

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland Care Leavers 2019/20



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

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Main uses of document	The main uses of these data are to monitor the delivery of social care services to children, to help assess Trust performance, corporate monitoring, to inform and monitor related policy, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. The bulletin is also used by academics/researchers, the voluntary sector and those with an interest in children in care.
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Provide up-to-date, quality information on children and adult social services and community health;

to disseminate findings widely with a view to stimulating debate, promoting effective decision-making and improvement in service provision; and be an expert voice on social care information.

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The purpose of Community Information Branch (CIB) is to promote effective decision making in children and adult social services by providing quality information and analysis.

We collect, analyse, and publish a wide range of community information that is used to help monitor the delivery of personal social services policy. Information collected by CIB is used to assess HSC Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, policy evaluation, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions.

Information is widely disseminated through a number of regular key statistical publications and ad hoc reports, details of which are available online.

## KEY FINDINGS

### There were 295 care leavers **aged 16-18** in 2019/20

- Some two thirds (66%) of care leavers aged 16-18 had GCSEs or other qualifications. The proportion of care leavers who had 5 GCSEs (A\*-C) or higher at the time of leaving care was 27%.
- Care leavers continue to have a higher proportion of young people with a Statement of Educational Need (21%) compared with the general school population (5%).
- Of the care leavers aged 16-18 in 2019/20, for whom information was available, 71% were in full time or part time education, training or employment. Some 16% were unemployed and 13% were economically inactive because of caring responsibilities or illness/disabilities.

### There were 242 care leavers **aged 19** in 2019/20

- Some 92% of care leavers aged 19 were in contact with Health and Social Care Trusts; with 61% in contact at least once a month.
- Of the care leavers for whom information was available, 73% were in education, training or employment – a notable increase from previous years.
- In terms of becoming a parent, 10% of all care leavers aged 19 were parents, with 13% of female care leavers aged 19 becoming mothers on or before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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# 1. Northern Ireland Care Leavers

## 1.1. BACKGROUND

Children are taken into care for a variety of reasons, the most common being to protect them from abuse or neglect. In other cases their parents could be absent or may be unable to cope due to disability or illness. Children who become looked after by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust have often suffered many disadvantages in their lives and many of them attain low educational achievements which are likely to impact on their future lives and chances for employment.

The *Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002* came into force in 2005. It aims to improve the life prospects of young people who are looked after by HSC Trusts as they make the transition to independent living and become care leavers. To achieve this, the Act placed new and enhanced duties on HSC Trusts to support young people who are leaving care.

The main aims of the Act are to prevent premature discharges from care, improve preparation, planning and consistency of support for young care leavers, and to strengthen arrangements for financial assistance. Central to the Act are duties to assess and meet individual's needs, provide Personal Advisers and develop pathway planning for young people up to the age of 21 (or beyond if they are continuing in education)<sup>1</sup>.

*Standards for Leaving Care Services in Northern Ireland* were published by the Department of Health in 2012 which establish minimum standards for leaving and aftercare services. The Standards specify the arrangements, services and procedures that need to be in place and implemented to ensure the delivery of quality services for young people leaving care and to support them in education, employment and training. These Standards apply to HSC Trusts and those other agencies commissioned by a HSC Trust to deliver leaving and aftercare services.

The *Going the Extra Mile (GEM) scheme*<sup>2</sup> was launched in 2006. The aim of this scheme is to promote continuity and stability of living arrangements in post-care life for young people living with foster carers by ensuring that financial support is available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of these young people until they reach the age of 21. Allied to this, the scheme also



<sup>1</sup> The Children (Leaving Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 set out in more detail the matters to be taken into account by HSC Trusts when assessing and meeting the needs of those preparing to leave care and those who have left care.

<sup>2</sup> The scheme is facilitated under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, the Children (Leaving Care) Regulations (NI) 2005 and Volume 8 of the Children (NI) Order 1995 Guidance – Leaving and Aftercare.

aims to promote better outcomes for young people leaving care in relation to training, employment and education.

The Department recognises the importance of giving young people the best start in life, helping those in need, and in particular improving outcomes for children in care. The Programme for Government initiative is currently being reviewed but any ongoing population target on improving Support for Looked After Children related measure will continue to be reported on annually.

## 1.2. OC COMMUNITY INFORMATION RETURNS

The community information returns OC1, OC2 and OC3 collect data relating to children in care and care leavers in Northern Ireland, which together are designed to monitor and assess outcomes for children while they are in care and after leaving care. The OC1 return collects information on educational attainment of care leavers aged 16 to 18, the OC2 return collects information relating to the educational qualifications and health of children looked after continuously for 12 months and the OC3 return collects information on the economic activity of care leavers aged 19. This bulletin reports findings from the OC1 and OC3 surveys relating to the year ending 31 March 2020.

Due to strains on the workforce caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, and after consultation with policy colleagues, shortened versions of the OC1 and OC3 forms were issued, it was decided to issue shortened versions of the OC1 and OC3 forms, to alleviate some of the pressure on the workforce. The analysis contained in the 2019/20 publication are therefore reduced compared with previous years.

## 1.3. CARE LEAVERS

Children admitted to care may be discharged, if appropriate, at any age. *Care Leavers* in this bulletin cover young people aged 16-18 who left care during the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 as well as young people who turned 19 years of age during the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and who had been looked after on 1<sup>st</sup> April three years previously. It excludes those young people who had been looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements (respite care).

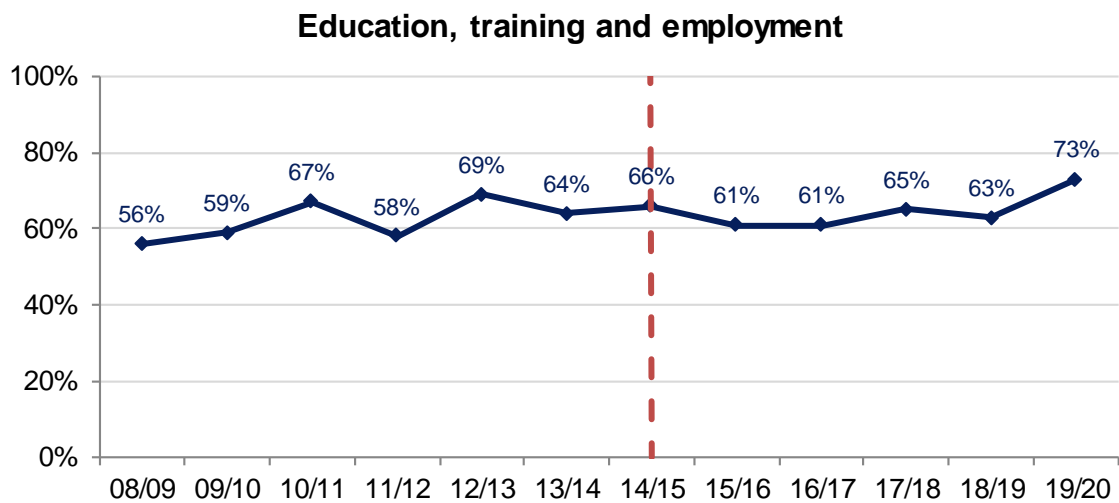
Due to the small number of care leavers in Northern Ireland, some caution should be taken when interpreting figures presented in this bulletin, especially when the figures are broken down into sub categories. It is also worth noting, when comparing yearly figures, that each year has an individual cohort of young people which may differ in characteristics to other years. For example, a given year may include a higher number of young people with special educational needs which could impact on the educational attainment figures for that year. As such, yearly variations in outcomes may be a reflection on the different cohorts of people in addition to actual trends or social care intervention.

## 1.4. PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Outcome 12 of the Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021, states that “*We will give our children and young people the best start in life*”. Care leaver data informs a population indicator for this outcome:

**“Care leavers who, aged 19, were in education training or employment.”**

The baseline for the above indicator relates to year 2014/15, when 66% of care leavers aged 19 were in education training or employment. In 2019/20, the percentage had increased and was 73%. Further discussions on this can be found in section 3.3.2 of this publication.



Further analysis can be found in section 3.3.2 of this publication.



## 2. Care leavers aged 16-18

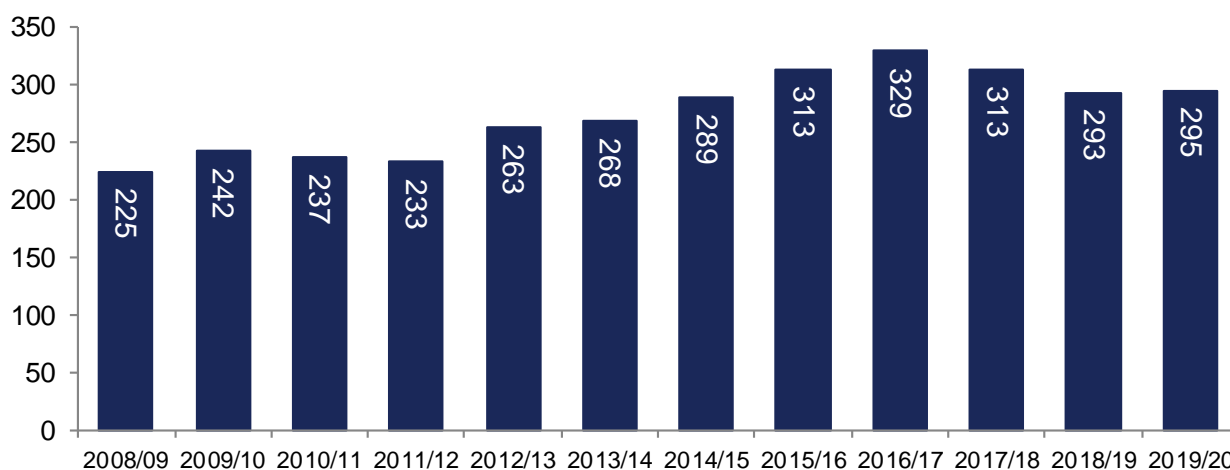
### 2.1. WHO ARE THE CARE LEAVERS AGED 16-18?



During the year ending 31 March 2020, 295 young people aged 16–18 left care in Northern Ireland. This was two more than in 2018/19 (1% increase). The number of care leavers steadily increased between 2011/12 and 2016/17, after a period of relative stability in the preceding years and has stayed around 300 the last years.

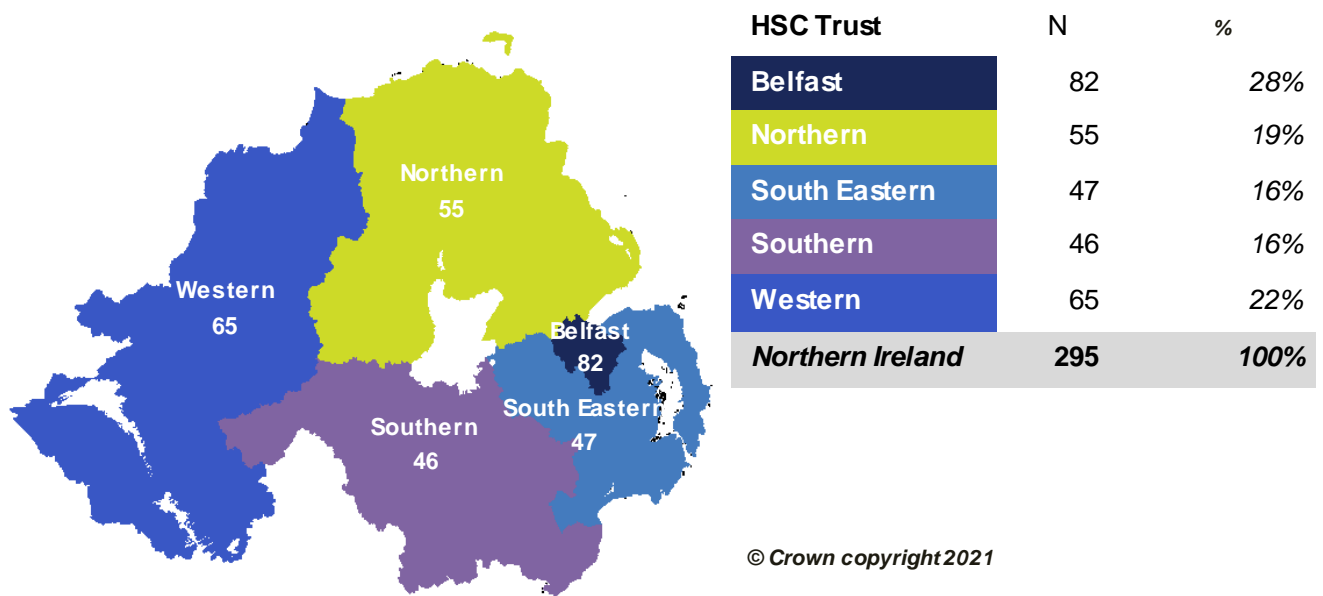
There were fewer female than male care leavers in 2019/20 (46% and 54% respectively). This breakdown is slightly inflated compared to the general population of that age group in Northern Ireland, (49% female and 51% male)<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 1** Number of care leavers aged 16-18 in Northern Ireland (2008/09 – 2019/20)



<sup>3</sup> 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2020).

**Figure 2** Number of care leavers aged 16-18 – HSC Trust profile (2019/20)

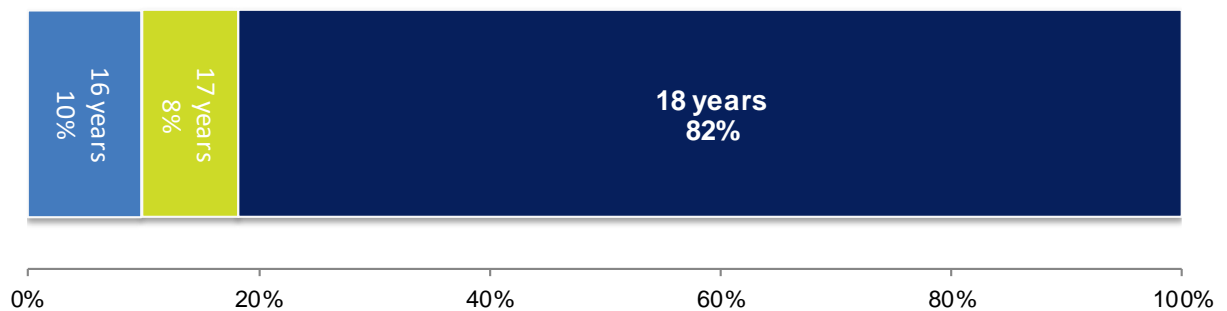


As in previous years, the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust had the highest number of care leavers aged 16-18 (28% of all the care leavers). The number of care leavers in each HSC Trust can vary year on year. However, between 2018/19 and 2019/20, there were only minor differences in Trust figures, with either identical figures or increases of max 4 more young people leaving care

### 2.1.1. Age Profile

As in previous years, the majority of care leavers in 2019/20 had stayed in care until they reached the age of 18 years of age (82%). Some 18% left care at 16 or 17 years of age. At HSC Trust level, there was some variation in the age profile of the care leavers, with the proportion of young people leaving care at 18 ranging from 71% in the Belfast HSC Trust to 96% in the Northern HSC Trust.

**Figure 3** Age of care leavers (2019/20)



### 2.1.2. *Special Educational Need*

Children have special educational needs if they have a difficulty which calls for specific educational provision to be made for them. Further definitional and background information on this is detailed in the 'Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Need', which is available from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup>.

Almost a quarter of care leavers in 2019/20 (23%) had a statement of Special Educational Need, a slightly larger proportion than that in 2018/19 (21%). Although not directly comparable, 5.5% of the general school population in Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup> had a statement of Special Educational Needs. Furthermore, 5% of school leavers in Northern Ireland had a statement of Special Educational Need in 2017/18<sup>6</sup>. This suggests that a disproportionate number of young care leavers have specific educational needs compared with the general population.

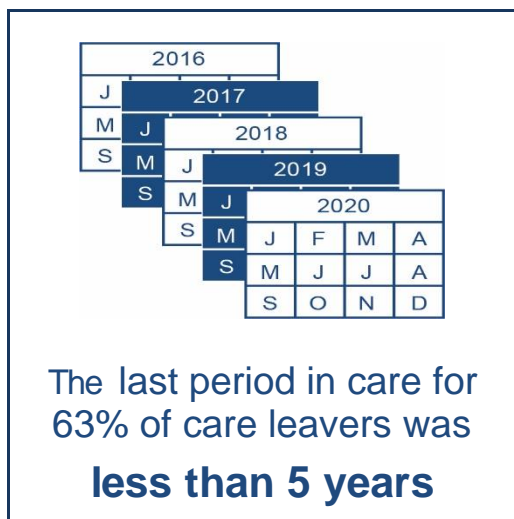
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<sup>4</sup> DENI, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/special-educational-needs-code-practice>

<sup>5</sup> DENI, 'Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2018/19', <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolments-201920-statistical-bulletins>

<sup>6</sup> DENI, 'Qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland school leavers 2017/18', <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>

## 2.2. WHAT WAS THEIR LAST PERIOD IN CARE?

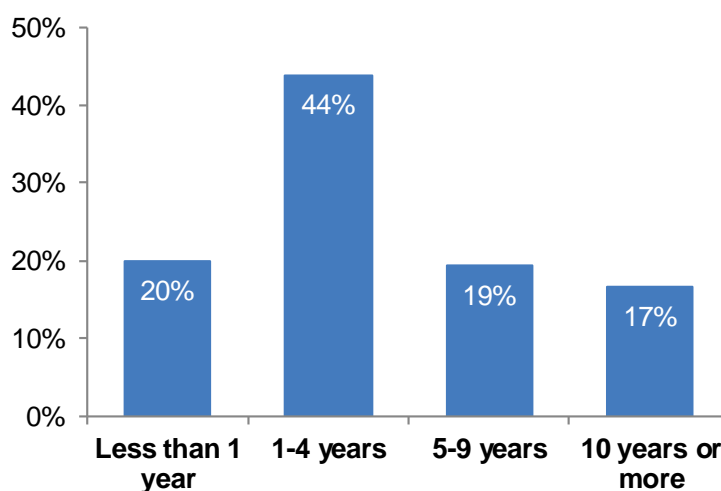


### 2.2.1. Length of Most Recent Period in Care

Every child's care history is unique and some children may experience more than one episode of care. For this publication, only information on the duration of the last period of care is collected.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of care leavers had been looked after for 4 years or less in their last period of care, and some 17% had been looked after for more than 10 years. On average, females last period of care was shorter (4 years 8 months) than males (5 years 0 months).

**Figure 4** Care leavers aged 16-18 – Length of most recent period of care (2019/20)

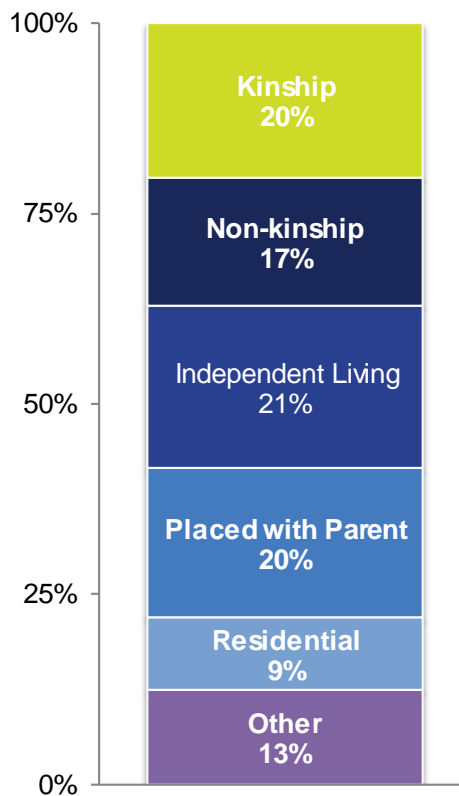


Information missing from one care leaver.

### 2.2.2. Last Placement

As in previous years, the majority of care leavers in 2019/20 had been in foster care prior to leaving care (37%); 20% in kinship foster care (placed with relatives or a person known to the child) and 17% in non-kinship foster care<sup>7</sup>. Just over a fifth (21%) had been in independent living arrangements, and a further fifth (20%) had been placed with a parent or person with parental responsibilities. Some 9% had been in residential care and 13% had been in 'other' placement types which included placements such as supported living, hospital, bed & breakfast, , and friends.

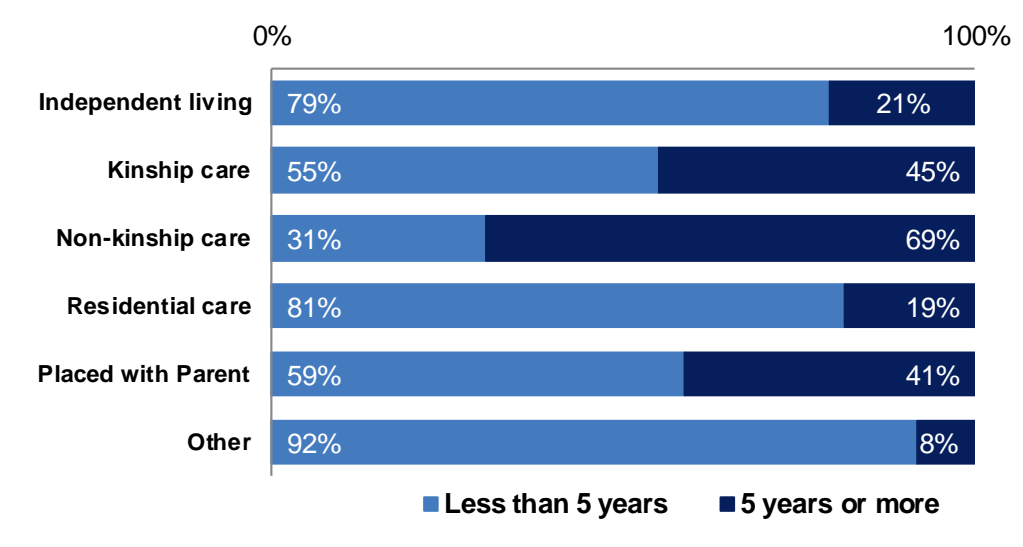
**Figure 5 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Last placement type (2019/20)**



Young people, whose last placement was foster care (kinship or non-kinship) and those whose last placement was placed with a parent were more likely to have been in care for 5 years or more, compared with all other placement types. Please note that the young person may have had one or several placement changes during the time in care and these figures only reflect the last of their placements before leaving care.

<sup>7</sup> Please see appendix B for placement definitions.

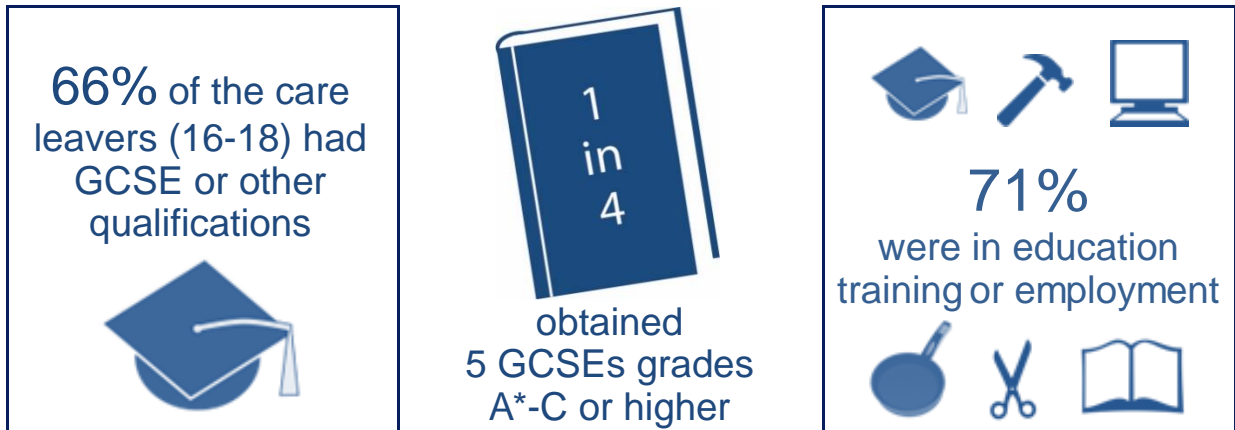
**Figure 6 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Last placement by time in care (2019/20)**



Information missing from one care leaver.

Please note that the young person may have had one or several placement changes during the time in care and these figures only reflect the last of their placements before leaving care.

## 2.3. HOW ARE THEY DOING NOW?

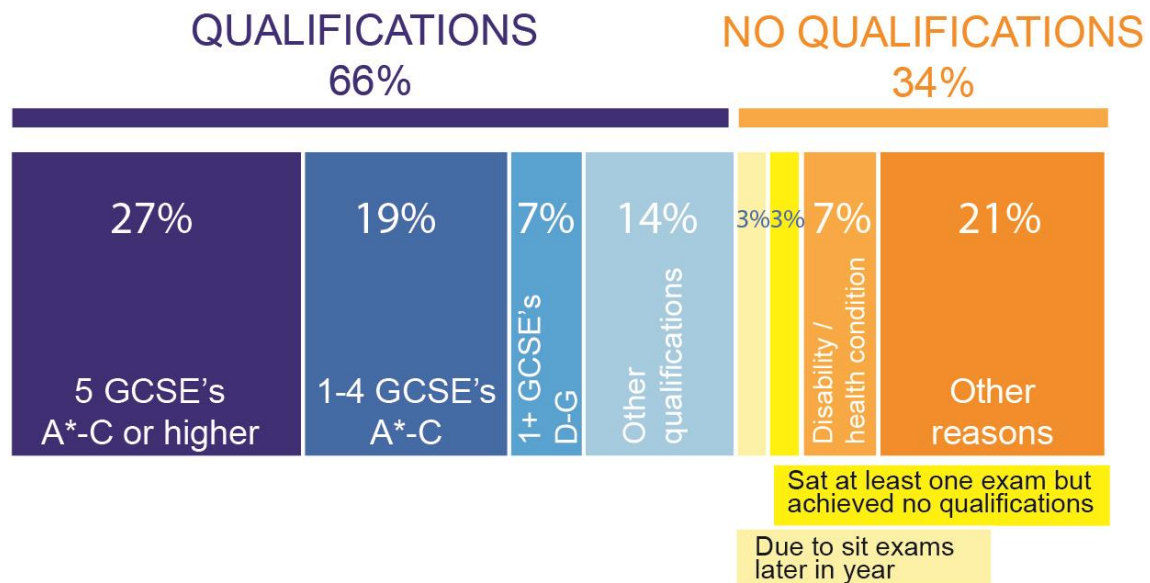


### 2.3.1. Educational Attainment

Educational attainment can be an important predictor of success in later life; low educational achievements may impact on future lives and chances for employment.

At the time of leaving care, two-thirds (66%) of the care leavers aged 16-18 had educational qualifications<sup>8</sup>; 52% had at least 1 GCSE or higher qualifications and 14% had non-GCSE qualifications. Some 34% of the care leavers did not have any qualifications at the time of leaving care.

**Figure 7 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Care leavers’ educational qualifications at time of leaving care (2019/20)**

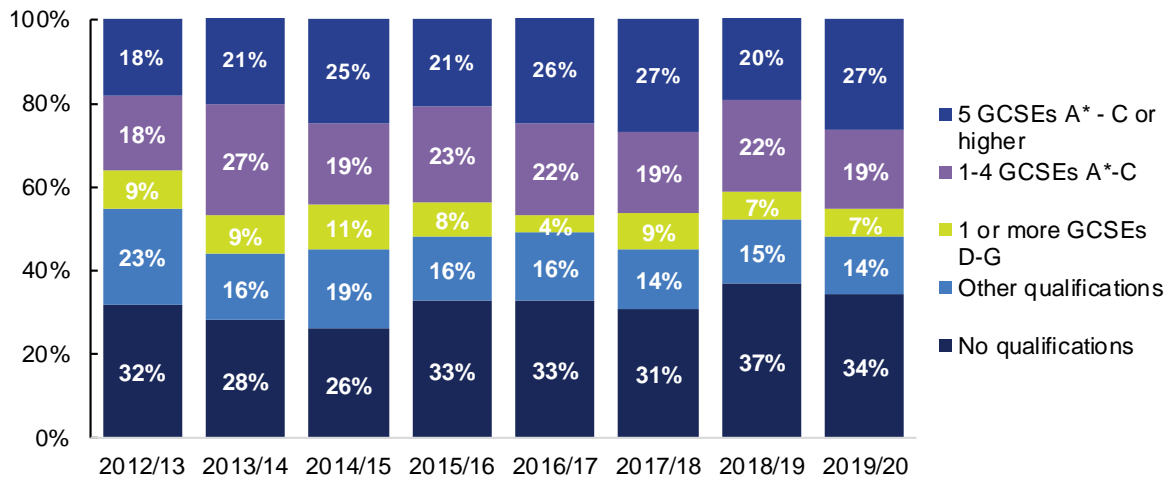


**Note:** Excludes a small number of care leavers who either had severe learning disability or no reported information.

**Note:** Some young people had both GCSE and NVQ or essential skills qualifications. These have been grouped in the appropriate GCSE category.

<sup>8</sup> Figures exclude 9 care leavers who either had severe learning difficulties or no recorded information.

**Figure 8 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Care leavers’ educational qualifications at time of leaving care (2012/13 - 2019/20)**

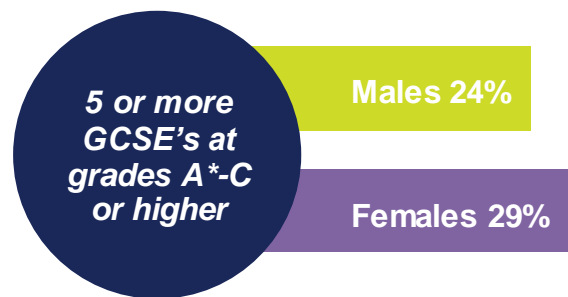


**Note:** Excludes a small number of care leavers who either had severe learning disability or missing values.

The 34% with no qualifications represented 98 care leavers aged 16-18. Some 61 of these did not sit any examinations, even though they had reached an appropriate age to do so; 9 sat examinations but did not obtain any qualifications and 9 were due to take examinations after leaving care. A further 19 had health conditions or disabilities preventing them from sitting exams.

As the characteristics of the cohort of care leavers can vary each year, the educational outcomes may also vary. Some annual variation can be seen in care leavers’ qualifications, however the general trend has remained the same over the last years.

A slightly higher proportion of females left care with qualifications compared with males (70% compared to 62%). Some 29% of females obtained 5 GCSE’s grades A\*-C or higher in 2019/20 compared with 24% of males. Some 38% of males and 30% of females left care with no qualifications (see Tables in Appendix C for details).

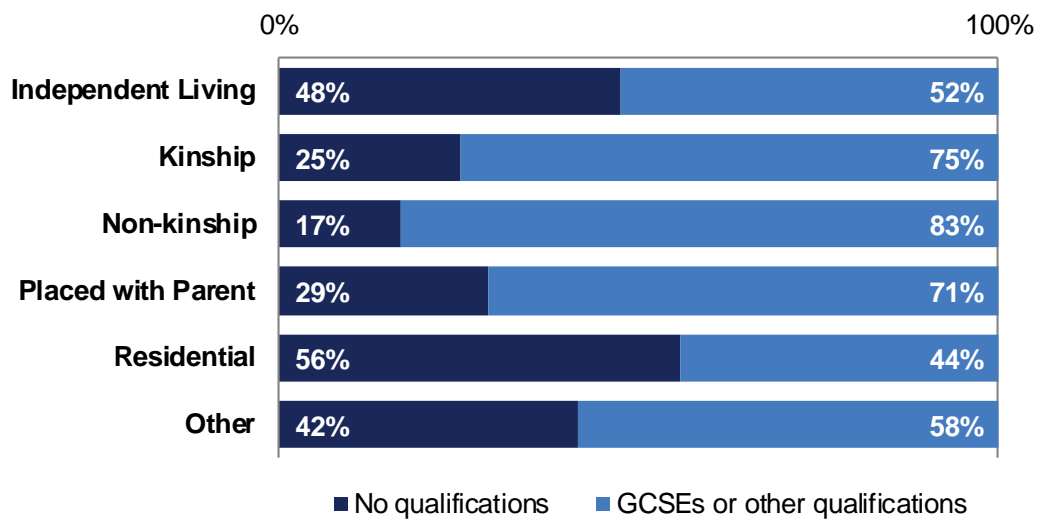




The following analyses compare those care leavers aged 16–18 with GCSE’s or other qualifications (188, 66%) and those with no qualifications (98, 34%)<sup>9</sup>.

Some 78% of care leavers previously in foster care placements had GCSEs or other qualifications at the time of leaving care (83% in non-kinship and 75% in kinship), followed by 71% of those placed with parents and just over half (52%) of those living independently. Some 44% of those in residential care had GCSEs or other qualifications when leaving care.

**Figure 9 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Qualifications achieved by last placement type (2019/20)**

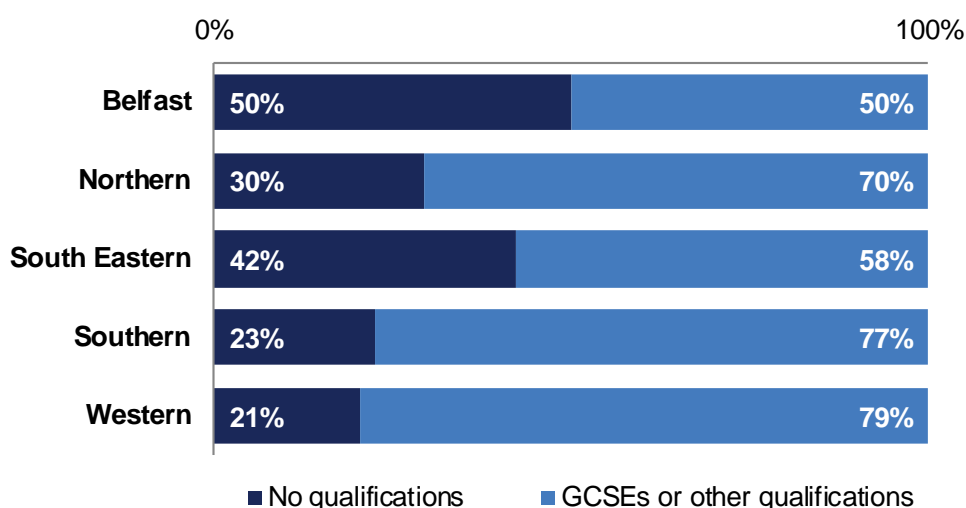


Note: Excludes a small number of care leavers who either had severe learning disability or missing values.

Length of time of the last period of care also appeared to be important in terms of educational attainment. Children in care for 5 years or more tended to do better academically than those in care for less than 5 years; however, the difference in 2019/20 was not as marked as in previous years; some 73% of care leavers in care for 5 years or more had obtained GCSEs or other qualifications, compared with 62% of those in care for less than 5 years. However, this difference may also be related to different placement types experienced by these groups of care leavers.

<sup>9</sup> Excludes a small number of care leavers who either had severe learning disability or missing values.

**Figure 10 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Qualification achieved by HSC Trust (2019/20)**



Note: Excludes a small number of care leavers who either had severe learning disability or missing values.

At the time of leaving care, the 16-18 year old care leavers from the Western and Southern HSC Trusts performed best academically with 79% and 77% leaving care with educational qualifications. Please note that due to the small numbers involved, these figures may be subject to high year on year volatility.

### 2.3.2. Educational Attainment – Comparison with the general school population

The Department of Education publish annual statistics on qualifications for the general school leaver population in Northern Ireland. These figures are not directly comparable to the care leaver qualifications, as the care leavers information includes all care leavers (whether in education or not) and is captured at the time of leaving care, not when leaving school.

To best match the school leaver population, a sub-cohort of care leavers was created, covering those who **had GCSE qualifications or who sat exams but did not achieve any qualifications (total of 157 young people)**. The qualifications of the sub-cohort has been compared to the school leaver population in the table below.

As can be seen in Table 1 below, some 97% of school leavers achieved at least 5 GCSEs A\*-G compared to 68% of care leavers who sat exams. Furthermore, 48% of care leavers achieved 5 or more GCSEs at A\*-C compared to almost 86% of the school leaver population<sup>10</sup>.

Please note that this way of comparing the two cohorts (care leavers and NI school leavers) was introduced in 2017/18 and is different from previous publications. The methodology behind capturing the information has not changed, only the way it is presented. Please note, the above will still not allow like-for-like comparison, however; it is the best possible match based on the data available.

<sup>10</sup> Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers  
<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>

**Table 1 Attainment of Care Leavers aged 16-18 who had sat exams (2018/19 and 2019/20) and School Leaver (2018/19)**

	Care leavers aged 16-18 who sat exams* 2018/19	Care leavers aged 16-18 who sat exams* 2019/20	School leavers 2018/19**
At least 5 GCSEs A*-G	76.6%	68.2%	97.0%
At least 5 GCSE A*-C	36.7%	48.4%	86.4%
No formal qualifications	11.4%	5.7%	0.6%

\*Excludes care leavers aged 16-18 with non-GCSE qualifications (eg NVQs or essential skills); those who did not sit exams due to health conditions, disability or learning disability; those who were due to sit exams after leaving care and those who did not engage in school/education.

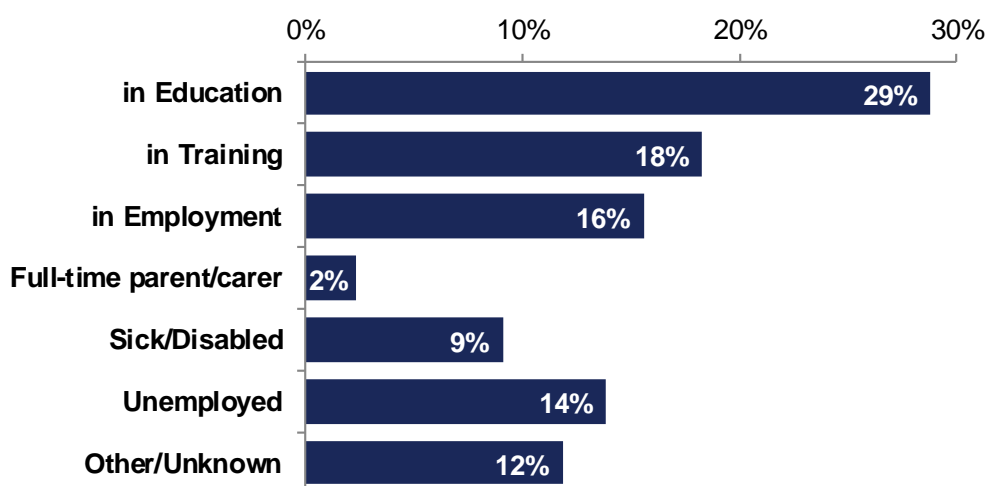
\*\*Year 12, 13 or 14 pupils leaving mainstream, grant aided post-primary schools <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>.

### 2.3.3. Economic Activity

Figure 11 below details economic activity for care leavers aged 16-18 for 2019/20. Most of the young people were in education or training at the time of leaving care (29% and 18% respectively), while 16% were in employment. Some 9% were economically inactive due to sickness or disability and a further 2% were economically inactive due to caring/parental responsibilities. Most of the 12% who were unemployed when leaving care, were either lacking motivation to engage in education, training or employment, or actively seeking employment.

Economic activity amongst care leavers compared less favourably with that for young people of similar age; for example, 25% of young people in the general population aged 16-18 years were employed, compared with 18% of young care leavers<sup>11</sup>.

**Figure 11 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Economic activity (2019/20)**



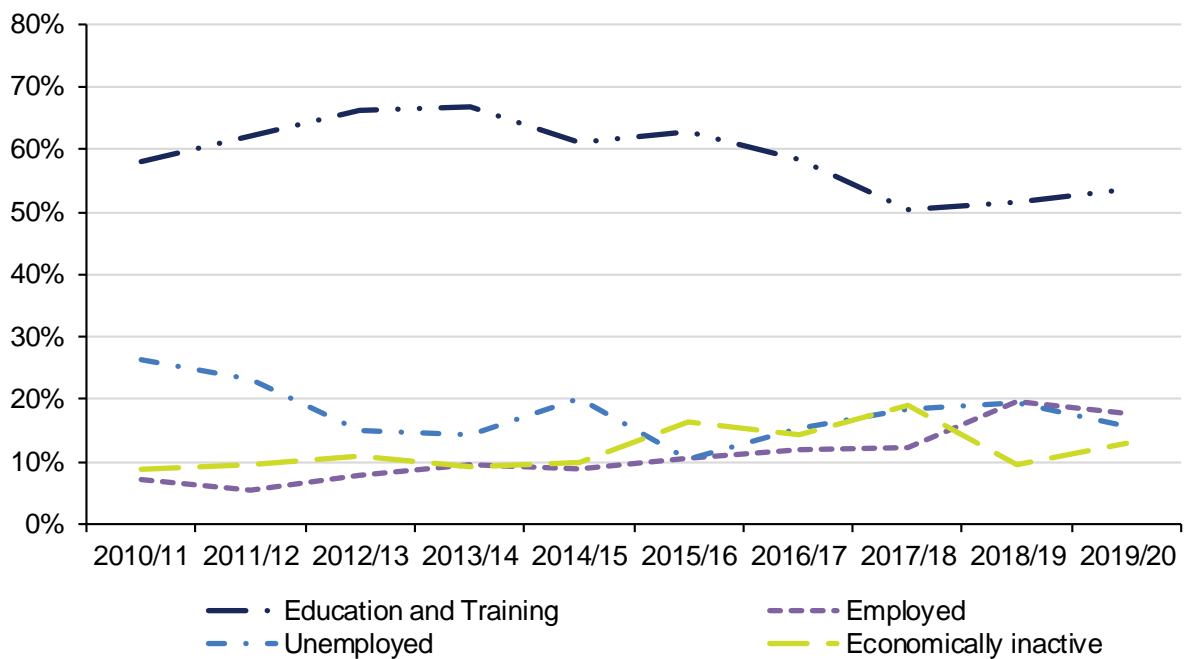
<sup>11</sup> Labour Force Survey July-September 2019, NISRA.

The findings of this section relate only to those for whom economic activity was reported<sup>12</sup>

Of the 260 care leavers aged 16-18 in 2019/20, whose economic activity was reported, 71% were in full time or part time education, training or employment. Some 16% were unemployed and 13% were economically inactive because of caring responsibilities or illness/disabilities.

Although the proportion of care leavers in education or training is still substantially larger than the other categories, the gap has narrowed the last few years (see figure below).

**Figure 12 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Economic activity on leaving care (2019/20)**



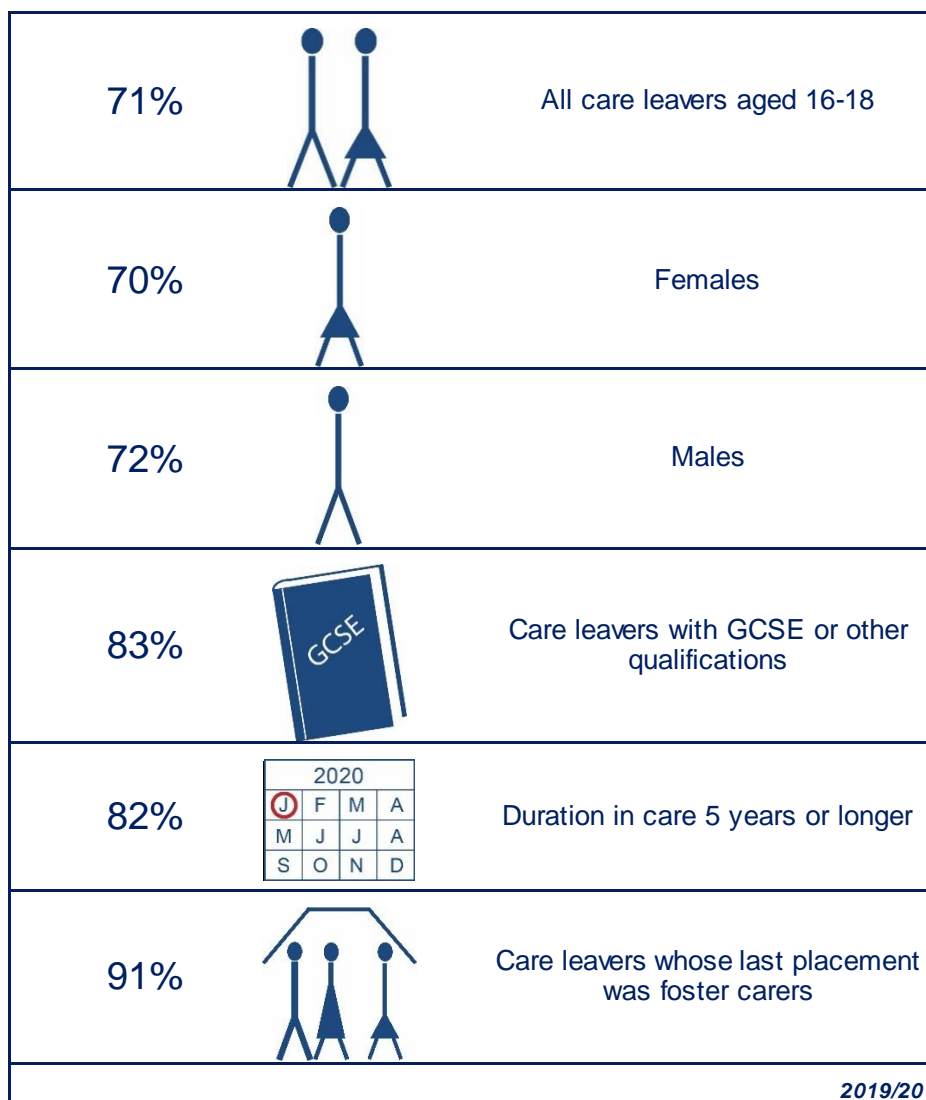
Note: Excludes care leavers where economic activity was not known.

Looking at the HSC Trusts individually, in 2019/20, the proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment at the time of leaving care ranged between 66% (the South Eastern Trust) and 79% (Belfast Trusts).

Similar proportion of female and male care leavers were in education training or employment (70% and 72% respectively), however a slightly higher proportion of females were economically inactive due to caring responsibilities or disability /ill health (16% compared to 11%).

<sup>12</sup> Economic activity was not known/not reported for 35 of the care leavers aged 16 – 18 in 2019/20 (12%)

Care leavers aged 16-18 in education, training or employment



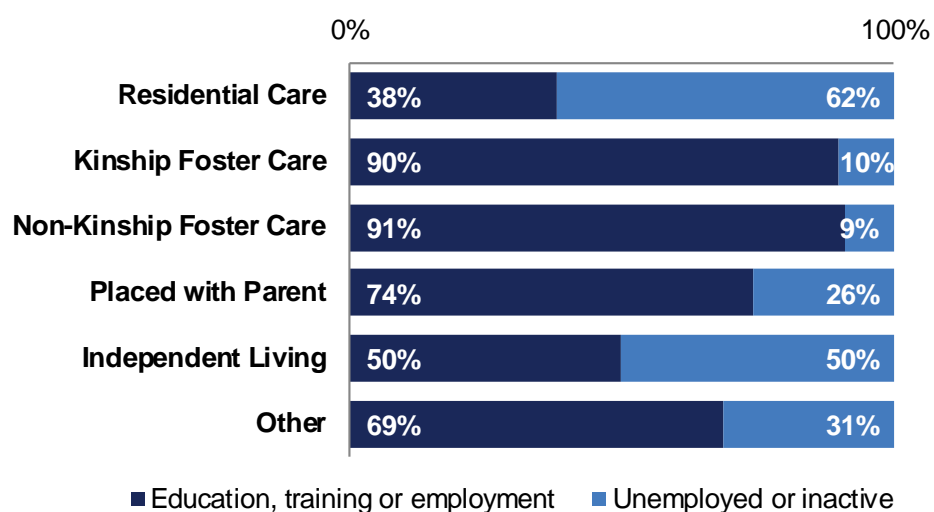
Excludes care leavers where economic activity was not known.

As can be expected, having qualifications correlated highly with economic activity, with 83% of those with GCSEs or other qualifications in education, training or employment compared with 42% of those without qualifications.

Some 82% of care leavers whose last period of care lasted 5 years or longer were in education, training, or employment. The corresponding figure for those in care for less than 5 years was 64%.

Care leavers whose last placement was foster care (both kinship and non-kinship) fared better in terms of economic activity on leaving care, with 91% in education, training or employment. This compares to 38% of those whose last placement had been residential care (see Figure below). Please note that these analysis include at times very small numbers and figures must therefore be interpreted with care.

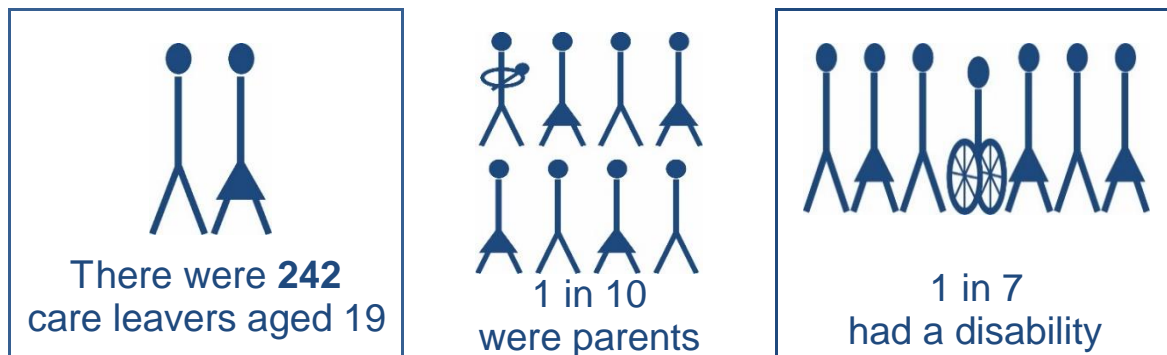
**Figure 13 Care leavers aged 16-18 – Economic activity by latest placement type (2019/20)**



Note: Excludes care leavers where economic activity was not known.

# 3. Care Leavers Aged 19

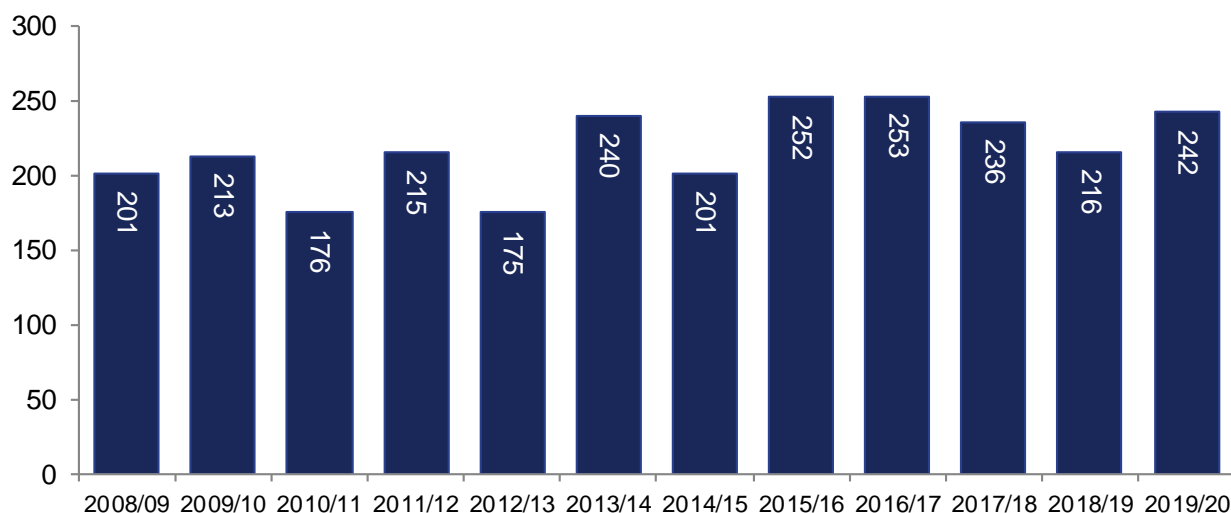
## 3.1. WHO ARE THE CARE LEAVERS AGED 19?



During the year ending 31 March 2020, there were 242 young people in Northern Ireland, who had been in care on 1 April 2017, and who reached their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday during the year ending 31 March 2020. This was 12% more than the previous year.

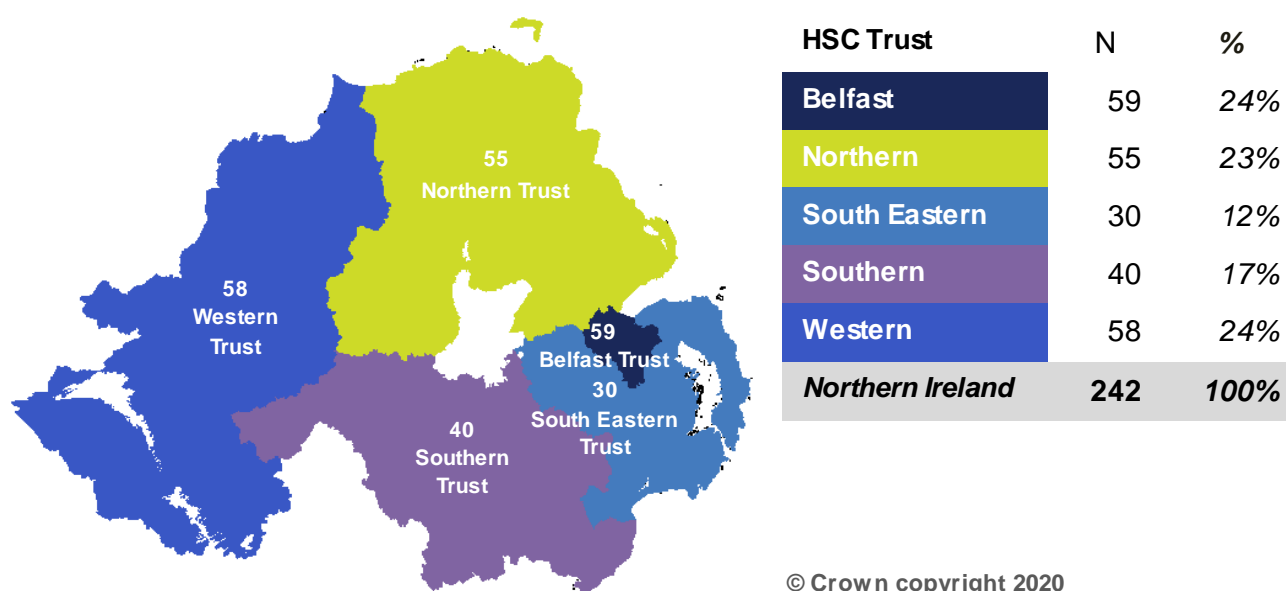
Of the 242 care leavers aged 19, 124 (51%) were male and 118 (49%) were female. This gender split was similar to the general population of that age group in Northern Ireland, where 53% were males and 47% females<sup>13</sup>.

**Figure 14** Number of care leavers aged 19 in Northern Ireland (2008/09 – 2019/20)



<sup>13</sup> 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2020).

**Figure 15** Number of care leavers aged 19 by HSC Trust (2019/20)



The highest proportion of care leavers aged 19 were in the Belfast and Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust (24%) compared to 12% in the South Eastern HSC Trust.

The care leavers' geographical location was linked with the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017<sup>14</sup> to identify the deprivation quintile rank of home location before last entry into care and after leaving care<sup>15</sup>. For the young people where geographical information was available<sup>16</sup>, a higher proportion had been living in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland before the last entry into care (44%) than after leaving care (40%).

### 3.1.1. Religion and Ethnicity

Information on religion and ethnicity of care leavers is collected for equality monitoring purposes. In terms of religion, the proportion of care leavers aged 19 from a Catholic community background (50%) was higher than those from a Protestant community background (42%). Some 8% were of 'Unknown', 'None' or 'Other' religious backgrounds, which was similar to the previous year.

The vast majority of the care leavers aged 19 had a white ethnic background (94%).

<sup>14</sup>Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2017 (<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017>).

<sup>15</sup> These analyses were only carried out for care leavers residing in Northern Ireland.

<sup>16</sup> Northern Ireland geographical information prior to entering care was available for 89% of the care leavers and information was available for 88% upon leaving care. Some 81% had geographical information for both prior to entering care and upon leaving care.



### 3.1.2. Disability

Of those care leavers aged 19, 35 had a disability (14%), and of that, just over half (54%) had a learning disability<sup>17</sup>. Although not directly comparable, figures from the 2011 Census indicated that 7% of 18-19 year olds in Northern Ireland had a disability<sup>18</sup>. This suggests that a disproportionately high number of care leavers have a disability.

### 3.1.3. Dependants

Some 10% of care leavers aged 19 were parents, 15 young women and 8 young men. The proportion of care leavers with dependent children can fluctuate extensively year on year.

In 2019/20, 13% of female care leavers aged 19 became mothers on or before their 19th birthday. During 2019, 1% of 15-19 year old females in the general population in Northern Ireland became mothers<sup>19</sup>. Although these figures are not directly comparable, it does indicate a higher prevalence of teenage mothers in the cohorts of care leavers.



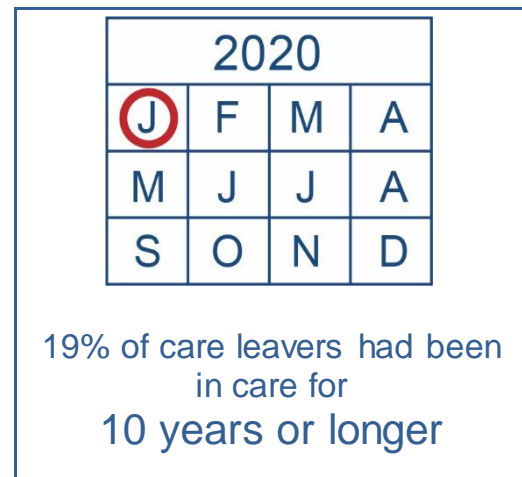
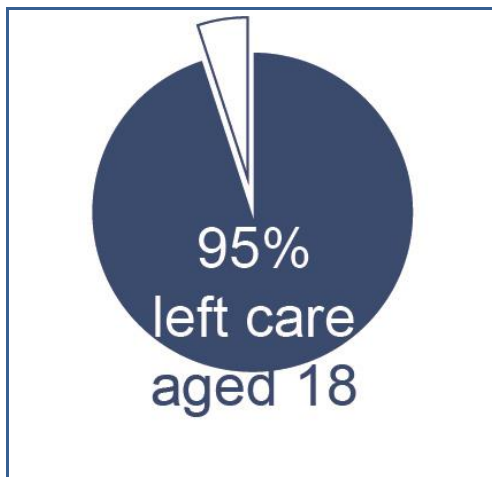
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<sup>17</sup> Please note that the care leavers may have had multiple disabilities with other disabilities alongside learning disability.

<sup>18</sup> Census 2011 – 18 to 19 year olds with long term health problem limiting day to day activities.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Registrar General Annual Report 2019 Births, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2020; 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2020). Please note, the figure has been calculated using the number of live births and therefore, may be an overestimation as it does not take account of multiple births.

### 3.2. WHAT WAS THEIR LAST PERIOD IN CARE?



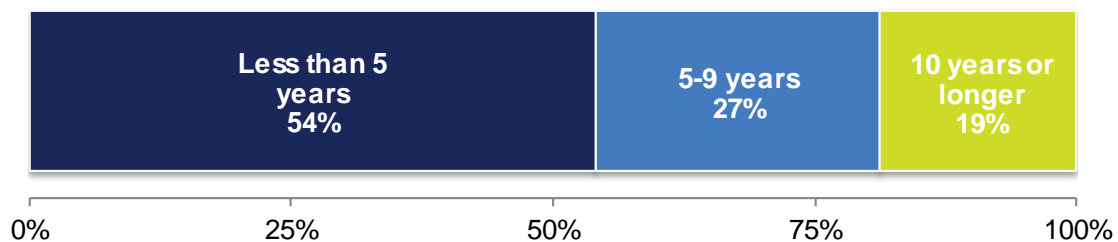
#### 3.2.1. Age when leaving care

The majority of care leavers aged 19 left care on reaching 18 years of age (95%)<sup>20</sup> with 5% leaving at 16 or 17 years of age.

#### 3.2.2. Last period in care

Every child's care history is unique and some children may be in care for only a short period whereas others may be in long-term care for most of their lives. For the care leavers aged 19 in 2019/20, the average length of time in care was 5 years 9 months prior to leaving care<sup>21</sup>. This was 9 months less than that in 2018/19 (6 years 6 months). In 2019/20, the average last period in care was shorter for males than females (5 years 7 months and 5 years 11 months respectively). For just over half (54%) of care leavers the duration of the last period in care was less than 5 years, whereas for 19% of care leavers it lasted for 10 years or longer.

**Figure 16 Care leavers aged 19 – Length of last period of care (2019/20)**



**Note:** Excludes two care leavers where information was not reported.

<sup>20</sup> This figure includes a small number of care leavers aged 19 or 20 when leaving care.

<sup>21</sup> Excludes two care leavers where information was not reported.

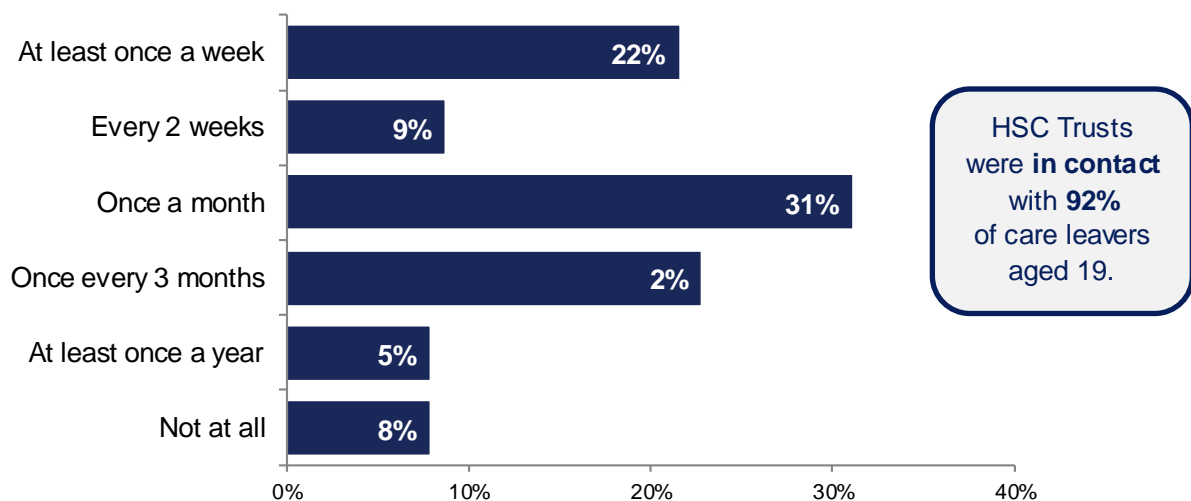
### 3.3. HOW ARE THEY DOING NOW?



#### 3.3.1. Contact with Social Services

The ‘Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002’ requires HSC Trusts to take reasonable steps to maintain contact with care leavers. For 2019/20, HSC Trusts reported contacts with 222 (92%) of the care leavers aged 19<sup>23</sup>. This is an increase of 20 percentage points since 2003/04<sup>24</sup> when the contact rate was 72%. In 2019/20 Social Services were in contact with 61% of the care leavers at least once a month.

**Figure 17 Care Leavers aged 19 – Contact Rates by Frequency of Contact (2019/20)**



**Note:** Information not reported for one care leaver.

<sup>22</sup> Of those in contact with the HSC trusts and where activity was known.

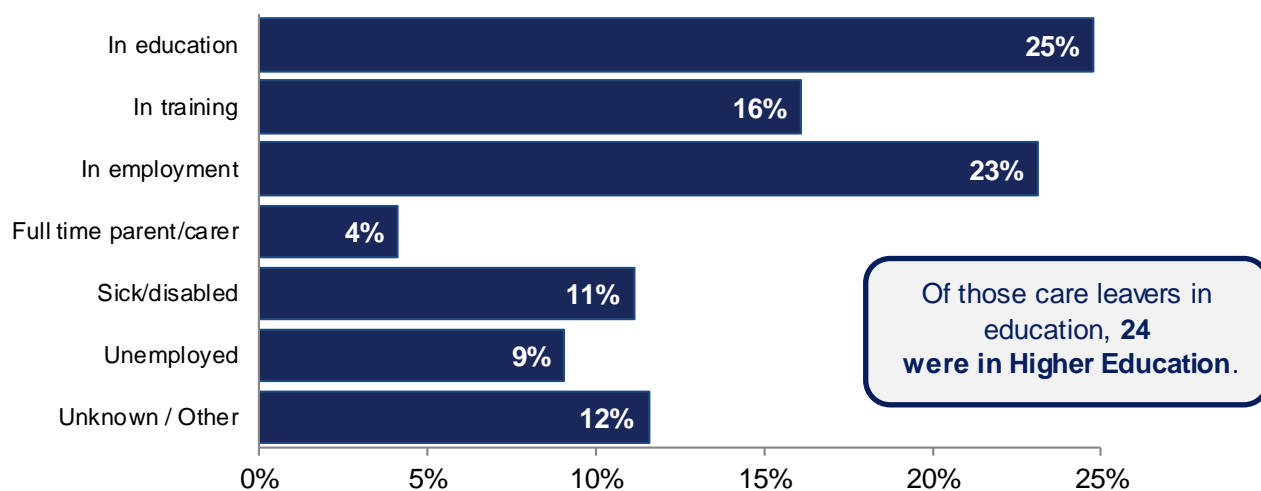
<sup>23</sup> Information not reported for one care leaver.

<sup>24</sup> Former Care Leavers in Northern Ireland 2003/04, DHSSPS 2006.

### 3.3.2. Economic Activity

Of all care leavers aged 19 in 2019/20, 25% were in education, 16% were in training<sup>25</sup> and 23% were employed. Almost a quarter of the care leavers were economically inactive either from being unemployed (9%), having ill health or a disability (11%) or due to being a full time carer (4%). The economic activity was not known for 12% of the care leavers<sup>26</sup>.

**Figure 18 Care leavers aged 19 – Proportion of care leavers by current activity 2019/20<sup>27</sup>**



**All information below referring to the economic activity of care leavers aged 19, relates to 213 care leavers who had been in contact with social services during the 12 months prior to 31 March 2020, and whose economic activity was known.**

In 2019/20, 73% of all care leavers aged 19 in contact with HSC Trusts and whose economic activity was known, were in education, training or employment, and 27% were unemployed or economically inactive.

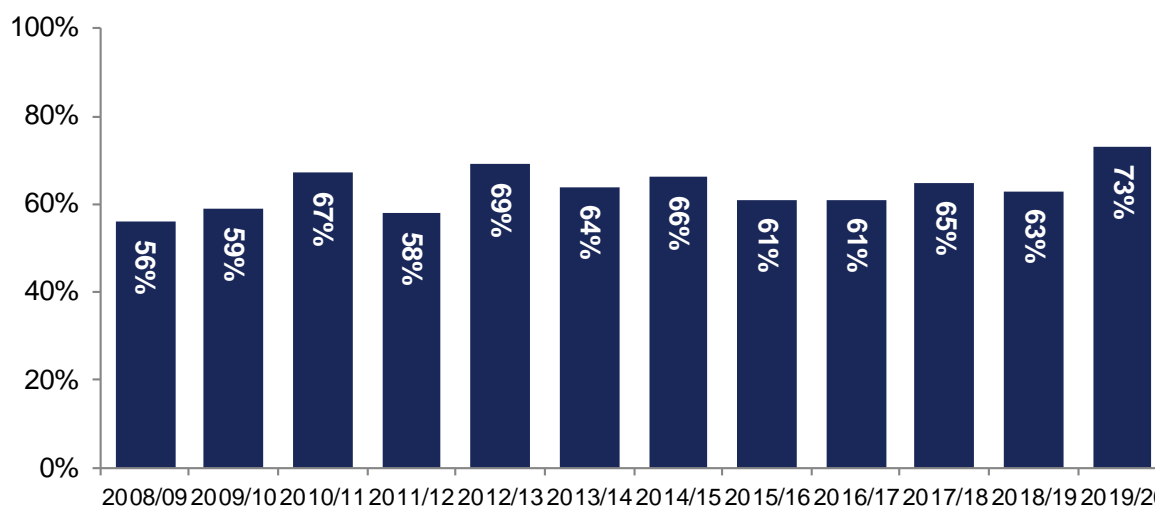
The proportion of care leavers aged 19 in education, training or employment was 10 percentage points higher in 2019/20 than in 2018/19. This is the highest proportion of care leavers in education, training, or employment in recent years.

<sup>25</sup> “Training” includes a small number of non-Governmental training programmes, and volunteer work.

<sup>26</sup> Includes care leavers who were not in contact with their HSC Trust or had died before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>27</sup> Higher education is defined as studies beyond A Level, leading to a degree or higher qualification, including diplomas in higher education, teaching and nursing qualifications, HNDs, ONDs and BTEC. This includes full-time and part-time study if it is considered the main activity.

**Figure 19 Care leavers aged 19 – Proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment (2008/09 – 2019/20)**



**Note:** Excludes care leavers who were not in contact with their HSC Trust and whose economic activity was not known.

A higher proportion of male (76%) than female (69%) care leavers aged 19 were in education, training, or employment in 2019/20.

A care leaver is categorised as economically inactive if they are not in employment, training, or education due to caring responsibilities or disability. Therefore, it can be expected that a lower proportion of care leavers in those cohorts are economically active. However, in 2019/20, 79% of those with a disability (e.g. learning or physical disability) were in education, training or employment. This was higher than the overall average, and twelve percentage points higher than the previous year.

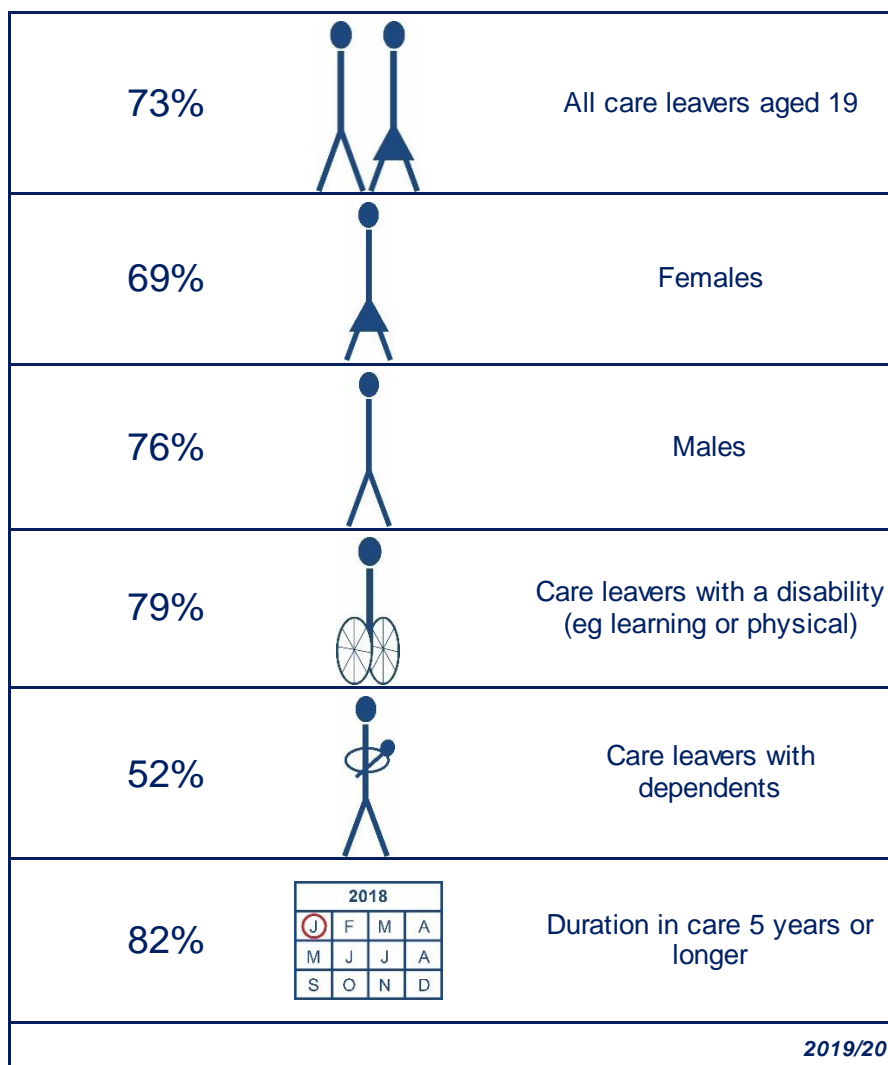
In 2019/20, the Belfast HSC Trust had the highest proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment (89%) whereas the South Eastern HSC Trust had the lowest (61%). There were increases in the proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment for all HSC Trusts from the previous year except for the Western HSC Trust which saw a decrease of 9 percentage points. Please note, the number of care leavers in each Trust is small, therefore, large year on year variability may occur (see Tables for details).

Just over half (52%) of the care leavers aged 19 who had dependent children, were in education, training or employment; 19 percentage points higher than in 2018/19.

Please note that due to small numbers of care leavers with dependants and with disabilities, these figures may be subject to high year on year volatility.

Some 82% of young people who had been in care for 5 years or longer were in education, training or employment, compared with 65% of those in care for less than 5 years. This trend is similar to previous years.

Care leavers aged 19 in education, training or employment



Excludes care leavers who were not in contact with their HSC Trust or where economic activity was not known.

### 3.3.3. NEET

The term NEET refers to young people not in education, employment or training. The term was first used in the 1990s and is now in common use. Calculating NEET is dependent on the information sources available. As such, there may be some difference, for example, between NEET figures for Northern Ireland in general and that of care leavers in this survey.

In this survey, care leavers who are NEET refers to those who were not in part- or full-time education, training<sup>28</sup> or employment. Those care leavers whose activity was not known were excluded from the calculations. In general, care leavers defined as NEET were either economically inactive, due to illness/disability or full time caring responsibilities, or they were unemployed. In 2019/20, 27% of care leavers aged 19 were NEET.

<sup>28</sup> Includes a small number of non-Government supported training programmes, and volunteering.

## Appendix A      Technical Notes

### Care Leaver Statistics for Northern Ireland

Statistics on care leavers have previously been published in two separate publications; “Care leavers Aged 16-18 in Northern Ireland” and “Care Leavers Aged 19 in Northern Ireland”. Due to the similarities of topic and to allow for better use of resources producing the publications, these two publications were merged to the bulletin “Northern Ireland Care Leavers” in 2013/14. Historic publications on care leavers in Northern Ireland can be downloaded from the Department of Health’s (DoH) website:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research>

### OC1 and OC3 Surveys

The information presented in this bulletin derives from the twelfth OC1 information collection of care leavers aged 16-18 in Northern Ireland and the eleventh OC3 information collection of care leavers at the age of 19. These information returns were provided by each of the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland to Community Information Branch (CIB) in the DoH.

OC1 and OC3, together with its companion return OC2 (children in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September), provide a comprehensive series of data on looked after children in Northern Ireland. It is a stated aim of DoH to improve outcomes for children in care, by improving the quality and stability of placements and improving educational opportunities for young people as they make the transition to adulthood. These publications help to measure the Department’s progress in meeting these stated aims.

The OC1 return, introduced in 2002, reports the circumstances of young people at 31 March aged 16-18 who had left care during the previous financial year. It collects a range of information, including educational achievement, economic activity, disability, duration in care and placement prior to leaving care.

The OC3 return, introduced in 2004, reports the circumstances of care leavers at the time of their 19th birthday. It collects information on frequency of contacts with social services, economic activity and accommodation.

To help put some figures within their wider social context, comparative information with, for example, the general school population and looked after children in other countries in the United Kingdom have been included where possible. Users of these statistics find such comparisons interesting; though it should be stressed that they are not like-for-like comparisons and may merely reflect differences between different cohorts of children.

### Data Collection

The returns used to collect this information has one record for each young person fitting the parameters of the collection. The returns are completed online by nominated HSC Trust staff using a secure web-based application. All records are anonymised to protect the confidentiality of these young people.

For inclusion in OC1, care leavers had to be aged 16-18 years when leaving care and left care during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2020. The information collected related to the last period in care.

The OC3 return relates to care leavers at the time of their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. It provides data on all care leavers at age 19, who had been looked after on 1 April, 3 years previously.

All references made to 'Year' refer to the financial year, 1 April to 31 March, i.e. for the 2019/20 collection the reference period was 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Guidance notes and other documents associated with the completion of the OC surveys are available to view or download from the DoH website:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/care-leavers-returns-and-quality-reports>

### Rounding/Disclosure Conventions

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers and as a consequence some percentages may not sum to 100. It has been necessary to suppress other figures whenever it would be possible to calculate the value of a suppressed number by means of simple arithmetic. The rule applied in these circumstances has been to suppress the next smallest data item.

### Data Quality

All information submitted by HSC Trusts was validated at the point of entry, where Trust staff correct or amend data as required, and provide appropriate explanations if information is missing. Community Information Branch, within DoH, perform further checks, using historical data to monitor annual variations and emerging trends.

### A National Statistics Publication

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- are trustworthy;
- have high quality; and
- are of value to the public.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. The most recent assessment of these statistics, Report 265, can be found at the following link:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications-list/?type=assessment-report>



If you have any comments on this publication, please contact:

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Tel: 028 90522580

### Related Publications

Details of statistics on looked after children published by other countries in the UK (United Kingdom) can be found as detailed below.

Scotland

[Children's Social Work Statistics](#)

Wales

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services>

England

[Children looked after in England including adoption](#)

Other statistics produced by the DoH relating to looked after children and other areas of children's social care with relevant web links are detailed below:

Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/childrens-social-care-statistics-northern-ireland>

Children in Care in Northern Ireland

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children>

Child Protection Register

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/child-protection-register>

Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-adopted-care>

A further source of information on issues relating to children and young people in care and care leavers is the virtual library hosted by the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) charity. This virtual library can be accessed via the following link:

[www.libraryinthesky.org](http://www.libraryinthesky.org)

## Appendix B Definitions

### Placement

*Foster care* is when a child is placed by a Trust, or by its parents (or those with parental responsibility), with other persons who will care for, and rear the child. Foster Carers are approved by a Health and Social Care Trust and receive an allowance for their caring responsibilities from the approving Trust.

*Kinship foster care (approved)* is when a looked after child is placed by a Trust with a relative, friend, or other person with a prior connection to the child, who will care for and rear the child. A person with a prior connection could be someone who knows the child in a professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher, or a youth worker, although these are not exclusive categories. Kinship Foster Carers are approved by a Health and Social Care Trust and receive an allowance for their caring responsibilities from the approving Trust.

*Placed for adoption* refers to a child that has been approved to be adopted and is placed with their prospective adoptive parents pending affirmation from the courts. It can be distinguished between children who are placed for adoption with their former foster carers and those who are placed for adoption with 'others' (not former foster carers).

*Residential care* is when a looked after child is placed by a Trust in a Children's Home. Residential care for children/Children's Homes are there to ensure that the needs of children are met when they cannot live with their own family. They are a place for children to develop and grow, as well as providing food, shelter, and space for play and leisure in a caring environment. Children's Homes look after children with many different needs.

*Secure accommodation* is provided for children on a short term basis when it is likely that the child, in any other setting, will injure him/herself or abscond and is likely to suffer significant harm when absconding.

*Placed with parent* (in previous publications called "Placed with Family") refers to children for whom a Care Order exists and who are placed with their parents, a person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child or where a child is in care and there was a residence order in force with respect to him/her immediately before the care order was made, and who are placed with a person in whose favour the residence order was made.

*Emergency foster care* is when a looked after child is placed by a social worker in an emergency (short term) arrangement, for example emergency kinship foster care. Emergency kinship foster carers would normally not have been previously approved by a Health and Social Care Trust as foster carers.

*Independent living arrangements* refers to children placed in independent accommodation. This would refer to young people between 16-18 years old. Independent living arrangements can further be categorised into with or without formal support from Trust.

*Other placements* refers to any placement reported that are not covered by other categories given. This may include children in assessment centres, boarding schools etc, and also special arrangements relating to a Trust. The categories included may change from year to year.

## Legal Status

The legal framework for compulsory intervention in the care and upbringing of children. If more than one legal status is indicated or in force for the child at 31 March, the latest one only is recorded.

*Emergency Protection Order (Article 63 & 64):* An Emergency Protection Order (EPO) is intended for use in urgent cases to protect a child in the short-term. Almost anyone with a concern can apply for an EPO, although in most circumstances a Trust will seek one. Where the applicant is a Trust or the NSPCC they must show that in the course of fulfilling their duty to investigate they are being unreasonably frustrated in gaining access to the child. Anyone else applying for an EPO they must show that the child is likely to suffer significant harm unless removed to, or allowed to remain, in a safe place.

An EPO lasts for eight days but can be extended on one occasion for a further seven days. An application to discharge the order cannot be made within the first 72 hours giving a Trust sometime to decide what actions to take in respect of the child. The person to whom the order is addressed also gains parental responsibility for the child for the duration of the order.

*Accommodated (Article 21):* Children with this legal status have been accommodated by a HSC Trust if there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, they have been lost or abandoned or if the person who has been caring for them has been prevented, for whatever reason, from providing them with suitable accommodation or care. Children are often accommodated with the permission of their parents.

*Care Order (Article 50 or 59):* A Care Order accords the HSC Trust parental responsibility and allows for the child to be removed from the parental home. This does not extinguish the parental responsibility of the child's parents but means that they cannot exercise this responsibility while the Care Order is in place. For a Court to make a Care Order it must be satisfied that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and that the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to the care given to the child, or likely to be given to the child, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give or the child being beyond parental control.

*Interim Care Orders (Article 57):* An Interim Care Order is put in place following an adjournment of proceedings for a Care Order or in any family proceedings in which a Court orders a Trust to investigate the circumstances of a child. An Interim Care Order can be in place for up to eight weeks initially and for a further four weeks upon renewal and subsequent occasions that Court deems an Interim Order necessary.

*Supervision Order:* This order requires the Trust to advise, assist and befriend the supervised child and can only be granted if the same threshold conditions that apply for Care Orders are met. This Order does not give the Trust parental responsibility. It does allow a social worker

to issue directions about the child's upbringing including place of residence and involvement in certain programmes. Schedule 3 of the Children Order sets out the full range of matters that may be addressed in a Supervision Order.

*Interim Supervision Orders (Article 57):* An Interim Supervision can be put in place following an adjournment of proceedings for a Supervision Order or in any family proceedings in which a question arises with respect to the welfare of any child, it appears to the court that it may be appropriate for a supervision order to be made with respect to him, the court may direct the appropriate authority to undertake an investigation of the child's circumstances.

## Appendix C      Tables

The tables are available in excel format on the DoH website  
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/care-leavers>

- Table 1:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Profile
- Table 2:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Last Placement Type
- Table 3:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Length of Time in Care
- Table 4:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Reasons for Leaving Care
- Table 5:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Educational Attainment
- Table 6:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Current Activity
- Table 7:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Economic Activity
- Table 8:      Care leavers aged 16 – 18: Health & Social Care Trust
- Table 9:      Care leavers aged 19: Profile
- Table 10:     Care leavers aged 19: Length of Time in Care
- Table 11:     Care leavers aged 19: Last Placement Type
- Table 12:     Care leavers aged 19: Legal status prior to Leaving Care
- Table 13:     Care leavers aged 19: Contact Rates
- Table 14:     Care leavers aged 19: Current Activity
- Table 15:     Care leavers aged 19: Education, Training or Employment
- Table 16:     Care leavers aged 19: Current Accommodation
- Table 17:     Care leavers aged 19: Accommodation by Gender
- Table 18:     Care leavers aged 19: Support from Social Services
- Table 19:     Care leavers aged 19: Health & Social Care Trust

This statistical bulletin and other statistical bulletins published by  
Community Information Branch are available to download from

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research-social-services/social-care-statistics>