



# Supporting care-experienced graduates into and through postgraduate study

Dr Zoe Baker

Twitter: @zs\_baker  
Zoe.baker@york.ac.uk

# The research

- Funded by the British Academy (2021-2024).
- Qualitative, longitudinal narrative inquiry.
- England and Scotland.
- Semi-structured interviews at three points: final year of HE (phase 1); 6 months after graduation (phase 2), then 12 months after graduation (phase 3).
- Online diaries are being used to record interim experiences.
- 23 participants.






# Who is 'care-experienced'?

*Care-experienced* (CE) people are those who have spent *any time* in care as children, including:

- Foster care or private foster care.
- A residential home.
- Secure care accommodation.
- 'Looked after at home'.
- Living with friends/relatives in kinship care.

*Care leavers* are those who have spent 3 months or more in care since the age of 14, and who are still in care at age 16.



A photograph of four students in a library setting. A young woman with long dark hair is on the left, smiling. Next to her is a young man with short brown hair, also smiling. To his right is a young woman with glasses, looking towards the right. On the far right is a young man with short dark hair, seen from the side. They are all looking in the same direction, towards the right. The background is filled with white bookshelves packed with books. A dark, semi-transparent banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image, containing the text.

# Motivations to enter postgraduate study

# Motivations for postgraduate study

- Necessary for career (e.g. PGCE to become a teacher, or a conversion degree).
- Providing more opportunities for career flexibility (concerns over being 'stuck').
- Sense of safety in education.
- Interest in area (in combination with altruism, social justice).

Few participants planned to enter postgraduate study though, citing financial constraints, learning exhaustion, and regarding it as something they could return to in the future.





A person with long hair, wearing a yellow t-shirt, blue jeans, and a black backpack with the word 'OAKLEY' on it, is walking away from the camera. They are pulling a black rolling suitcase. The setting is an airport terminal with a large glass and steel structure. In the background, there are signs for 'YDA' and a person with a suitcase. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

**Accessing and progressing through  
postgraduate study**





# What constrains access to, and progression through, PG study?

- Undergraduate support 'cliff edge'.
- Absence of financial support.



# The undergraduate support cliff edge

I don't know if I'm able to do my master's. I've got academic references. All my lecturers that I've spoken to have all said yeah, you should go off and do your master's. But the thing is, yeah, I would love to do that, but would I be able to even afford to live if I was to go off and do a master's which is really sad. (Jade, 21, Politics)

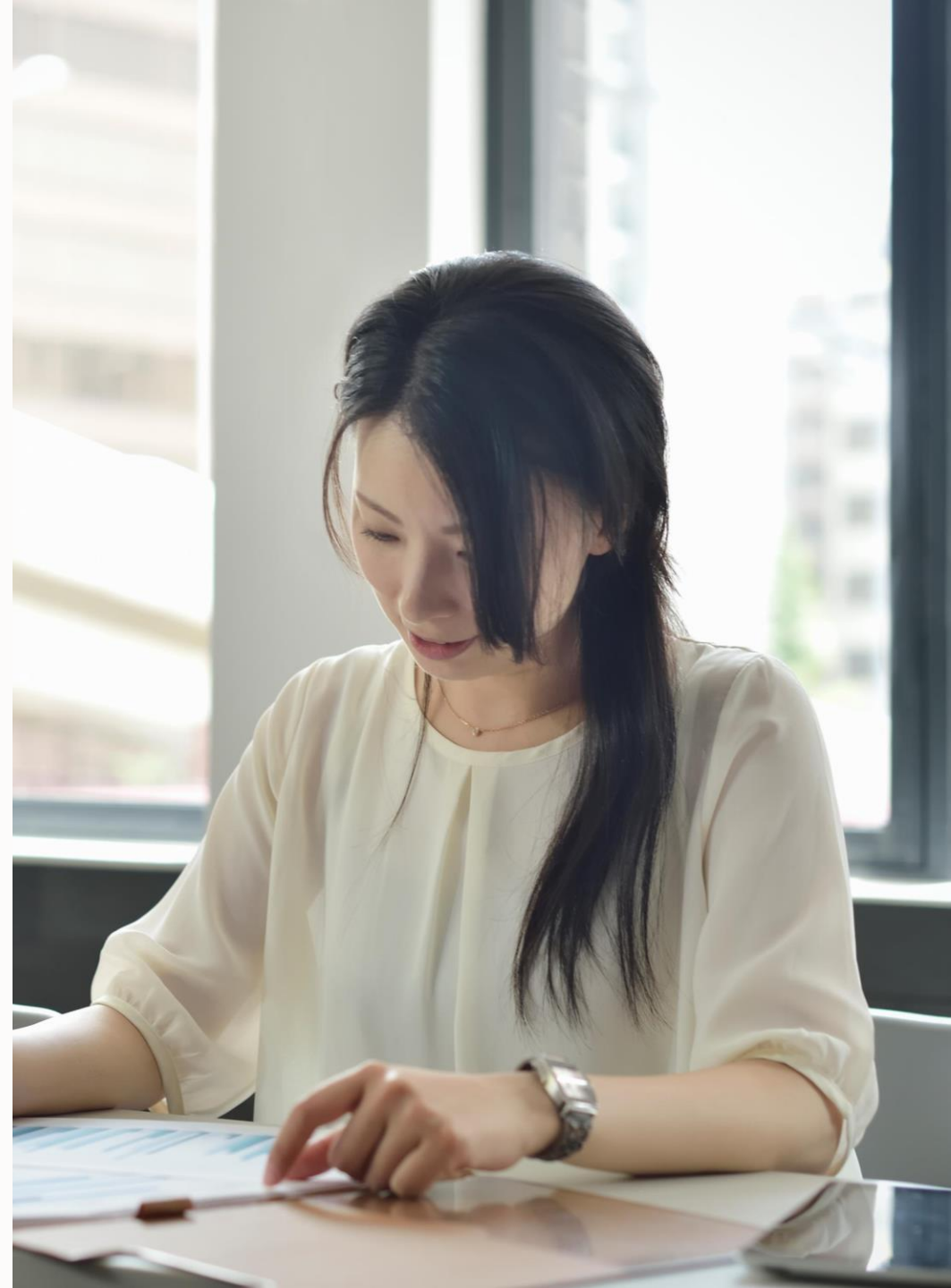
Can I really afford to continue to do an MA? You wouldn't get the same level of support like financially, and it means I'm not earning anything. (Penelope, 21, Politics)



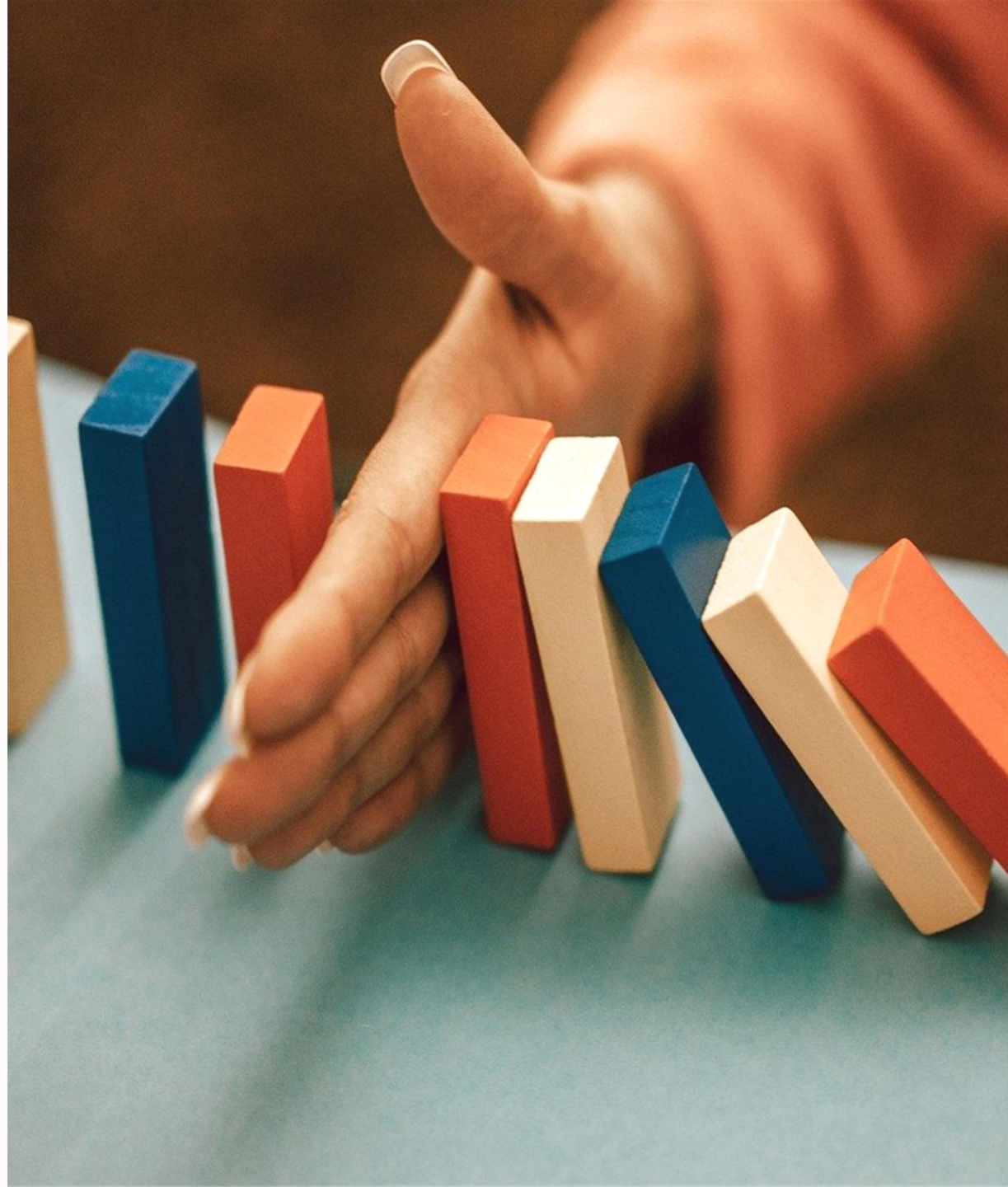
# Absence of financial support

On my undergrad I have like a direct comparison, I had a money adviser, I had a pathway adviser, I had like a person I could go to for my mental health, I had somebody that helped me childcare services, I had somebody I could go through for my disability. Like if my laptop broke they would help me and I have not one worker this year so it has been a stark difference going into the postgrad. (Jennifer, 24, Housing)

They (the LA) said apply for scholarships. There's no more financial support now. My easter holiday was the last holiday rent that they paid. (Jade, 21, Politics)







## **Stability as a pre-requisite for PG study**

I'm hoping to go on and study a master's in Social Research...I sort of have a list of things that sort of each one needs to be sorted before I move on to the next one, so the first one is graduate uni and then it's get a job...then it's pay off all my debts and be sort of financially stable there, and then masters would be next. (Austin, 20, Social Work)



# What does this mean for care-experienced graduates' transitions?

- Unable to access desired career.
- Less career flexibility later (if a career change is desired or needed).
- Concerns over future stability (and potential mental health and wellbeing implications of this).
- Needing to delay PG study to create own safety nets.
- Taking more financial and wellbeing risks to access.





# What can be done?: Initial ideas

- Collect data on care-experience during postgraduate enrolment to target support provision.
- Provision of postgraduate bursaries.
- Continuation of a named contact at PG level.
- Accommodation support for PG students
  - Free year round accommodation.
  - Support in locating suitable private rented accommodation.
  - Guarantor schemes.



## Further reading

- Baker, Z., Harrison, N., Stevenson, J. & Wakeling, P. (2021). [Patterns of postgraduate transitions amongst care-experienced graduates in the United Kingdom.](#) *Cambridge Journal of Education*. 52 (3), 349-368.
- Harrison, N., Baker, Z. & Stevenson, J. (2021). [Employment and further study outcomes for care-experienced graduates in the UK.](#) *Higher Education*. 83. 357-378.
- Stevenson, J., Baker, Z., Harrison, N., Bland, B., Jones-Devitt, S., Donnelly, A., et al. (2020). [Positive impact? What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for university students with a background of care or family estrangement?](#) Bristol: The Unite Foundation.