, in two countries the source of young people was related to services they attended; in three it was not. All of these factors have a bearing on the comparability and representativeness of the sample of young people. In three countries, data from the in-depth sample was complemented by national level data relating to the same age group and contextualisation of the findings was possible.

The study took place in Denmark, Hungary, Spain (Catalonia), Sweden and the UK (England).

PROJECT IDENTITY

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Website

<http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/>

Further reading

- Jackson, S, Ajayi, S., Quigley, M. (2005) Going to University from Care, Institute of Education University of London
- Cameron, C., Hollingworth, K. and Jackson, S. (2011) Young People from a Public Care Background: secondary analysis of national statistics on educational participation, <http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/>
- Casas, F. & Montserrat, C. B., Jackson, S. & Cameron, C. (eds) (2010) Young people from a Public Care Background:

establishing a baseline of Attainment and Progression beyond Compulsory Schooling in Five EU countries,

<http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/>

- Höjer, I., Johansson, H., Hill, M., Cameron, C. and Jackson, S. (eds), (2009) State of the Art Consolidated Literature Review: The Educational Pathways of Young People from a Public Care Background in Five EU countries, <http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/>
- Cameron, C. and Jackson, S. (forthcoming) WP 10 Consolidated report: Young people from a public care background: pathways to education in Europe <http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/>

Related websites

- Education as Welfare - Enhancing opportunities for socially vulnerable youth in Europe (EDUWEL) – Network for Initial training
- Online mobile communities to facilitate the social inclusion of young marginalized people (COMELN) - Collaborative project, <http://www.comein-project.eu>
- Combating social exclusion among young homeless populations: a comparative investigation of homeless paths and reinsertion programmes for young men and women of different ethnic and migrant statuses (CSEYHP) - Small or medium-scale focused research project <http://www.movisie.nl/118836/eng/>
- Youth, unemployment, and exclusion in Europe: a multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed (YOUNEX) - Small or medium-scale focused research project <http://www.younex.unige.ch/index.html>
- On the margins of the European community young adult immigrants in seven European countries (EUMARGINS) - Small or medium-scale focused research project <http://www.iss.uio.no/forskning/eumargins/>
- Social software for inclusion of (marginalized) young people (INCLUSO) - Collaborative project (generic) <http://www.incluso.org/node/1>

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