

Care Experienced Children Statistical Briefing

January 2023



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Care Experienced Children

Statistical Briefing

January 2023

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Introduction

Content: This is a statistical briefing on care experienced children in Wales. It sets out some of the characteristics of 'children looked after', parental factors, social services expenditure and workforce information. It also sets out outcomes for children and young people where these are measured and published. It uses data sourced from a range of publications and the voluntary sector to supplement official statistics published on [StatsWales](#). It identifies some aspects of the policy area where data is not published.

Policy context: The Senedd's Children Young People and Education Committee is looking at what Welsh Government is doing to deliver its Programme for Government commitment to '[explore radical reform for care experienced children](#)'. The Committee is considering priorities for radical reform in the following three stages of the care system:

- **Before care:** Safely reducing the number of children in the care system
- **In care:** Quality services and support children in care
- **After care:** On-going support when young people leave care

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

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

Contents

1. Entry into care	1
The number of children looked after.....	1
Legal status	1
Looked after children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18	2
Care rates.....	4
Gender and Age	5
Ethnicity.....	5
Reasons for children needing to be looked after	6
Parental factors	7
Factors influencing care rates	7
Parental advocacy provider statistics.....	9
The balance of flows into and out of the care system over time	10
Newborn infants subject to care proceedings within two weeks of birth per 10,000 live births in Wales	12
Children of care experienced children	12
2. In care	14
Type of placement	14
Number of placements during year	14
Location of placement.....	15

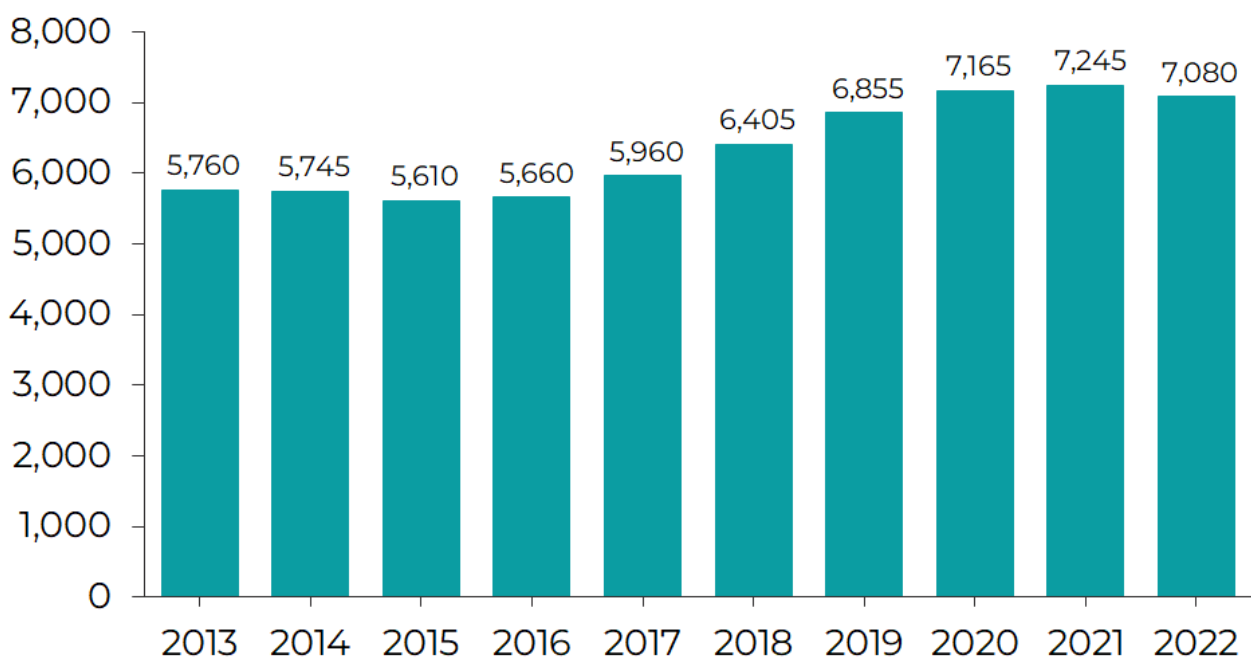
Adoptions of looked after children by the length of time until adoption and age	15
Educational outcomes.....	15
3. Aftercare.....	17
Reasons for finishing being looked after, aged 16 and over	17
Care leavers on their 19th birthday	18
Children aged 16 and over ceasing to be looked after and reason for no qualifications	18
Care experienced students in higher education (HE)	19
Health and well-being survey	19
4. Cross cutting	22
Social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services.....	22
Workforce	22
Whole time equivalent staff numbers.....	22
Workforce consistency.....	23
Social workers supporting foster carers.....	24
5. Further sources of data.....	25

1. Entry into care

The number of children looked after

As at 31 March 2022 there were **7,080** children looked after in Wales, which compares to 5,760 on 31 March 2013, an **increase of 22.9%**. In 2021 there were 7,245 looked after children in Wales, the highest number recorded since 2003. Between 2021 and 2022 there was a fall of 165 looked after children, representing a decrease of 2.3%.

Figure 1.1: Children looked after at 31 March

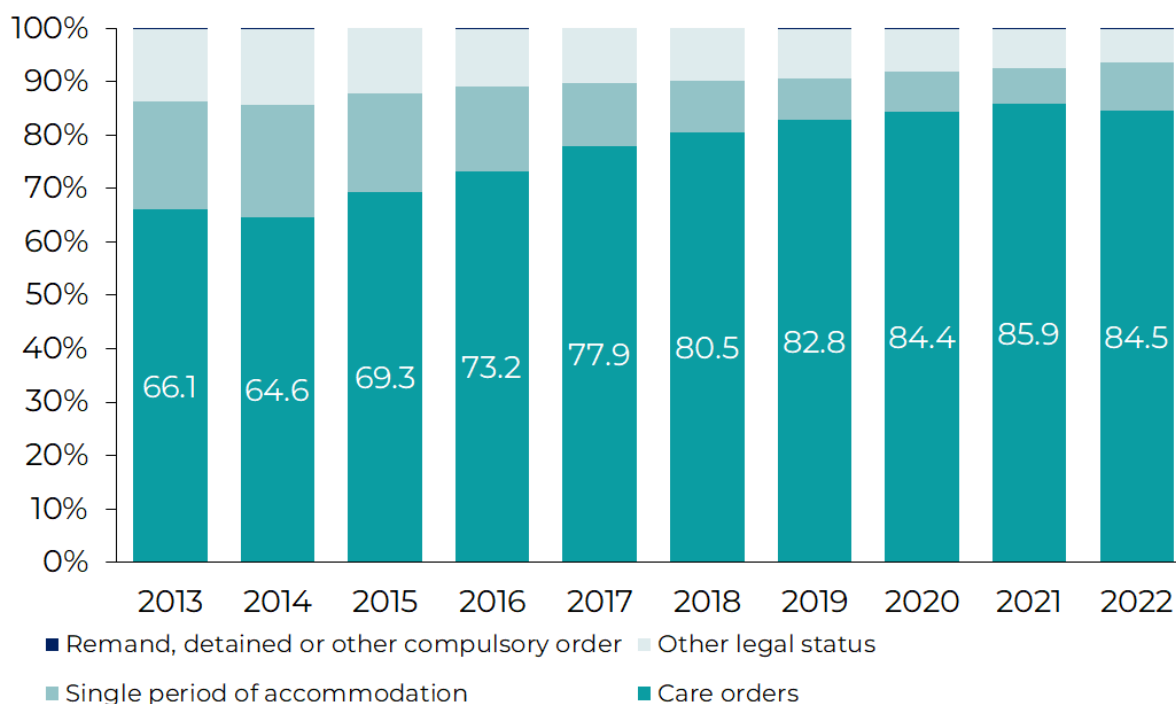


Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age](#)

Legal status

Children looked after include those on care orders and other children provided with accommodation by local authorities. Some children are also looked after because local authorities provide accommodation for respite purposes – these children are not included in the figures below. Data for the last 10 years shows that the percentage of looked after children on care orders has increased from 66.1% (3,805) in 2013 to 84.5% (5,985) in 2022.

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



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

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

On 31 March 2013 there were 91 looked after children per 10,000 population in Wales, increasing to 115 in 2021 and decreasing to **112 per 10,000** in 2022.

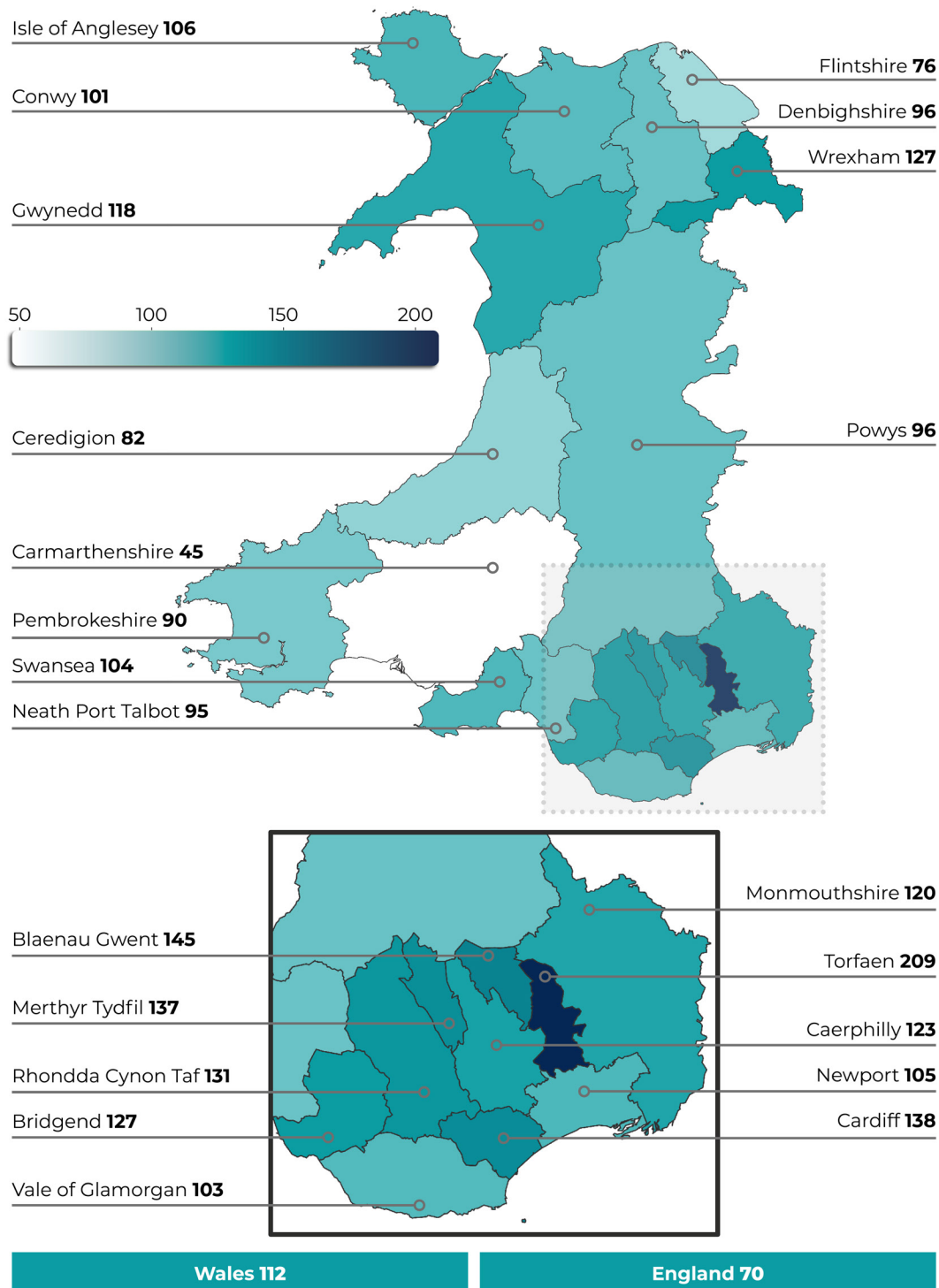
Local Authority variation: Looking at the number of looked after children aged under 18 per 10,000 population by local authority as at 31 March 2022, **Torfaen** has the highest rate of 209 and **Carmarthenshire** has the lowest rate of 45 looked after children per 10,000 population aged under 18.

Rates in England: In England the number of looked after children per 10,000 population aged under 18 increased from 64 per 10,000 in 2018 to **67 per 10,000 in 2021**. The statistical release states that the 2022 rate for England is not comparable to previous years due to the mid-year population estimates not being revised to reflect the 2021 Census. The 2022 rate in England (70 per 10,000) is below the rate for Wales (112 per 10,000) although the [Department for Education’s statistical release](#) states:

Data is collected and published independently by each of the four countries in the UK. Although there are similarities between the data collected by the four nations, there are also differences which may be

down to different policies and legislation, and differing historical data collections.

Map 1: Looked after children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18 in 2022; by area



Sources:

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

England - Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions 2022](#) - table cla_number_and_rate_per10k_children

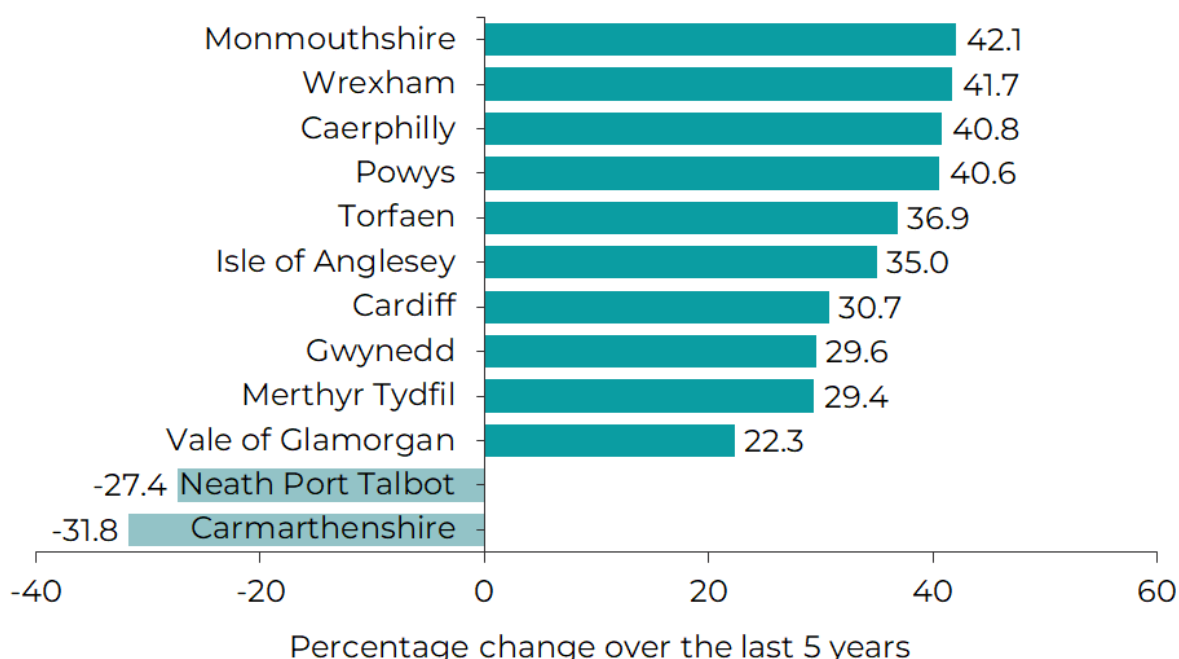
Notes: Numbers rounded to the nearest 10 and calculated rates per 10,000 children in this release are based upon ONS population estimates. Estimates by age and LA for mid-2021 were released by ONS in November 2022 and have been used for calculating rates for 2022. Rates for earlier years in this release are based upon population estimates published in 2021 and have not yet been revised following the 2021 census. As such, rates for 2022 are not comparable to rates for earlier years.

Care rates

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

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

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

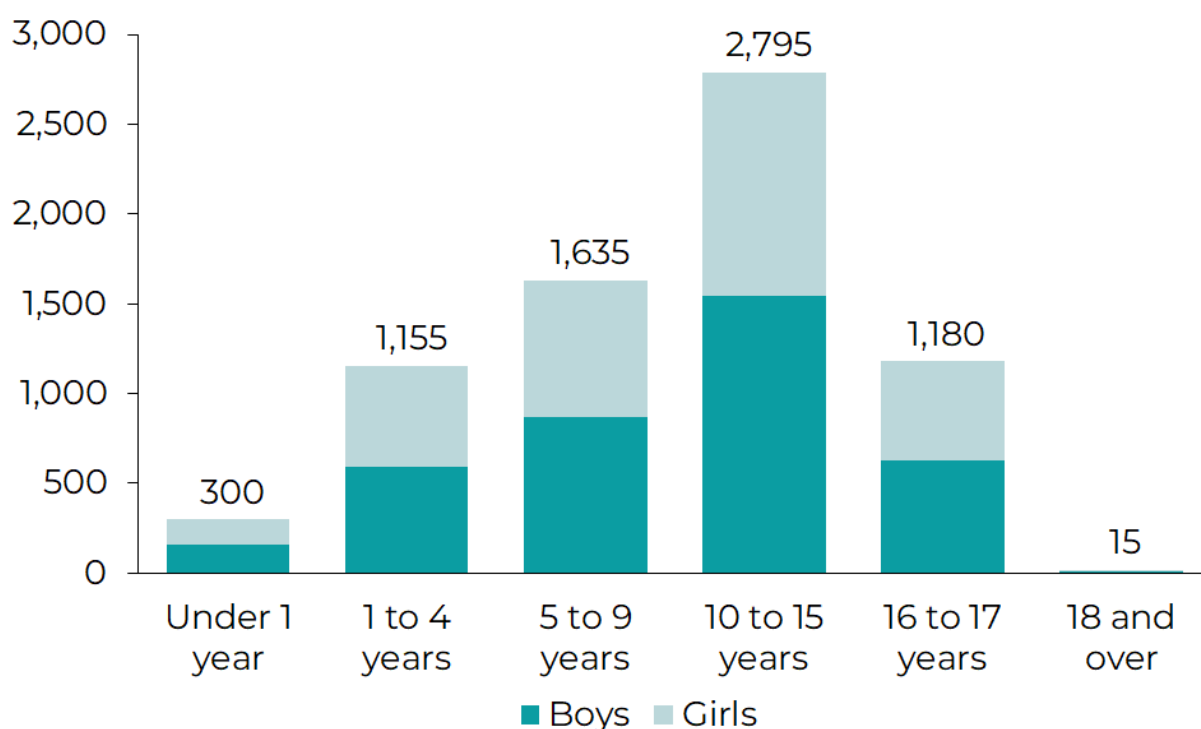


Source: Wales Centre for Public Policy, **Children’s social services and care rates in Wales: A survey of the sector, 2021**

Gender and Age

Statistics on the number of looked after children by gender and age are available on StatsWales rounded to the nearest 5. This means that some of the totals may not match those in other figures. Boys make up 53.7% of the total number of looked after children. Over half (56.4%) of all looked after children are aged 10 or over.

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



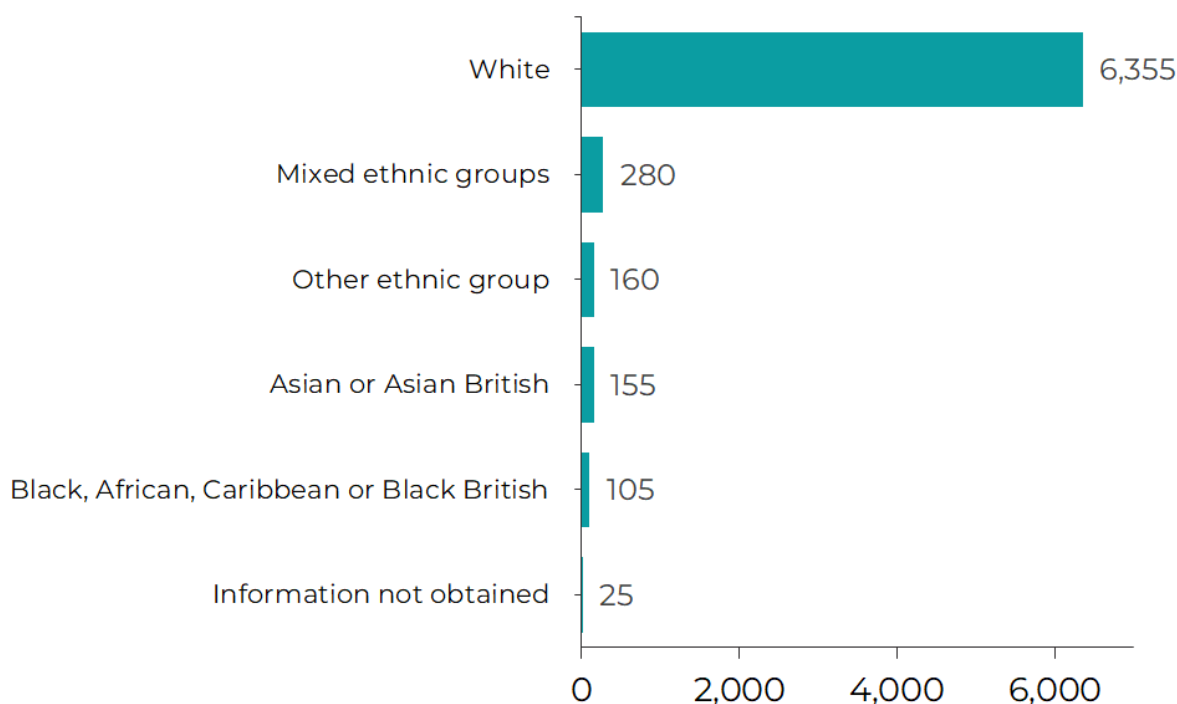
Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age](#)

Ethnicity

Where ethnicity was known, 90.1% of children looked after in 2021-22 identified their ethnic group as white, 4.0% as mixed ethnic group, 2.3% as other ethnic groups, 2.2% as Asian or Asian British and 1.5% as Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

Data from the Annual Population Survey for 2018 to 2020, shows 90.5% of 0-15 year olds were from a white ethnic background, 3.6% from an Asian ethnic background, 2.8% from a mixed/ multiple ethnic backgrounds, 1.5% from a Black / African / Caribbean / Black British ethnic background and 1.3% from other ethnic backgrounds.

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



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

Reasons for children needing to be looked after

Data on children starting to be looked after by need for care shows that **abuse or neglect was the reason 61.5%** of children (1,040) started to be looked after followed by family in acute stress (13.0%, 220) and family dysfunction (13.0%, 220).

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



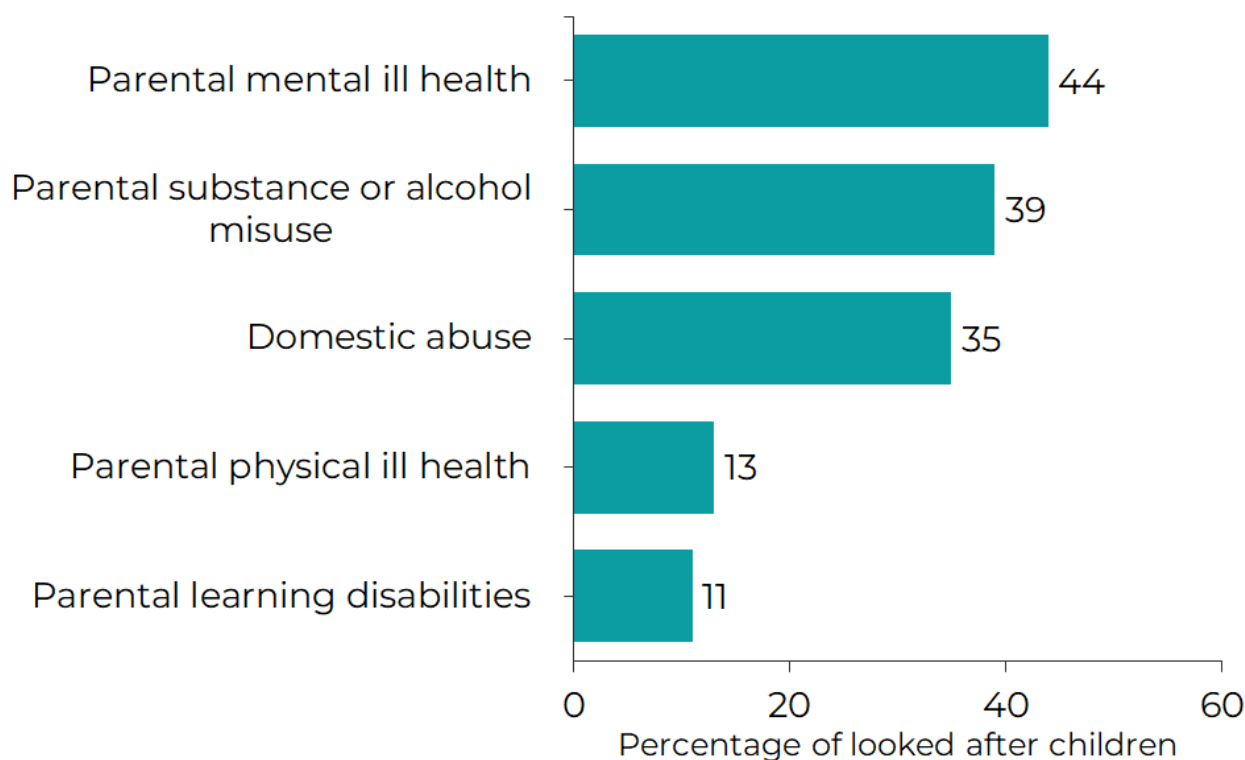
Excludes adoption disruption which was less than 5 children (0.3%).

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

Parental factors

The Welsh Government collects some data that measures the ‘characteristics and attributes’ of children looked after by local authorities. Data for children looked after as at 31 March 2021 shows that parental mental ill health (44%) was the most common factor, followed by parental substance or alcohol misuse (39%).

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



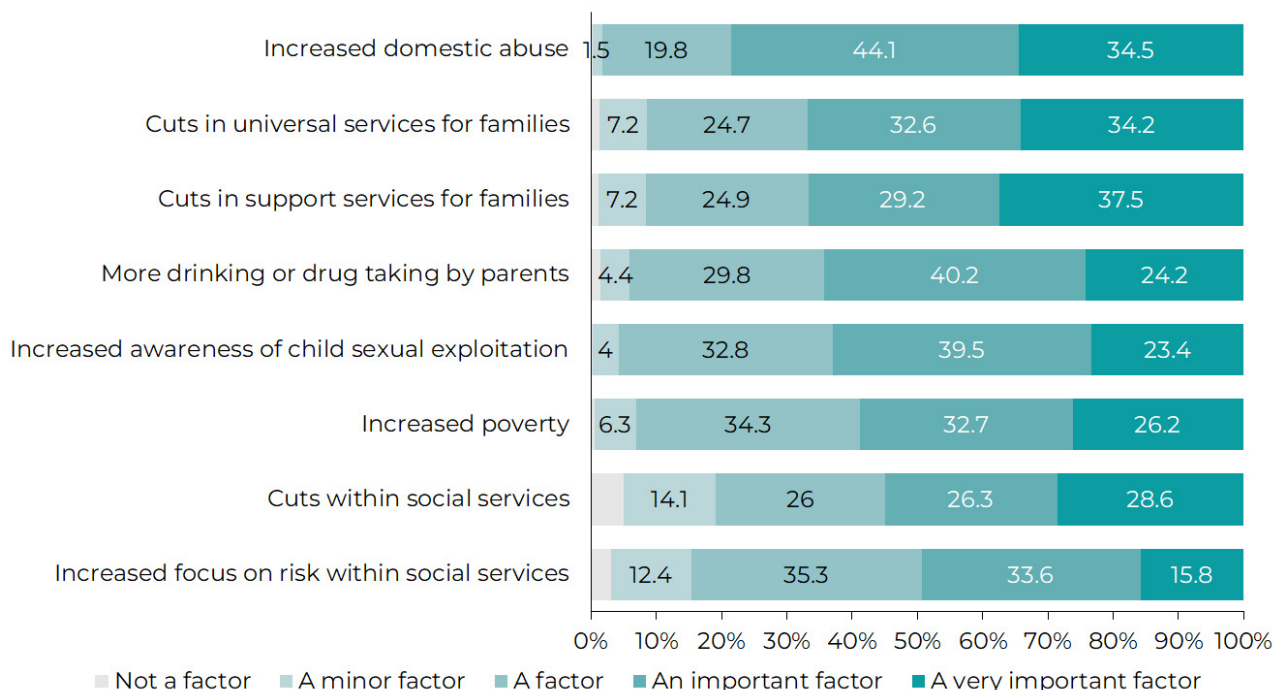
Source: StatsWales, [Parental factors of children receiving care and support by measure and year](#)

Factors influencing care rates

The care rate in Wales increased by 83% between 2003 and 2022, with more than 1% of children currently in care.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy [Children’s social services and care rates in Wales: A survey of the sector](#) report analyses the results of a survey of 792 social workers and leaders in children’s social care across Wales. The survey sought to understand what those working in the sector believe may be driving care rates and asked about which factors most influence the increase in care rates in Wales. Figure 1.8 shows respondents felt the biggest drivers for increased care rates were **increased domestic abuse with 78.6%** of respondents saying this was an important or very important factor. This was followed by cuts in universal services for families (66.8%) and cuts in support services for families (66.7%).

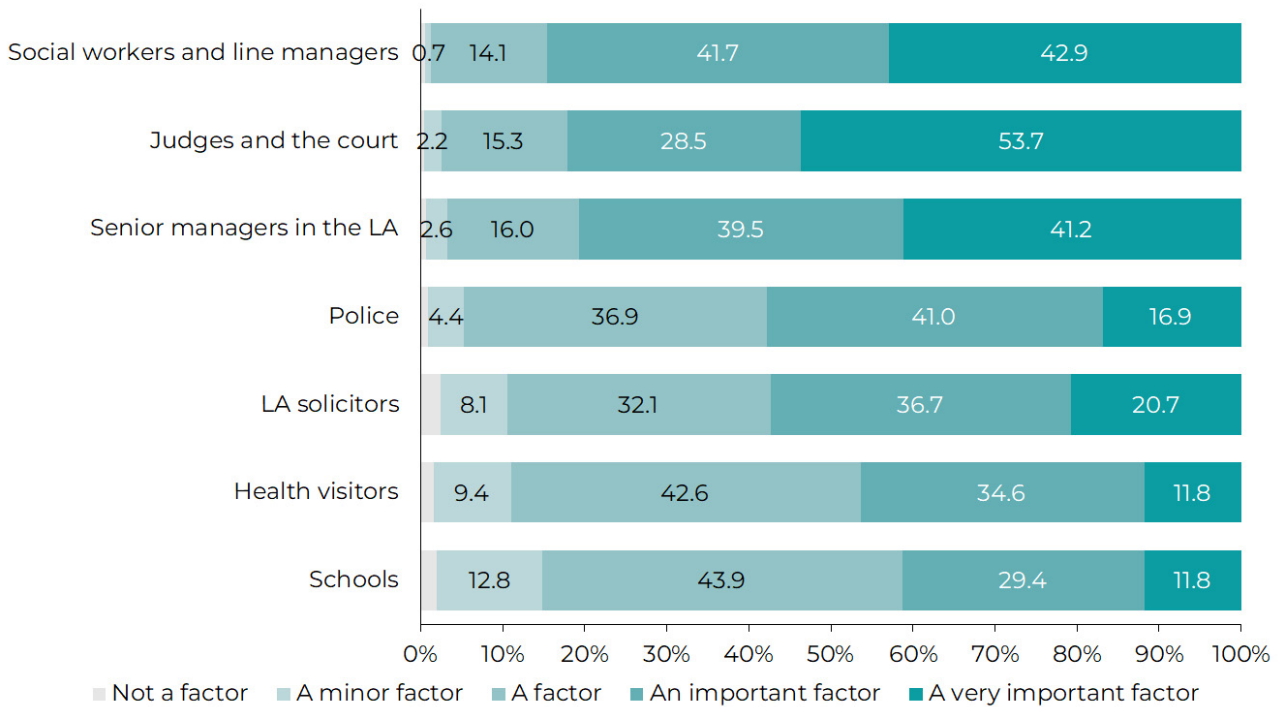
Figure 1.8: The proportion of responses to factors influencing care rates



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

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

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

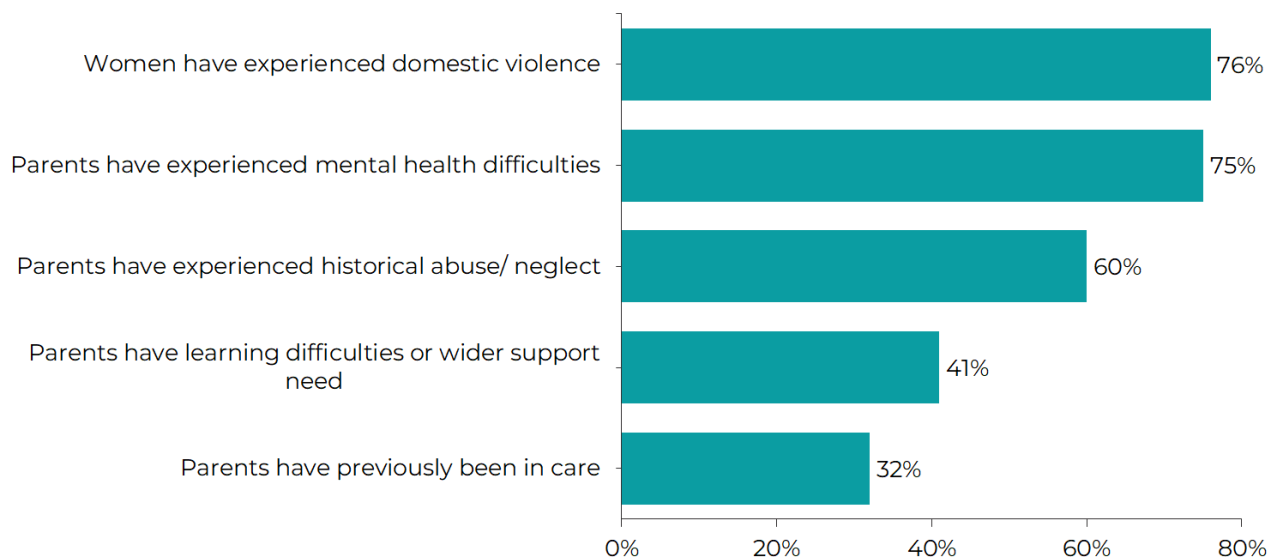


Source: Wales Centre for Public Policy, **Appendices: Children’s social services and care rates in Wales - A survey of the sector** - Table D2

Parental advocacy provider statistics

In a Children, Young People and Education Committee visit in December 2022, Barnardo’s Cymru gave a presentation on its Reflect Cymru project that discussed the presenting and historical needs of parents of looked after children. Figure 1.11 shows **76% of women had experienced domestic violence**, 75% of parents had experienced mental health difficulties and 60% had experienced historical abuse/neglect. These reflect similar factors to the statistics in figures 1.6 and 1.7 above.

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



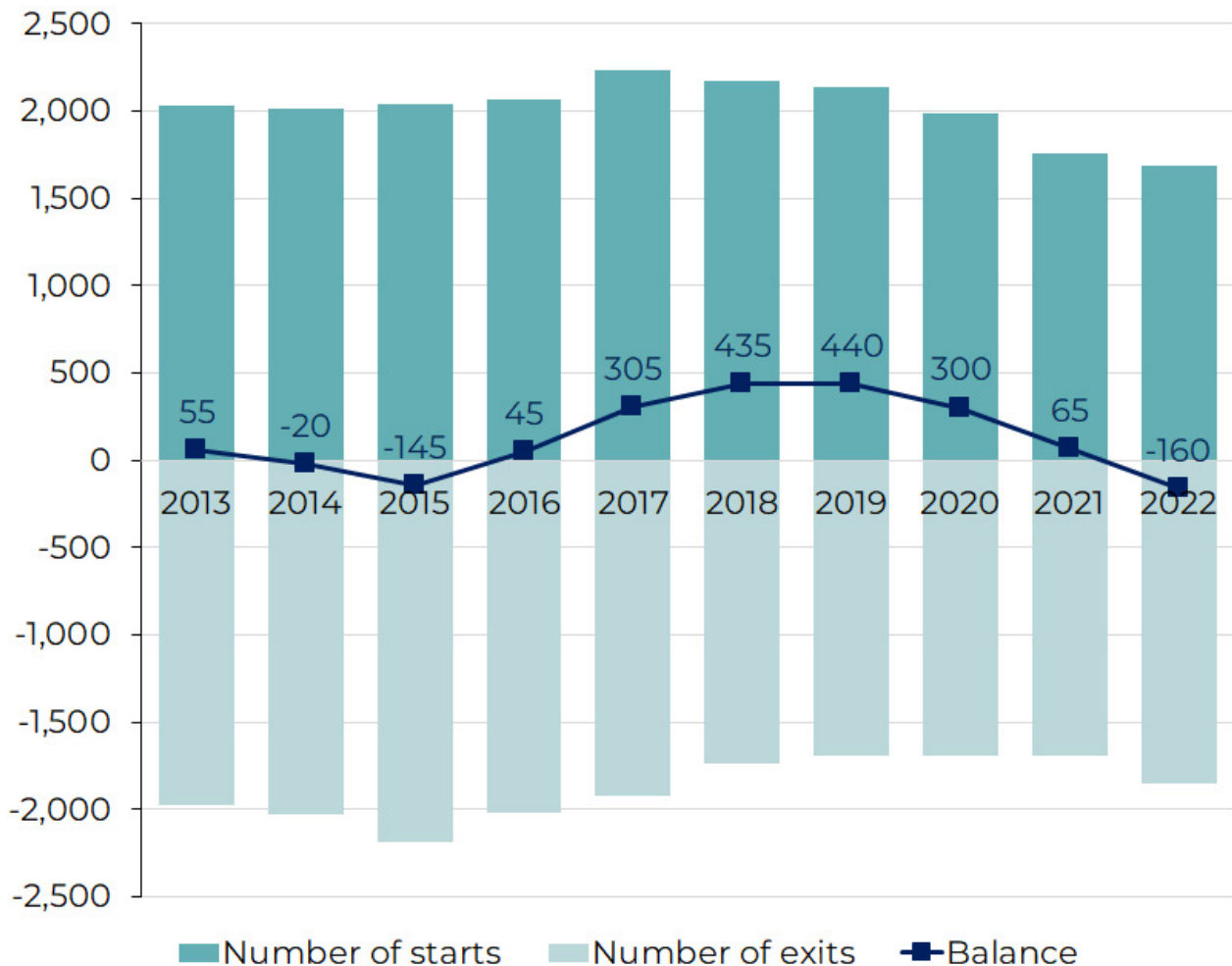
Source: Barnardo’s, Reflect Cymru presentation to the Children, Young People and Education Committee, December 2022

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

Figure 1.11 shows the number of starts and exits from the care system and the balance of children remaining in the care system from 2013 to 2022.

Between 2013 and 2020 there were around 2,000 entries of children and young people into the care system, peaking at 2,230 in 2017 and reducing to 1,690 by 2022. The number of children and young people leaving the care system decreased from 2015 to 2020 and then has started to rise in the last two years. The ‘balance’ between ‘starts’ and ‘exits’ is shown by the trend line in Figure 1.11. In 2015 and 2022 there were more ‘exits’ than ‘starts’ resulting in what the Wales Centre for Public Policy’s (WCPP) methodology referred to as a ‘negative balance’. In the other years there was a positive balance with more starts than exits. In their analysis the WCPP caution that the two measures are not directly comparable as one covers the whole year and the other is a snapshot.

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



Sources:

Starts - StatsWales, **Children starting to be looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and need for care**

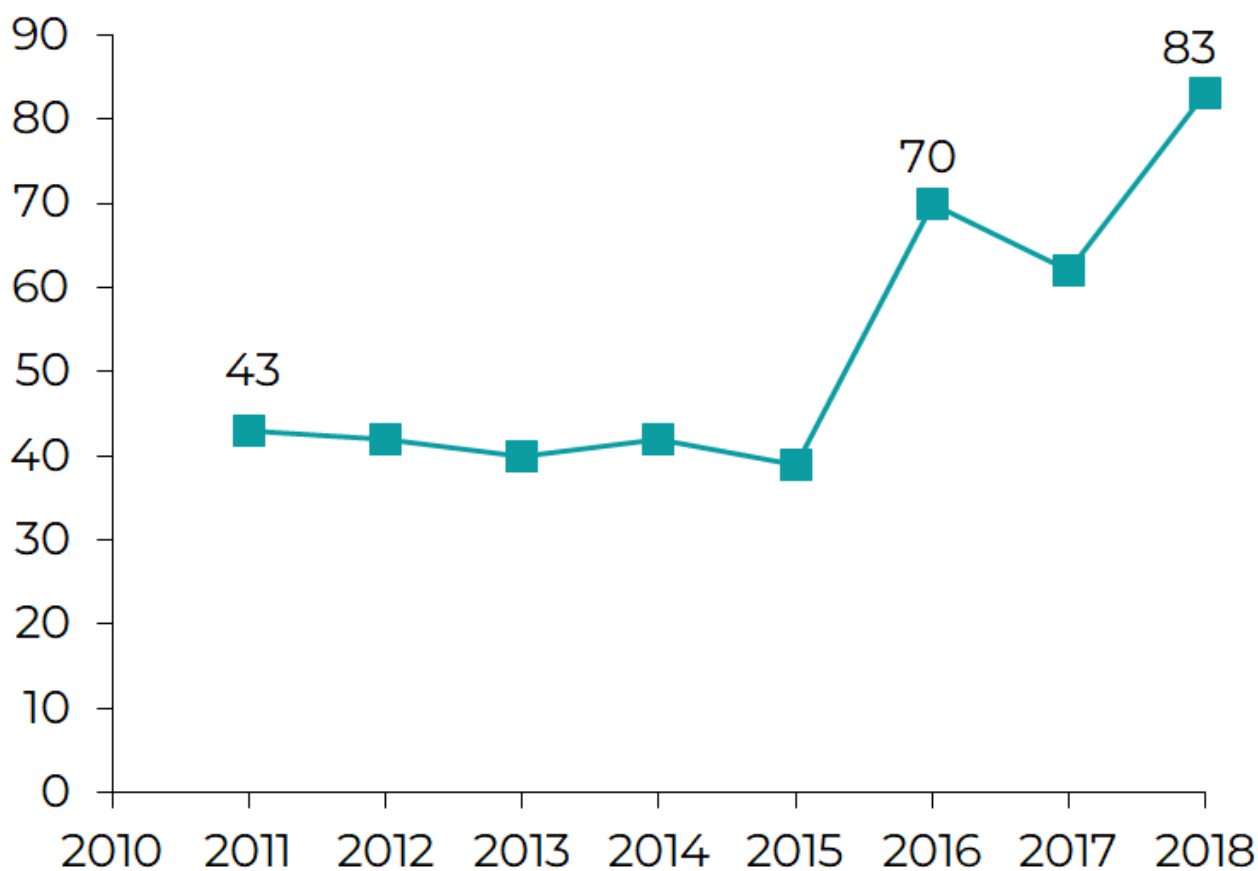
Exits - StatsWales, **Episodes finishing for children looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and reason for finishing** (not including Episode ceases and new episode begins on same or next day)

Balance = starts minus exits using the methodology from Wales Centre for Public Policy, **Children looked after in Wales: Flows into and out of the care system**

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

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

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



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

Children of care experienced children

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

The Senedd Petition's Committee has taken evidence on a petition calling for [**Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children**](#)

return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement.

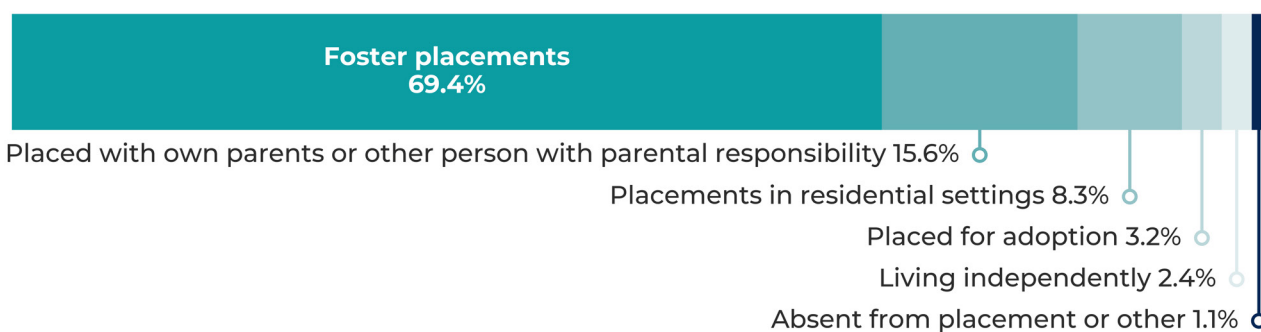
As part of this, ADSS Cymru provided **snap shot data from the City and County of Swansea** setting out information about 380 care experienced young people in touch with the local authority in Swansea as of March 2022. It suggests that of these, 21 were parents and 14 had their children remaining living with them. From the cohort of care experienced parents, 5 were under 18 years of age at the point of birth (the youngest being 15) and 16 were aged 18-22 years. This appears to suggest **that a third of care experienced parents had their children removed**. As part of its Inquiry into Care Experienced Children, the **Chair of the Children Young People and Education Committee** wrote to ADSS Cymru in December 2022 to request the equivalent data from all Welsh local authorities.

2. In care

Type of placement

Of the 7,080 looked after children in 2022, the majority (69.4%) were in foster placements, followed by placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibilities (15.6%) and 8.3% were in placements in residential settings.

Figure 2.1: Children looked after at 31 March by placement type; 2022

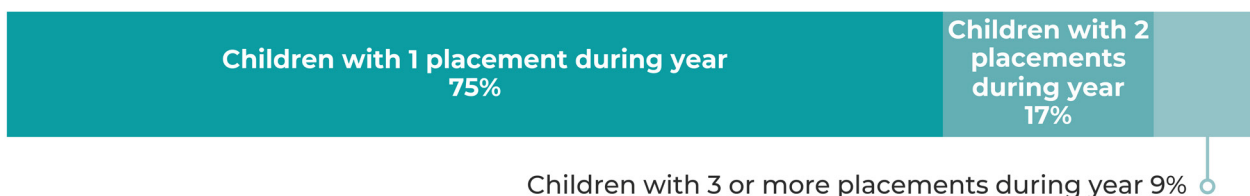


Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and placement type](#)

Number of placements during year

Three quarters (75%, 5,285) of children looked after had one placement during the year to 31 March 2022. This means that **26% of children looked after had two or more placements in the previous 12 months**. This is made up of 1,190 or 17% of children looked after had two placements and 605 or 9% of children had three or more placements.

Figure 2.2: Children looked after at 31 March by number of placements during year; 2022

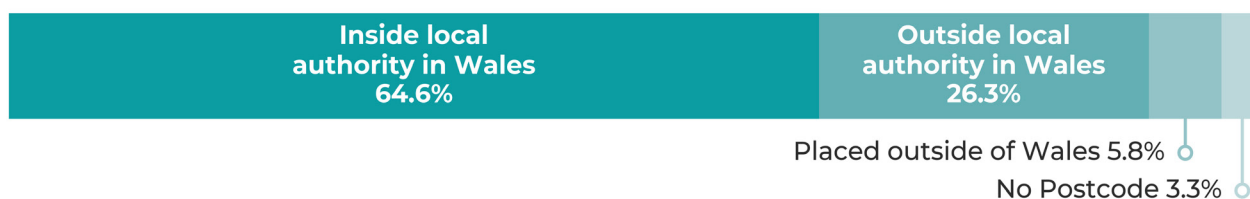


Source: StatsWales, [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, number of placements during year and measure](#)

Location of placement

Over half (64.6%, 4,575) of children looked after had their placements inside their local authority, **26.3% (1,860) had placements outside of their local authority** in Wales and 5.8% (410) were placed outside of Wales.

Figure 2.3: Children looked after at 31 March by location of placement 2022



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

Adoptions of looked after children by the length of time until adoption and age

In the year to the end of 31 March 2022, [data](#) shows that 285 looked after children were adopted. Over two fifths (43.9%, 125) were adopted in 2 to 3 years, 36.8% were adopted in 1 to 2 years, 12.3% in 3 to 4 years and 5.3% in 4 to 5 years. The majority (71.9%, 205) of looked after children adopted in the year to the end of 31 March were aged under 1 year.

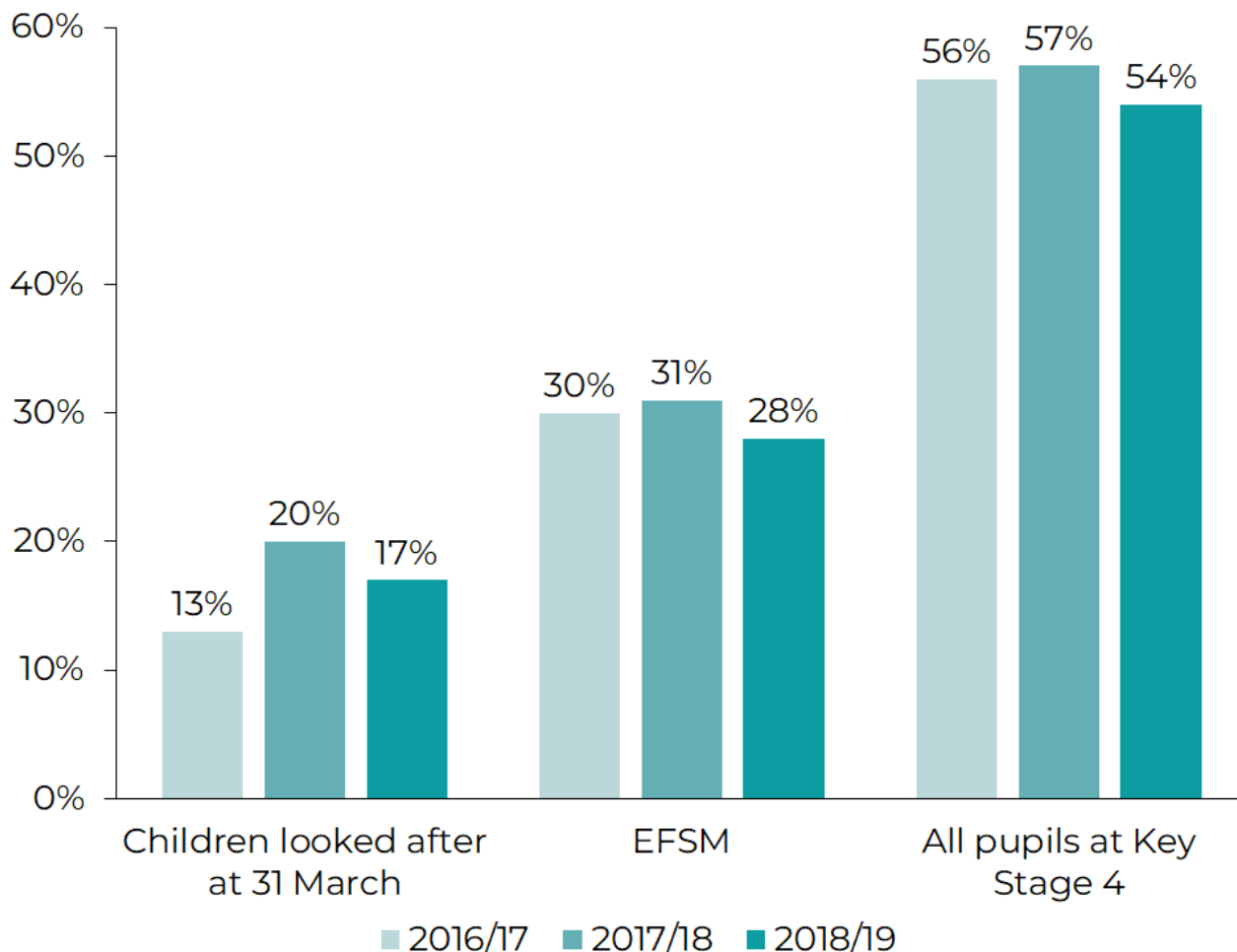
Educational outcomes

There is very limited data published on the educational experience of looked after children, for example the number of school moves they experience or the educational outcomes they achieve during their school careers.

There is some data available on educational outcomes at key stage 4 which we have compared to educational outcomes for all pupils and for those pupils eligible for free school meals, which will continue to be used as the proxy measure for deprivation until the roll out of universal provision.

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

Figure 2.4: Percentage of children achieving the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and Mathematics at key stage 4, looked after children, pupils eligible for free school meals (EFSM) and all pupils in Wales at Key Stage 4, 2016/17 to 2018/19



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

Notes:

- Includes all pupils aged 15 at the start of the academic year.
- Figures for children looked after are for the year at 31 March rather than the academic year
- Level 2 inclusive threshold is a volume of qualifications equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including maths and English or Welsh first language
- Pupils who are looked after may also be eligible for free school meals (EFSM). In 2017, 30% of looked after children were EFSM and 32% were EFSM in both 2018 and 2019.

3. Aftercare

There is very limited data published on the outcomes for looked after children when they have left care. Whilst there are concerns about the number of care leavers who experience **homelessness** or have contact with the youth justice system, it appears there is no routine data published.

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

Reasons for finishing being looked after, aged 16 and over

Of the 700 episodes finishing for children looked after (aged 16 and over) during the year to 31 March 2022, 190 finished due to turning 18 years old and continuing to live with former foster parent(s) in a When I Am Ready Arrangement. A further 175 gave other reasons and 130 returned home to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility.

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

	Number
Turned 18 years old and continuing to live with former foster parent(s) in a When I Am Ready arrangement	190
Period of being looked after ceased for any other reason	175
Returned home to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility	130
Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer looked after: supportive accommodation providing formalised advice/support arrangements (e.g. most hostels, YMCAs, foyers, and care leavers projects)	110
Transferred to care of adult social services	50
Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer looked after: accommodation providing no formalised advice/support arrangements (e.g. B&B, bedsit, own flat, living with friends)	35
Sentenced to custody	5

Source: StatsWales, **Episodes finishing for children looked after (aged 16 and over) during the year to 31 March by local authority, gender and reason for finishing**

Care leavers on their 19th birthday

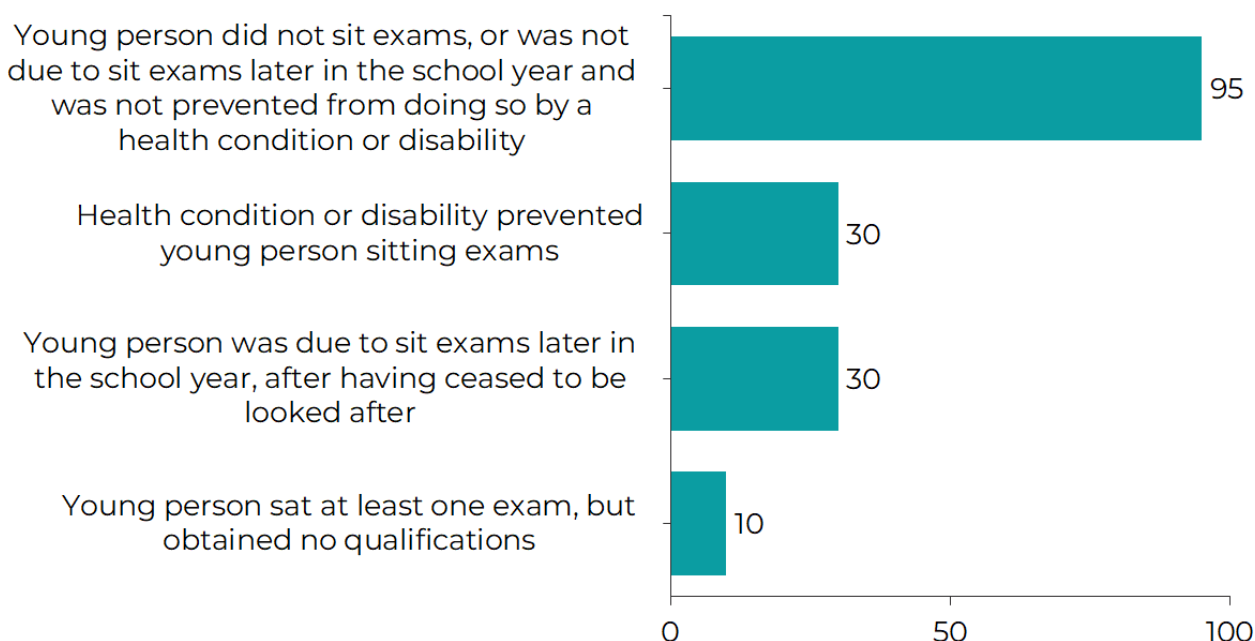
- The majority of care leavers (93% of 495) were in touch with the local authority (in line with statutory responsibilities) on their 19th birthday during the year ending 31 March 2016. These **figures** are no longer updated.
- Over a third of care leavers (39% of 465) were not in education, employment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

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

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

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

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



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

Care experienced students in higher education (HE)

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

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

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

	Percentage
Had concerns about finances when starting university or college	69%
Did not receive guidance around applying to higher education specific to their status as a care-experienced student when at school or college	60%
Did not know there was support available for care-experienced students in higher education before they started their application/research	59%
Had concerns about looking after their mental health and wellbeing when starting university or college	54%
Did not do any research about support offered to care experienced students by universities and colleges when considering their options	54%

Source: UCAS, **Next Steps: What is the experience of students from a care background in education?**

Health and well-being survey

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

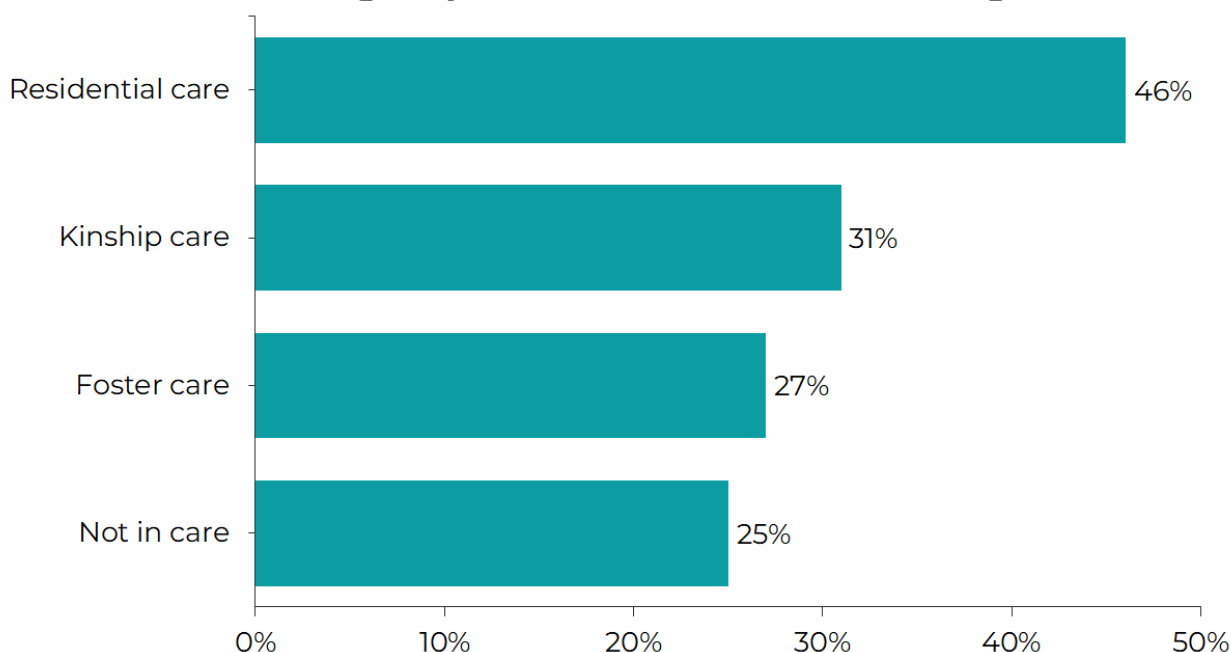
In January 2020 DECIPHer at Cardiff University published **Young People ‘Looked After’ in Wales: findings from the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and**

Wellbeing Survey. It sets out the findings for young people 'looked after' in Wales relating to wellbeing, risk behaviours and school belonging. The survey is an online self-completion survey and measures self-reported health behaviours and wellbeing outcomes among adolescents aged 11-16 years.

The two figures below show young people 'looked after' were more likely to have drunk alcohol in the past 30 days or have been exposed to bullying in the past couple of months. Those placed in residential care showed the highest rates in both cases.

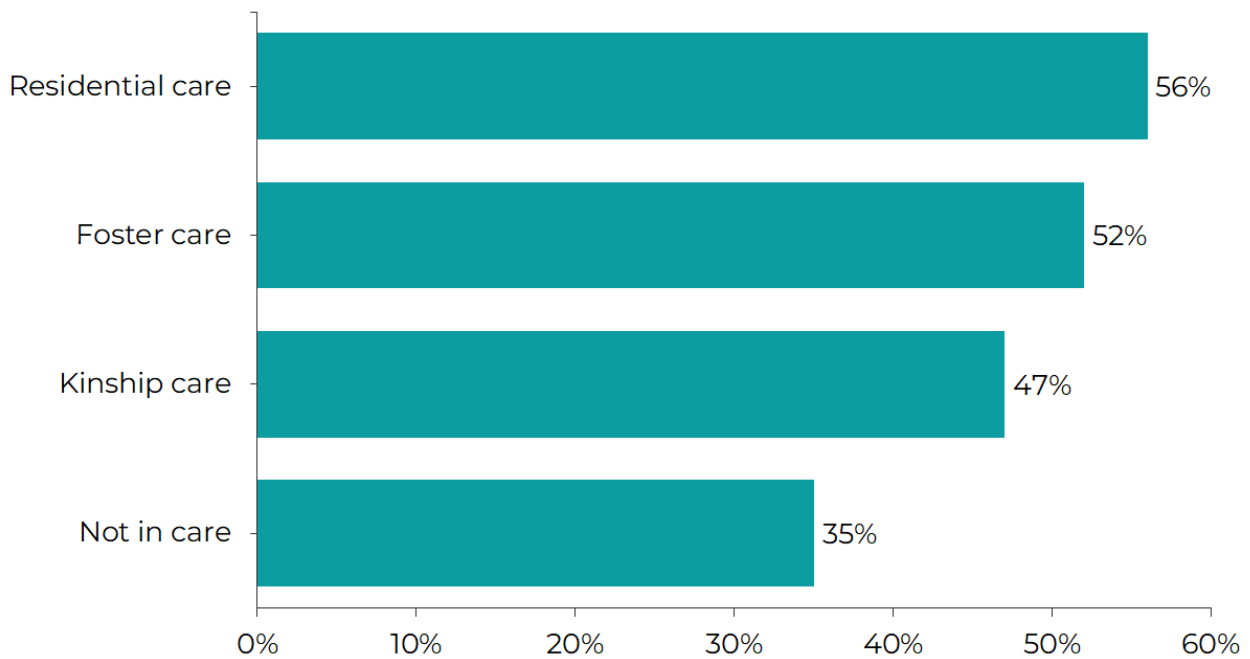
Figure 3.4: Percentage of care experienced young people aged 11-16 who have drunk alcohol in the past 30 days by care status

Source: DECIPHer, **Young People 'Looked After' in Wales: findings from the**



2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey

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



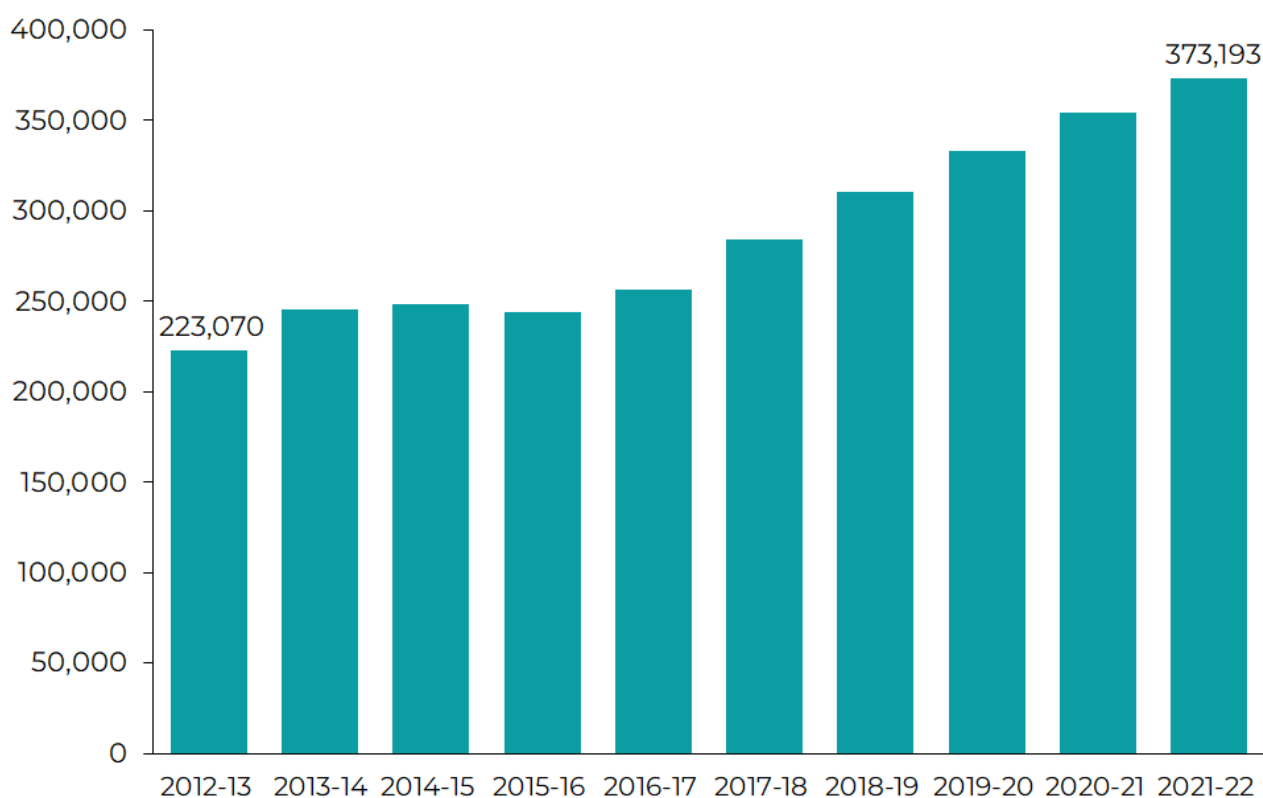
Source: DECIPHer, **Young People ‘Looked After’ in Wales: findings from the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey**

4. Cross cutting

Social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services

Social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services is available from StatsWales. Data from 2012-13 to 2021-22 shows that **expenditure has increased by 67.3% in cash terms to £373 million in 2021-22**. In real terms (taking inflation into account) expenditure increased by 40.7% between 2012-13 and 2021-22.

Figure 4.1: Total social services revenue expenditure on looked after children services; 2012-13 to 2021-22 (£ thousand)



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

Workforce

Whole time equivalent staff numbers

Figures are available showing the whole time equivalent numbers of staff working in local authority social services departments. The number of whole time equivalent

staff in residential services for children and young people decreased from 422 in 2012-13 to 407 in 2018-19, a fall of 4%.

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

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Total residential services for children and young people (RSCYP)	422	409	379	396	364	386	407

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

Workforce consistency

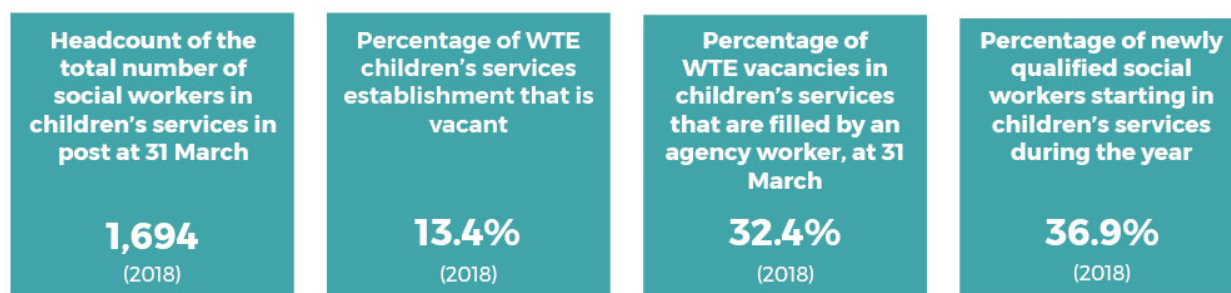
Care Inspectorate Wales' report [National Overview Report in relation to care experienced children and young people](#) analysed local authority self-evaluation data from 1 January 2018. This report found:

- 97% of looked after children were allocated to a social worker
- 61% of looked after children have had the same social worker for the last six months and
- 13% of looked after children had experienced more than two changes of social worker in the last 6 months

Headline data reported by Social Care Wales shows in 2018:

- There were 1,694 social workers (headcount) in children's services in post at 31 March:
- 13.4% of whole time equivalent posts in children's services were vacant
- 32.4% of whole time equivalent vacancies in children's services were filled by an agency worker as at 31 March
- 36.9% of newly qualified social workers started in children's services during the year

Figure 4.2: Headline data reported by Social Care Wales



Source: Social Care Wales, [National social care data portal for Wales, Children services](#)

Social Care Wales also published a [Social care workforce report](#) in 2021 which discusses social work teams and their vacancies and turnover;

Frontline teams are carrying 726 vacancies (462 in children's social work teams, 261 in adult social work teams and three in teams that work with both adults and children). (...)There were 141 vacancies reported in children's residential care with 61 posts held vacant. This represented 2.5 per cent of all social care vacancies in Wales. In total, we estimate there were 142 vacancies in children's residential care in Wales on 31 March 2021.

The report also looked at turnover by service area in the social care sector in 2020 to 2021 although highlights that data was only provided by 81% of identified services. The table below shows service areas working with children had experienced a positive net change in 2020 to 2021.

Table 2: Staff turnover by service area; 2020 to 2021

	Joiners	Leavers	Net change
Residential care - children	285	119	+166
Social work teams - children	417	304	+113

Source: Social Care Wales, [Social care workforce report](#) 2021

Social workers supporting foster carers

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

5. Further sources of data

Welsh Government, [Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census: as at 31 March 2021](#)

Welsh Government, [Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census, 2019 statistical release](#)

[The Public Law Applications to Orders \(PLATOS\) tool](#)

[National Youth Advocacy Service, Project Unity Mid Term Review Jan 2022](#)