# Exploring Innovation in Transition (EXIT) for Young People Leaving Care

A SCOPING REVIEW OF INNOVATION IN THE UK (2010-2020): SUMMARY REPORT

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**Introduction**

Young people looked after (YPLA) face complex challenges as they make the transition from care to adulthood. The support that care leavers receive from Local Authorities varies, but in a report by the National Audit Office (2015), it has been recognised that measures need to be taken to improve their experience of transition and outcomes [1]. In turn, this has created a dynamic space in which innovative ideas, interventions, and practices have emerged, but for innovation to be effective, it must go beyond simply a good idea at the local-level and needs to become sustainable and adopted more widely.

This review forms part of the **Ex**ploring **I**nnovations in **T**ransition to Adulthood – for young people leaving care study, known as the EXIT study.

The objectives of the study are to:

- Explore what innovation currently exists across the United Kingdom for young people leaving care;
- Identify what helps or hinders how innovation is put into practice;
- Find ways about how the wider spread of innovation can be better supported so innovation makes a difference to care leavers;
- Evaluate outcomes of innovation across leaving care processes in four ways: 1) how it spreads; 2) how it is adapted; 3) how it affects young people leaving care; 4) implementation costs;
- Uncover the journey of meaningful innovation, what adaptations are necessary for it to spread, and the effect of this on outcomes.

Fulfilling the first objective, this report maps the extent of innovation for YPLA transitioning from care to adulthood in the UK over the past decade (2010-2020).

**Background**

In the year ending 31st March 2019, 29,460 young people ceased to be looked after by Local Authorities in England. While just under a third left care to return home, 16% of young people ceasing to be looked after went on to independent or supported accommodation [2]. In Scotland 4,002 YPLA ceased to be looked after, with 12% going on to independent/supported living, other types of accommodation (i.e. custody), or unknown[1]. In Wales 4,505 young people were looked after and 470 moved into independent or supported accommodation, custody, or unknown [3]. Finally, in Northern Ireland, there were 293 care leavers aged 16-18 years and 216 aged 19 years [4].

Although many YPLA demonstrate resilience, transition to adulthood is complex and non-linear and outcomes are highly variable depending on many contingent factors. YPLA are more likely to have a conviction [5], become a teenage parent [6, 7], be socially excluded [8] and have mental health problems [9]. They are less likely to achieve academically in school [10, 11], enter higher education [12], or enter into stable employment and are more likely to experience homelessness [13] than their non-looked after peers.

The context for YPLA leaving care is one of a steadily growing policy infrastructure of measures attempting to ensure that the transition from care to adulthood for YPLA is more akin to that of their peers in the general population. This report attempts to map the nature and extent of innovations that have emerged over the past 10 years within this context.

## From Care to Adulthood

Transition from a care environment to one of adulthood is not a one-off single event, but a process of taking on new roles and responsibilities in several different domains. There is no standardised consensus on what transition entails, and other potential transition domains emerge from outcome frameworks or auditing measures for YPLA leaving care.

Munro and Simkiss (2020, p.175) highlight the key domains as; moving to independent living arrangements; transition from education to employment, change in social worker to personal advisor; and leaving a child focused health system (such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and moving to an adult orientated health system (such as Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS), if the threshold for ongoing service provision is met.

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) provide guidance to Local Authorities in seven key areas that should be considered when helping young people through varying transitions. Whilst the newly developed outcomes framework for assessing YPLA leaving care – Leaving Well [14], proposes six transition domains in a hierarchical model aligned with statutory guidance including the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

## Innovation

Innovation is an abstract term and there is no universally accepted definition [15]. Innovation can mean different things to different people. A product, technology, or way of working may itself not be new, its intentional introduction in a context where it has not been used before makes it 'new to the unit of adoption'[16] .

In public services settings such as Children's Services, innovation is less likely to centre on new products and more likely to be about processes – creating change in relationships between service providers and their users [17]. Additionally, innovation is a process that happens over time [18], and the process often begins with an idea, which then interacts with

different stakeholder groups, political ideas and organisational systems in a journey towards scale up and diffusion, or termination.

It is important to study innovation, because although it is believed innovation will naturally spread and become best practice if there is enough perceived benefit and supporting evaluation evidence, the picture is more complex. The sometimes 'must-have' status of innovation can impact upon diffusion and can be more about its desirability and ease at fitting in with existing practices, rather than evidence-based improvement in outcomes for YPLA. For innovation to generate widespread impact on outcomes for YPLA, we need to understand how meaningful innovation can best be supported.

## Methods

Undertaking a review of the 'grey literature' (non-academic sources of information), we mapped the innovation landscape for YPLA leaving care. Central to the review process were five steps [19] to 1): define terms, 2) decide inclusion/exclusion criteria, 3) decide time-frame brackets, 4) decide geography and 5) identify likely sources of data.

***Defined terms****:*

**Care Leaver**- We adopted the following definition of care leaver and focused on traditional care settings of foster and residential care, where a young person looked after is resident prior to leaving care. We included young people who enter custody after leaving care, since in these settings, care leavers are disproportionately represented [20].

> Any young person who is resident in foster or residential care for more than 13 weeks from the age of 16 years, and is "*about to", "is currently", or "has recently"* undergone transition to semi or independent living, up until the age of 25 years (26 in Scotland) and independent of their EET (Employment, Education or Training) status. This excludes children and young people who have been care experienced for less than 13 weeks, are under 16 years of age, or who have been mainly resident in secure units, hospitals, schools, therapeutic communities etc. However, we do include care leavers (up to the age of 25/26) who are in custody within a prison setting after having left care.

**Innovation** – There is no universally agreed definition of innovation. We define innovation as:

> The process by which new practices, organisational arrangements, service initiatives, or new technologies/interventions are intentionally created, introduced, sustained and scaled up for generating public value through improved organisational performance and/or service user outcomes and experience.

Innovation ought to be "planned projects" that go beyond statutory duties or are a novel way to fulfil them.

***Inclusion/exclusion criteria for articles/source****:*

1. Must refer to innovation in the United Kingdom and be in English
2. Include young people who meet our definition of a care leaver or focused on stakeholders directly relevant to YPLA leaving care or those who provide services for them. If focused on transition;
3. Must consider at least one of four transitions outlined in (Munro & Simkiss 2020);
4. Innovation must be publicly available online;
5. Innovation must go beyond, or be a novel way of fulfilling statutory duties towards young people leaving care, going beyond advocacy or providing information
6. Any innovation must be situated in a 10-year window (2010-2020)

***Identify relevant grey sources:***

The following potential sources of information about innovation were identified;

Department for Education, Department for Health & Social Care, Ministry of Justice, Department for Work & Pensions, Department for Housing, Children's Commissioner, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, Northern Ireland Government. NHS England, NHS UK, Charitable organisations for care-leavers, Housing Associations, National Students Union, main stream media, BBC news website, OFSTED, Care Leavers Foundation, Google scholar, Google web (using specific search terms), BING search engine (to compare with Google), ADOLEC (adolescent health).

***Search Strategy:***

The search was undertaken across the relevant grey sources outlined above using a limited number of search terms. Many of the sites did not have layered search capabilities. This limited the search terms that could be used, and thus, were adapted according to the functionality and capability to manage searching of given websites.

Each search always included the term "Care Leaver". Some websites or documents only mentioned a potential innovation. We followed external links to explore further pages. Some searching resulted in large numbers of hits, thus, we adopted a strategy of stopping after 10 pages of non-relevant hits. Applying our inclusion/exclusion criteria, we identified 221 relevant articles, from a wide range of online sources. A closer review of these articles surfaced 91 examples of innovation across all areas of the United Kingdom.

# Results

## 1. Geographical Incidence of Innovation for YPLA Leaving Care

Mapping the innovation landscape was a priority for this review and revealed the extent of innovation across the United Kingdom. We found there was good spread, with every major region of the UK represented.

*Innovation occurring nationally or at multiple-sites (2010-2020)*

| Innovation | Organisation |
| --- | --- |
| Staying Close, Care Leaver consultants, Policy Implementation Advisor, Care leavers charter, Keep on caring policy, Access to HE principles and guidance, Care Leavers Strategy & year ahead review, cross department care leavers strategy, Open employment toolkit, Social care impact bonds, Children's Social Care Innovation fund, Care leaver apprenticeship bursary | Government |
| Charity shop work experience, Triangles peer research, Care leaver app –Journey | Barnardos |
| What Works Centre | Department for Education |
| Bright Spots survey, New Belongings engagement model | Coram Voice |
| Intergenerational mentoring | Grand Mentors |
| Christmas dinners | Lemn Sissay Foundation |
| Care Leaver covenant | Spectra First |
| Health passport | NHS |
| Leaving Well digital app | Social Finance |
| Care leaver prisons report phase 1 | Innovation Unit/Oak Foundation |
| The National House Project | National House Project Cooperative |
| National network for the education of care leavers | NNECL |
| Partnership practices – four areas | Learning & Work Institute |
| Supported lodgings project | Shared Lives |
| From Care 2 Work | Catch 22 |
| Fairbridge programme | Princes Trust |
| Propel HE website | Become charity |
| IMO website | Children's Commissioner |
| HE accreditation pilot | National network for the education of care leavers & UPP |
| Live care leaver covenant projects | Various organisations |

*Innovation in northern regions of England*

| Area | Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| South Tyneside | The workplace (arts) & The workplace (labour tool) | *South Tyneside Council* |
| North Tyneside | Web based health tool | North Tyneside CCG/UCL |
| Newcastle | Young Dads programme | Barnardos |
| | Troupe theatre | Curious Monkey |
| Darlington | Moving On arts project | Tees Valley Arts/Darlington Borough Council |
| Liverpool | Resettlement passport | Venus Charity – Sefton Care Leavers Centre |
| Manchester | Clear Approach | Care Leavers Association |
| | Council owned company | Manchester City Council |
| | Boom + | Greater Manchester Youth Network |
| Calderdale | GOAL independence programme | Care Leavers Association |
| North Yorkshire | Restorative Academy | North Yorkshire & York City councils/multi-agency |
| | No Wrong Door integrated service | North Yorkshire County Council |
| Hull | Health information sheet | NHS Hull CCG |
| | Room 42 care leavers hub | Hull City Council |
| Sheffield | Project Apollo transition coach | Sheffield Futures charity |

*Innovation in the Midlands (East and West)*

| Area | Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| Swinfen | Prison support group | Care Leavers' Association |
| Nottingham | Princes Trust programs | Princes Trust East Midlands/Nottingham County Council |
| Northamptonshire | Peer mentoring | Nene Valley Care Trust |
| Stoke on Trent | The House Project | House Project Company |

*Innovation in East of England*

| Area | Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| East Anglia | Staying Close, Staying Connected partnership | Break charity, Norfolk County Council & Cambridgeshire County Council |

*Innovation in South West England*

| Area | Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|------|---------------|--------------|
| Bristol | Good-day stories & CLUB support | Barnardos |
| | ACT therapy & Personal wellbeing budget | Reboot West CCG |
| Plymouth | Service delivery collaboration | Barnardos |

*Innovation in London & the South*

| Area | Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|------|---------------|--------------|
| London | Theatre company | The Big House |
| London | Arts & Therapy | Element |
| London | Holistic support | Drive Forward Foundation |
| London | Service redesign | Catch 22 |
| London | Care Leavers into Work | Corporation of London & Drive Forward Foundation |
| London | Reaching Higher | Lloyds bank & Reaching Higher charity |
| Croydon | Building Hope housing hub | Barnardos |
| Southwark | Holistic support | Catch 22 |
| | HE collaboration | Southwark Council & Kings College London |
| Romford | Cocoon hub | Havering London Borough Council |
| Ilford | Wellbeing Centre | Barnardos |
| Lewisham Bromley Greenwich | I-Aspire | DePaul charity |
| Twickenham | First Star Academy | First Star & St Mary's University |
| Westminster | Tapered CAMHS 16-25 proposal | City of Westminster |
| Hastings | Xtrax | Lloyds bank & Xtrax charity |
| Kent | Tech innovation consortium | University of Kent |
| | Leaving Well outcomes framework | University of Kent & Social Finance |
| | Council as rent guarantor | Kent County Council |
| | Care Leavers Progression Partnership (CLPP) | Kent & Medway multi-agency |

*Innovation in Wales*

| Area | Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|------|---------------|--------------|
| South Wales | Supported step-down living service | Fabric |

*Innovation in Northern Ireland*

| Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Aiming Higher | Business in the Community Northern Ireland & Include Youth |
| Give & Take: core employability programme | Include Youth |
| Self-employment social enterprise (southern region) | Health & Social Care board (HSCB) |

*Innovation in Scotland*

| Innovation(s) | Organisation |
|---|---|
| GAP homes | Barnardos |
| Discovering your potential | |
| Fair Start Employment programme & Housing options protocols for care leavers | Scottish Government |
| Council as rent payer if EET | West Dunbartonshire Council |
| Co-production methodology Argyll & Bute Council | Institute for Research & Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) |

### 2. Transition for young people leaving care

Transition from care to adulthood is a process not an event. A care leaver must navigate multiple changes in their lives as they negotiate the transition from care to adulthood. We generated categories based on what innovations were for YPLA leaving care. Our analysis highlighted nine potential areas in which YPLA may undergo transition;

1. **Education or training transition**; *First Star Academy, HE collaboration Southwark/KCL, Care leaver apprenticeship bursary, Propel website, Access to HE principles, HE accreditation pilot (UPP & NNECL), ACT therapy, Council as rent payer if EET, Kent & Medway care leavers progression partnership*

2. **Accommodation transition;** *Supported step- down living service, Housing options protocols for care leavers, GAP homes, Building Hope housing hub, Council as rent guarantor, Staying Close, House Project*

3. **Independent living skills;** *GOAL independence training programme, Resettlement passport*

4. **Social transition;** *Big House theatre, Troupe theatre, IMO social media website, Element Arts, CLUB support group, Peer mentoring, Moving On arts project, The Workplace arts, Intergenerational mentoring, Christmas dinners, Boom+ volunteering*

5. **Employment transition;** *ACT therapy, Fair Start employment programme, Care leaver into work, Princes Trust East Midlands training programmes, Workplace*

*labour tool, From Care 2 Work, Open employment toolkit, Charity shop work experience, Discovering your potential pilot, Aiming Higher NI, Self-employment social enterprise, Give & Take: Core*

6. ***Wellbeing support for transition;*** *Element therapy, Wellbeing Centre, Good day stories*

7. ***Holistic transition;*** *Cocoon hub, Catch 22 holistic support, Drive Forward Foundation holistic support, Staying Close, Staying Connected partnership, Project Apollo transition coaches, Sefton Care Leavers Centre, Xtrax, Reaching Higher, Room 42 care leavers hub, No Wrong Door model*

8. ***Health transition;*** *Web-based health tool, Health information sheet, Health passports, Personal wellbeing budget, tapered CAMHS (16-25) proposal,*

9. ***Atypical transition (citizenship);*** *Swinfen prison support group, Clear Approach crime intervention, Restorative Academy*
   ***Atypical transition (parenthood);*** *Young Dads programme*
   ***Atypical transition (adulthood);*** *Fairbridge programme*
   ***Atypical transition (empowerment);*** *Care leaver journey app, Leaving Well app, New Belongings engagement model*

Innovations were categorised on primary best fit, explaining why some transition domains had less content.

### 3. *Non-transitional innovation*

While a considerable number of innovations addressed experiences of young people transitioning from care, others did not directly impact young people's lives, and were concerned with organisation level change.

Intellectual innovations were also found, as well as evidence of political or cultural innovation largely generated from central UK Government.

### 4. *Evaluation of innovation*

Completing our analysis of the grey literature for YPLA leaving care, consideration was given to how innovation has been evaluated. Not all innovations we surfaced were accompanied by an evaluation review, leaving a gap in our understanding of innovation for YPLA leaving care. However, those that did produce an evaluation report are summarised;

### 1. *Making a House a Home*, Dixon & Ward, 2017, Stoke on Trent [21]

*The House project*: Housing cooperative for 16-18 yr. old care leavers involving co-design and creation of their own housing (To improve housing stability and equip care leavers for independent living)

2. ***New Belongings: An Evaluation*, Dixon & Baker, 2016, National - 28 LAs in England [22]**

*New Belongings:* Programme to increase engagement and participation of YPLA in developing services. Achieved by 6 steps: survey of CL; review role of PAs; set up CL forum; create improvement plan; get CEO and cross dept. buy-in; influence and engage local community. Aim was to increase utilisation of YPLA voice for strategic development of corporate parenting.

3. ***Evaluation of University of Kent consortium to explore how technology can support YP in care,* Fu & Clay, 2017, University of Kent [23]**

*Co-participation in evaluating technology innovations – i.e. open innovation practice.* Care leavers invited to explore 7 digital technologies with a view to their development as tools for care leavers.

4. ***Evaluation of Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme: Final report,* Munro, Lushey et al, 2011, National, – has become National Government policy [24]**

*Staying Put:* Enables care leavers to extend arrangements to stay with their foster carers up until 21 years of age (piloted between 2008-2011)

5. ***Fair Start Scotland Evaluation Report 2: Overview of Year 1,* Social Research, 2019, Scotland [25]**

*Fair Start:* Scotland's first fully devolved employability service for vulnerable adults who are NEET including but not limited to CLs. The intention is to support people into education, employment or training (EET).

6. ***From Care to Independence: Princes Trust Fairbridge Programme*, Gibb & Edwards, 2017, National (England) [26]**

*Fairbridge Programme:* Training course to empower YP to stabilise life circumstance and become EET or volunteer. Uses a model of group activities followed by one to one mentoring to develop EET skills**.**

7. ***Examining Clear Approach: An intervention for Care Leavers on an Intensive Alternative to Custody Order (IAC),* Fitzpatrick & Williams, 2014, Manchester [27]**

*Clear Approach:* Specialist 10-week support programme for CLs as an IAC. Targeted at Young males (18-25). Men engage in one to one and group sessions to explore links between care and offending.

8. ***Calderdale GOAL Project Evaluation,* Care Leavers Assoc, 2017, Calderdale [28]**

*GOAL (Getting on and Living):* Peer mentor, independent living course delivered over 10 modules built on Child's Act 1989, OFSTED (2012) and using a mentor framework GROW – goal, current, reality, options, way forward. Group sessions to enhance skills and confidence, followed by 1-1 peer mentor sessions.

9. ***Localised Approaches to Supporting Care leavers,* Robey, Aylward, & Pickles, 2017, Learning and Work Institute [29]**

*Partnership and integrated work practices for CL services.* Kent & Medway Care Leaver Progression Partnership (CLPP); Staffordshire Central Through Care Team (CTC); Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network (CLN); Sheffield Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP).

### 10. *Boom+: Working Successfully with Care Leavers – Final Evaluation Report,* **Martkike, Cox et al, 2015, Greater Manchester [30]**

*Boom+* An extension to care leavers (18+) of a national volunteering experience project for all YP (16-25).

### 11. *Evaluation of the No Wrong Door Innovation Programme,* **Lushley, Hyde-Dryden et al, North Yorkshire, 2017 [31]**

*No Wrong Door:* A dedicated, integrated (multi-disciplinary) service for Edge of care (at risk of care) and CLs (12-25yrs). YP not required to enter a formal agreement for NWD. Innovation aims to improve: Accommodation stability; engagement in EET; relationships; transition planning; resilience & wellbeing; crisis support; reduce high-risk behaviours; reduce social costs.

### 4a. *Reflection on evaluation reports*

We found 11 reports focused on evaluating innovation. Of these, four were organisational innovation and four evaluated novel interventions for care leavers. The remainder were one atypical innovation (Boom+ volunteering), one ecological innovation (Staying Put – which is now a statutory requirement for Local Authorities), and one intellectual innovation (a consortium with YPLA to engage with processes of technological innovation). Reports were both diverse and limited in number, hindering reliability in drawing conclusions. Some comments about the overall process of evaluating innovation were possible.

1. Measures used in the evaluation process reflected the specific objectives of each innovation and as such were highly variable.
2. Sample sizes were low, meaning descriptive statistics could only be used.
3. Most studies strongly highlighted positive findings, suggesting the evaluation process gives rise to bias in promoting the innovation and showing "meaningful" results.
4. Analysis of qualitative data was often deductive, likely resulting in a degree of researcher bias.
5. There was a general lack of quality in evaluation reports.

**Discussion**

Reviewing the grey literature on innovation for YPLA leaving care has highlighted the geographical extent of innovation around the United Kingdom. It has also surfaced what areas of the transition process are being addressed by various innovation.

*Geographic variation in innovation*

Mapping the geographical extent of innovation over the past 10 years revealed innovation was happening across the whole of the country. At a national and multi-location-level, innovation was extensive, suggesting good national coverage of innovation practices. However, focusing down onto the regional-level was more illuminating, with London strongly represented and the north of England the most dominant region for innovation. The Midlands, and South West of England had comparatively fewer innovations. Finally, for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland there were less examples of innovation, which may reflect lower numbers of care leavers in these regions' comparative to England.

Central to diffusion of innovation is leadership, some will pioneer innovation, while others will follow. A key question is: why? A second question is: how can experiences of generating innovation, be shared across all Local Authority areas so that learning and leadership for innovation can be transferred? Central to the finding of regional variability in innovation, may be issues of knowledge transfer and inter-organisational learning.

*Transition domains*

A second component of this review was to consider the domains of transition supported by innovation. We identified innovations addressing nine different areas of transition to adulthood:

Three transition domains were not well supported by innovation. Independent living skills was the least supported. However, this category captured only specific training programmes targeting independence skills and we found independence skill building was embedded within innovation taking a more holistic approach and sometimes as part of a supported accommodation initiative. This was similar for wellbeing, which was often a by-product of innovation addressing social transition. Wellbeing was not linked to health, as is traditionally the case, and health transition was not well supported by innovation. Most innovation for health centred on personal health information.

That health (both mental and physical) is an overlooked aspect of transition from care was surprising given health outcomes for YPLA are worse compared to their non-looked after peers [32]. For innovators and policy makers alike, addressing health transition for YPLA leaving care ought to be become a priority focus.

***Transition frameworks***

Mapping our nine categories against those of known frameworks (i.e. Leaving Well Outcomes Framework and OFSTED categories) revealed similarity and differences. Points of convergence were around employment, education and training (EET). The term, EET, is commonly used in discourse surrounding outcomes for care leavers but our findings show that innovation splits these into education and training on the one hand and employment on the other. OFSTED reporting also treats education and training as distinct from employment, while the Leaving Well framework combines them. Health and wellbeing are conflated in both approaches, yet our analysis highlights innovation for health transition is not only over-looked but does not include notions of wellbeing. We encourage separation of health and wellbeing as well as employment from education and training.

All approaches (including our own) found housing or accommodation to be common, and relationships, which we referred to as social transition. Additionally, we included a category called atypical transition.

Finally, we found no categories in existing frameworks to describe notions of empowerment, which are central to the Children and Social Work Act (2017). Capturing the extent to which innovations contribute to empowerment may help distinguish between innovations that are meaningful, or those that although perhaps easy to implement, may be less empowering for care leavers.

***Evaluation reporting***

In the last section of our analysis, we considered evaluation of innovation. Relatively few evaluations of innovation are publicly available. Evaluation studies as a growing collective evidence base of what works and what doesn't is confounded by the variability of innovations, their objectives and the assessment tools used.

Central to the wider EXIT study are the concepts of scale-up and diffusion of innovation. Evaluation reporting should play an important role in this, since it provides an evidence base on which to "sell" an idea to the wider professional and care-leaver community.

Finally, as part of exploring innovations in transition to adulthood, we recognise that care leavers are not a homogenous population. In our review, we found little evidence of innovation specifically addressing transition of different subgroups of YPLA who may have complex needs. Our (lack of) finding highlights a need for greater debate around diversity within the wider care leaver community and how or what types of innovation may be helpful.

**Summary**

The pace of innovation for young people looked after (YPLA) leaving care has been gathering speed over the past decade, attracting considerable political and financial support from central UK Government. Several evaluation reports exist for pilots of individual innovations, yet no review has investigated the wider innovation landscape to explore the impact of legislative changes and policy initiatives. In this first review of its kind, we mapped innovation relevant to care leavers across the UK since 2010 and found the extent of innovation to be nationwide, although with some regional variation. There was considerable range of innovation directly targeting different areas of transition for YPLA leaving care, while the focus of other innovations were toward influencing culture and organisational practices. Given the array of innovation surfaced by our review of publicly available grey sources, we conclude efforts for promoting a culture of innovation to improve outcomes for care leavers has had effect.

This may be considered positive, yet cannot be taken for granted while the number of YPLA and thus, number of care leavers continues to grow [2]. Additional pressure on resources requires an ever more effective innovation strategy, to ensure meaningful innovations become sustainable and diffuse into best practice.

**Recommendations**

Our review highlights five strategic recommendations for policy makers and practitioners to consider in future development of innovation.

### 1) Harnessing experience and sharing knowledge

We found increased concentration of innovation in London and the north of England suggesting these two locations may be particular hotspots for incubation and trialling of innovation. Further research should explore leadership for, and experience of implementing innovation in hotspots, and how this knowledge could be harnessed to benefit the wider service provision community across all areas of the United Kingdom.

### 2) Innovation for healthcare transition

There is widespread understanding that transition from care to adulthood for YPLA is both accelerated and compressed and occurs over multiple life areas. Our review highlighted that innovation within healthcare transition for YPLA is under developed. Thus, we advocate for more innovation and research addressing healthcare transition for care leavers.

### 3) Empowering care leavers

In exploring domains of transition addressed by innovation, we found some innovation explicitly attempted to empower YPLA in their transition journey. We recommend empowerment be foregrounded in outcome frameworks for YPLA leaving care. Explicitly

foregrounding empowerment of YPLA in processes of innovation and as an area in which transition occurs (i.e. from dependent young person to empowered adult) is consistent with principles of corporate parenting embedded in the Children and Social Work Act (2017).

### 4) A shared outcomes and transition framework

Reviewing current understandings of transition to adulthood is important, as it may contribute to greater consensus about how and what is important to young people when they transition from care to adulthood. Currently, there is no commonly shared framework of understanding or assessing outcomes for YPLA leaving care. A common conceptual framework of transition (and of innovation), would enable more consistency in evaluation reporting and facilitate a more robust evidence base going forward. The benefits of which extend to future decision makers, innovators and social scientists seeking to understand what works well and what innovation to support.

### 5) Improving evaluation of innovation

Our final recommendation is towards improving methods in evaluation of innovation. Across many of the evaluation studies we investigated, were a number of methodological challenges such as low statistical power. The use of qualitative methodologies may be valuable for avoiding the potential caveats embedded in statistical methods, which carry specific assumptions and validity parameters. Improving the quality of evaluation is essential if empirical evidence is to play a central role in decisions taken about which innovations to scale-up and support beyond initial pilots. This should be combined with recommendation 4 to maximise generation of greater transferable learning.

### Limitations

All research has limitations and our review was not immune. We were unable to investigate fully the care offers of all individual Local Authorities across the UK to uncover potential examples of innovation. Since we view this report as a collaborative endeavour, and to inform a wider programme of research, we welcome any correspondence identifying innovation we may have overlooked. Second, we were also unable to include sources that did not have a publicly available online presence. We acknowledge that this limits what is included and may overlook innovation happening at grass-roots level.

We were unable to directly involve care leavers in this review through their co-participation in the reviewing process. We have worked with members of the Care Leavers' Association in constructing this report and welcomed their engagement throughout the review process. For the next phases of the research, a group of young care leavers will work alongside the team, to ensure their representation and participation in the ongoing EXIT study.

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