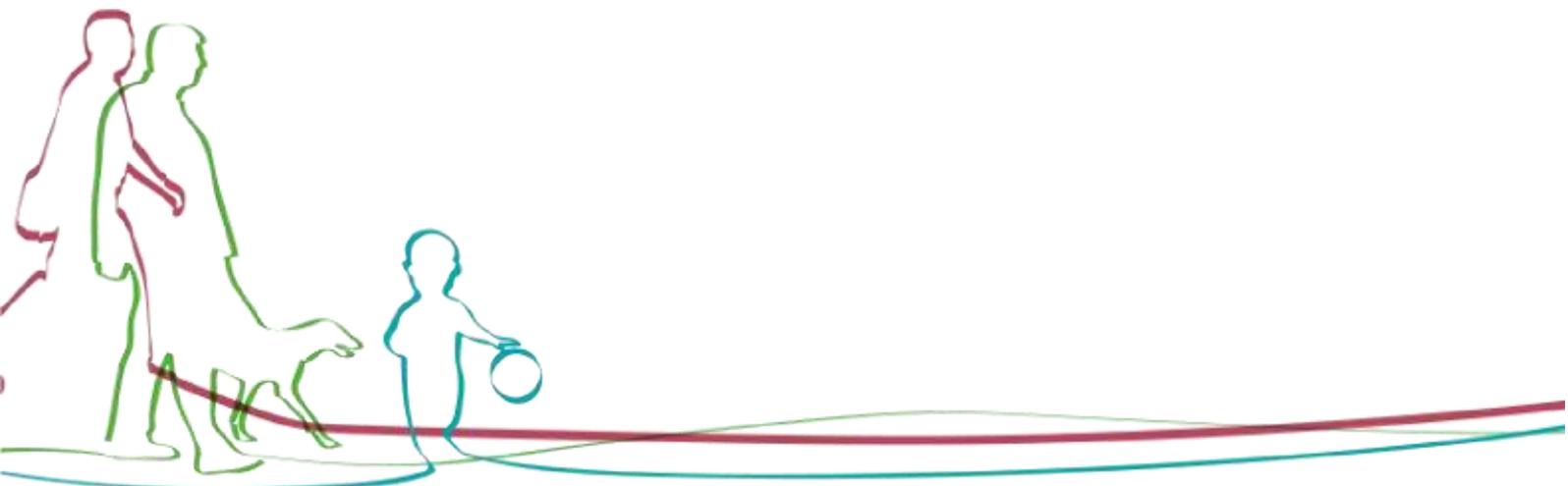


Evaluation of Propel: Final Report

Joanne H. Alexander & Jane E.M. Callaghan



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**The University of Northampton
Boughton Green Road
Northampton
NN2 7AL**

Report compiled by:

Joanne H. Alexander
The University of Northampton
Boughton Green Road
Northampton
NN2 7AL

Email: joanne.alexander@northampton.ac.uk

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Name and address of commissioner

Name: Natasha Finlayson

Position: Chief Executive, Become Charity

Address: 15-18 White Lion Street

London

N1 9PG

Tel: 0207 2513117

Email: natasha.finlayson@becomecharity.org.uk

University contact details

Name: Sarah Armstrong-Hallam

Position: Manager, Institute of Public Safety, Crime and Justice

Address: The University of Northampton

Institute of Public Safety, Crime and Justice

Boughton Green Road

Northampton

NN2 7AL

Email: sarah.armstrong-hallam@northampton.ac.uk



1. Executive summary

Introduction

In 2015, The University of Northampton (UoN) was commissioned by Become (formerly The Who Cares? Trust) to conduct a 2-year evaluation of Propel. The aim of the evaluation was to identify and capture information about who is using Propel, its impact, visitors' experiences and appraisals (including navigability, ease of use, and transfer of knowledge). The aim of this final report is to provide a synthesis of findings from interview and survey data drawn from care-experienced young people, professionals and carers. Themes emergent from the data are illustrated and discussed and, towards the end of the report, researchers make recommendations aimed at the future development and evolution of Propel.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was taken to the design of the evaluation which incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods. The methodology implemented was aimed at facilitating an assessment of the short to mid-term impact of Propel on participants. Online surveys enabled site visitors to quantitatively rate their experiences of the site, and to provide qualitative textual information. Semi-structured interviews facilitated a more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences of using the site and the impact on decision-making around HE. Follow-up surveys and follow-up interviews provided a means for participants to share their experiences and perceived impact across the evaluation period in the midterm.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at The University of Northampton. Prior to consent, online surveys incorporated a page related to the purpose of the evaluation, the use and storage of data, as well as the protections afforded to participants. Similarly, interview participants received written and verbal information about the nature of the research and their involvement. Identifying information (such as names, locations, or other identifying characteristics) have either been removed or obscured in dissemination.

Participants

There was a good response from Propel visitors completing Survey 1 (n=221). Professionals formed the largest group of survey respondents (n=134), and the second largest group defined themselves as '*care leaver up to and including 25 years of age*' (n=28). 23 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 21 participants: 11 interviews with 9 care-experienced young people, 12 with professionals and carers (professionals n=10; carers n=2).

Analysis

Researchers conducted a statistical analysis of quantitative data from Surveys 1 and 2 using SPSS software. A thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcriptions and, where appropriate, textual survey data. Thematic Analysis (TA) was chosen for its capacity to broadly identify and capture participants' experiences and thoughts regarding particular phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Online Survey 1

Descriptive statistics show responses from professionals/carers and young people to key domains relating to confidence, decision-making, and knowledge of support. Data indicates positive responses with the majority of participants from the 2 groups (professionals/carers, and young people) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that Propel had instigated development in each of the 3 domains. The majority of site visitors strongly agreed or agreed that Propel had increased their knowledge of support offered by HEIs (n=175) (79.1%) and knowledge of support available for care leavers to access HE (n=173) (78.4%). Similarly, the majority of visitors agreed or strongly agreed that Propel had increased their confidence to apply (young people n=39) (73.6%) or to assist others to apply to HE (professionals & carers n=121) (72%). Responses to the decision-making item were predominantly positive with 55.4% of professionals and carers and 56.6% of young people agreeing or strongly agreeing that Propel had helped them (young people), or a young person they work with (professionals and carers) to make a decision involving HE.

Online Survey 2

Survey 1 respondents consenting to future contact (professionals & carers n=78; care-experienced people n=30) were emailed a link to Survey 2 approximately 3 -12 months after completing Survey 1. The response to Survey 2 was low in comparison to Survey 1, with 22 completions (professionals & carers n=16; young people n=6). However, considering the nature of it as a follow-up, assessing midterm impact of a website months after visiting, a lower response rate is perhaps to be anticipated. Survey 2 required participants to rate and to provide qualitative textual information about impact. The limited statistical data cannot be used to generalize to the population of site users/wider population. However, in spite of a low response rate, data (particularly textual data) provides a useful account of the ways in which Propel supported respondents' decision-making in the months after visiting the site. The majority of young people participating in Survey 2 agreed or strongly agreed that since using Propel they had made decisions involving HE (n=5), that their ambitions had changed since visiting the site (n=4), and that Propel had helped them to feel more confident about applying to HE (n=5). Responses from professionals and carers mirror these findings, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing that Propel had supported the decision-making of a young person they worked with (n=10), and that Propel had helped them to feel more confident about assisting young people to apply to HE (n=11).

Interviews with Care-Experienced Young People

While interviews centred on Propel, participants also oriented discussion towards their current and historic experiences of education. Their reflections provide valuable insights into the contexts that hindered and challenged their educational progress, as well as the resilience with which they overcame adversities. While this data is a slight divergence from the evaluation of Propel, researchers felt it important to include it within this report in order to highlight, as other reports have done (Jackson, 2005; Driscoll, 2013), the difficulties and disadvantages care-experienced young people face in education. In addition, the rich information shared by participants enables us to assess how Propel is useful to young people, not only in practical terms, but also what the availability of resources means to them and of how they locate it within their personal and educational journeys. 5 themes emerged from the interview data set with young people: (i) *Experiences en route to HE*; (ii) *Support in HE: Expectation Vs Practice*; (iii) *Normalising HE*; (iv) *Appearance, navigability & content*; and finally, (v) *Recommendations*.

Interviews with Professionals & Carers

Like interviews with young people, those conducted with professionals and carers were very rich, not only providing an evaluation of Propel, but of how it functions as a resource in their practice, and how it fills a gap in the general landscape of work with care-experienced young people. Interviews were focused on capturing experiences of Propel, and yet interviewees oriented discussion towards their experience in practice. While this kind of material might appear a deviation to the evaluation, we represent it here as it provides insight into the contexts professionals and carers are operating in, their experiences of working with care-experienced young people, and the challenges they face. 5 themes emerge from the interview data set with professionals and carers: (i) *Raising aspiration: Requirements & challenges*; (ii) *Barriers to HE*; (iii) *Using Propel in working practices*; (iv) *Appearance, navigability & content*; and finally, (v) *Recommendations*.

Discussion & Recommendations

The evaluation of Propel has enabled an account of visitors' immediate response, as well as the perceived short- to mid-term impact. The phased mixed-methods approach to data collection has captured participants' experiences of Propel in relation to confidence, knowledge development, decision-making and ambition.

Analyses of quantitative Survey 1 data indicate that the majority of participants from each of the 2 groups (young people, and professionals/carers) perceived Propel to have facilitated an increase in each of the key areas. This evaluation acts as a pilot and due to the small sample sizes, statistical data should be treated speculatively. Quantitative data provides a descriptive snapshot of respondents' views, and while this is indicative and suggests particular directions, findings should not be used to generalise to the wider population.

While interviews with young people were focused on the Propel website, participants also oriented discussion towards their experiences of mainstream education and their educational journey prior to exploring HE. As such, their reflections provide valuable insights into the contexts that hindered and challenged their educational progress as well as the resilience with which they work(ed) to overcome adversities to redefine their identities and prepare for HE. Predominantly, young people valued Propel's inspirational stories, the details of named designated HE persons, and the ability to access information about universities in one location. Interviews with professionals not only provide an assessment of Propel, but also facilitated an understanding of how the site functions as a resource, and how it fills a gap in the general landscape of work with care-experienced young people. Drawing on survey and interview responses, professionals largely seem to be using Propel as a tool in their work with young people, either accessing it to help specific young people they work with to make decisions around HE, using it as a classroom-based activity with young people, or for professional development – to build their knowledge around HE support for care leavers. In addition, many professionals and carers we spoke to were embedding Propel into their everyday working practices, with a view to better supporting young people, or to raise awareness of support/increase aspiration within their professional networks. Most

interviewees (professionals, carers and young people) framed Propel as a tool not only for raising awareness of HE support for care-experienced young people, but also for challenging dominant messages of low expectation and low achievement.

2. Introduction

Increasing educational and occupational opportunities for care-experienced young people, and reducing resultant health and social inequalities, are concerns increasingly acknowledged in practice and research. Disruption at critical points in children's education, such as changes in placement and school moves, act as barriers for attainment, having a detrimental impact on the educational success of children in care (O'Sullivan, & Westerman, 2007).

In spite of other potential barriers to educational success related to disadvantage, such as behavioural, emotional, and mental health difficulties (Driscoll, 2013; Mathers et al, 2016), O'Sullivan and Westerman (2007) suggest that with appropriate support, and 'careful tracking', care-experienced young people *could* have an opportunity to reach their full potential and attain in accordance with their peers (see p. 19). There is evidence to suggest that without additional support, either early on in their education or as an ongoing concern, the attainment gap between looked-after children and their peers increases with age (Mathers et al, 2007; O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007).

Care leavers participating in Jackson's action research project (2005) reported being highly motivated to achieve academically, but were subject to a lack of information and advice during the processes of identifying and selecting universities in relation to financial support, and also regarding the accommodation provisions accessible in HE (see p.xi). Jackson's report (2005) highlights the need for resources, information and guidance specifically tailored to supporting care-experienced young people to access HE. Similarly, in 2013, Starks identified that while there was inconsistency across HEIs, where there was support available it was often not communicated to care leavers, further preventing them from making informed decisions about their futures.

Propel was designed and developed by Become to address these kinds of short falls, to raise care-experienced young people's aspirations by presenting HE as a possible and achievable option. Propel is designed to help young people to make informed choices by providing information about the types of support HEIs offer specifically to young people in care and care leavers. To prevent the need for time-consuming research and cross-referencing, the website enables young people, and the professionals who work with them, to compare the support individual universities offer. In addition, in order to further promote HE as an achievable option, Propel includes the inspirational stories of care leavers who have gone to university. Propel builds on the work of Become (formerly The Who Cares? Trust) and, more specifically, of their HE Handbook - a pdf resource of HEI support offered to care-experienced young people. Both Propel and the HE Handbook were based on Sonia Jackson's work, and sought to address



the lack of information and resources aimed at supporting care-experienced young people towards and in HE.

In 2015, The University of Northampton (UoN) was commissioned by Become to conduct a 2-year evaluation of Propel. The aim of the evaluation was to identify and capture information about who is using Propel, its impact, visitors' experiences and appraisals (including navigability, ease of use, and transfer of knowledge). The aim of this final report is to provide a synthesis of findings from interview and survey data drawn from care-experienced young people, professionals and carers. Themes emergent from the data are illustrated and discussed and, towards the end of the report, researchers make recommendations aimed at the future development and evolution of Propel.

Evolution of Propel

During the evaluation period, The Who Cares? Trust (WCT) changed their organisational name to 'Become'. Throughout this report, both names are referred to, and where participants used 'WCT', it remains unchanged.

Regular progress meetings took place between Become and UoN throughout the evaluation. Propel was not static during the process of evaluation, but was under development and has evolved over the course of the last 2 years. Become made a series of changes to the site, some of which were initiated by preliminary evaluation findings. Key changes include:

- Pages optimised for printing
- Scotland further education site launched
- Introduction of Scotland-specific guide content
- Changes to search functionality (across whole site)
- Young people can now compare course information from every further education college in Scotland and 94 per cent of all universities in the UK

3. Methods

A mixed methods approach was taken to the design of the evaluation which incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods. The methodology implemented was aimed at facilitating an assessment of the short to mid-term impact of Propel on participants. Online surveys enabled site visitors to quantitatively rate their experiences of the site, and to provide qualitative textual information. Semi-structured interviews facilitated a more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences of using the site and the impact on decision-making around HE. Follow-up surveys and follow-up interviews provided a means for participants to share their experiences and perceived impact across the evaluation period in the midterm.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at TUoN. Prior to consent, online surveys incorporated a page related to the purpose of the evaluation, the use and storage of data, as well as the protections afforded to participants. Similarly, interview participants received written and verbal information about the nature of the research and their involvement. All interviews were audio recorded, and recordings transcribed word-for-word. Identifying information (such as names, locations, or other identifying characteristics) were either removed or obscured prior to dissemination. Throughout this report, to protect participants' identities, pseudonyms replace actual names. The minimum age for participation in the research was 16 years. This was based on the difficulties of obtaining parental consent or of applying Gillick competency guidelines remotely online for those under-16 years of age.

Online surveys

3 surveys were designed in collaboration with Become staff and members of their advisory group. Surveys were aimed at developing an understanding of visitors' perceptions on the value and utility of Propel, as well as impact on young people's aspirations, confidence and entry into HE. In addition, surveys aimed to capture young people's current circumstances and their intentions to apply to HE. Surveys were set up on Bristol Online Survey (BOS). The first (Survey 1, see appendix 1) was built into the Propel website via a pop-up box that appeared within a few seconds of accessing the site. Follow-up surveys were sent out to consenting survey respondents as email links - one was aimed at careexperienced young people (Survey 2a, appendix 2), and the other oriented towards professionals and carers (Survey 2b, appendix 3).

Semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with care-experienced young people, professionals and carers. As well as exploring the perceived impact of Propel on decision-making, interviews enabled participants to share their knowledge of HE support and their thoughts about the barriers and enablers for care leavers in accessing and achieving in HE. (See appendices 4 – 5 for interview participant materials).

Care-experienced interviewees were invited to participate in a follow-up interview within 12 months of entering into HE. Interview schedules incorporated questions relating to the ways support provisions in practice met expectations, experiences of being in HE, and the perceived impact of Propel on decisionmaking.

Sampling Strategy

Researchers and Become worked closely together to recruit participants. Recruitment of young people to interview was lower than hoped, but across the duration of the 2-year project, several steps were taken to increase participants. Become facilitated recruitment by advertising the evaluation via mailing lists and social media. Researchers contacted virtual school heads (n=180) and invited them to explore Propel, to complete the online survey, and to share the link with the young people they worked with. In addition, researchers contacted local virtual schools directly with a view to setting up focus groups of young people

to share their views of Propel. Named university contacts were emailed and invited to forward on Propel links to the young people they worked with. Fig. 1 (below) shows how survey respondents discovered Propel.

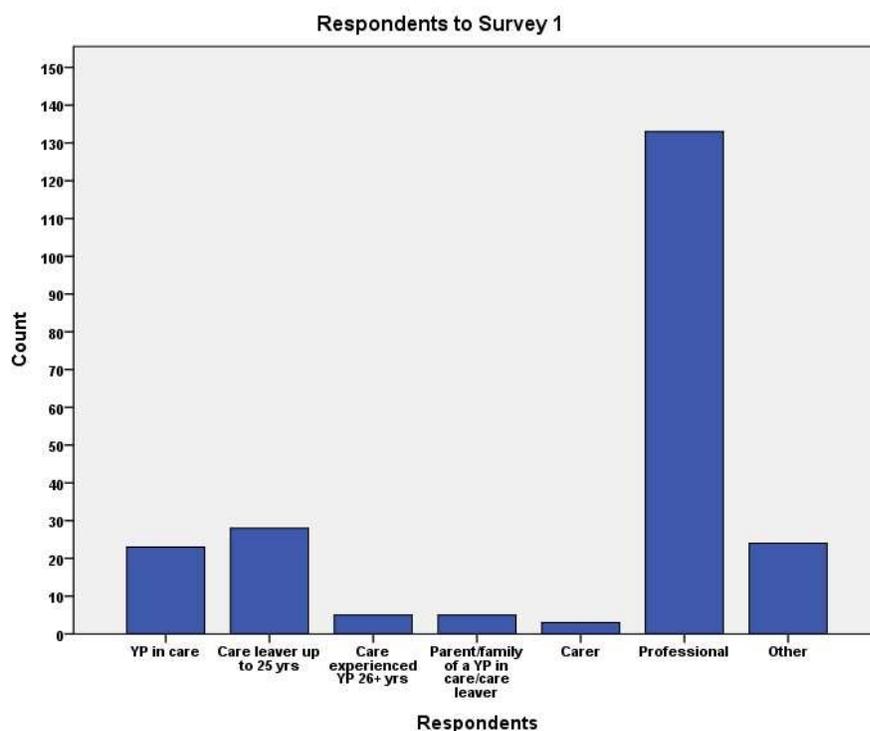
Fig. 1. Summary of responses to online survey 1, question 2 (i.e. How did you find out about Propel ?) (Facility to select more than one item).

Location	Number	Percentage
Social Media	22	9.2%
The Who Cares? Trust	87	36.3%
Colleague	30	12.5%
Friend	2	0.8%
Professional	49	20.4%
Other Key locations listed: Guardian online news Buttle Trust website UCAS Professional	50	20.8%

Participants: Online Survey 1

Overall there was a good response from Propel visitors completing Survey 1 (n=221) (see Fig.2 for a breakdown of respondents). Due to the nature of Propel, it was hoped that young people would account for the largest percentage of visitors to the site and respondents to the survey. However, in their work historically, Become have experienced greater success in reaching professionals directly than young people. The make-up of survey respondents is certainly in accordance with Become's experience, with professionals forming the largest group (n=134), and those defining themselves 'care leaver up to and including 25 years' forming the second largest group (n=28). Some identifying as 'Other' included descriptions in keeping with 'professional, 'carer', or 'care-experienced young person'. When added to figures with those identifying with respective predefined categories, a total of 154 professionals, and 59 care-experienced people (aged 16+ years) participated in Survey 1. It is important to note that survey respondents may not necessarily reflect site visitors, and as such the lower number of care-experienced people compared to professionals is not necessarily indicative of those accessing Propel.

Fig 2. Survey 1 Respondents



Participants: Online Survey 2 – Follow-up

Survey 1 respondents consenting to future contact (professionals & carers n=78; care-experienced people n=30) were emailed a link to Survey 2 approximately 3 -12 months after completing Survey 1. The response to Survey 2 was low in comparison to Survey 1, with 22 completions (professionals & carers n=16; young people n=6). However, considering the nature of it as a follow-up, assessing midterm impact of a website months after visiting, a lower response rate is perhaps to be anticipated. Survey 2 required participants to rate and to provide qualitative textual information about impact. The limited statistical data cannot be used to generalize to the population of site users/wider population. However, in spite of a low response rate, data (particularly textual data) provides a useful account of the ways in which Propel supported respondents' decision-making in the months after visiting the site.

Participants: Interviews

All care-experienced people who participated in Survey 1 and consented to future contact were invited to take part in a telephone interview. Due to a low response rate from care-experienced people, the partnership agreed to interview professionals and carers as well. In total, 23 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted: 11 interviews with 9 care-experienced young people, 10 with professionals,

and 2 with carers. Several interview participants were not recruited via completion of the online survey, but were referred in: 1 young person and their carer were referred via their LAC team, and another young person was referred via their contact with Become. Figs 3 and 4 (below) provide a more detailed overview of interview participants. When asked at interview, all care-experienced young people consented to future contact and agreed to being invited to a follow-up interview. As a result, 2 young people studying in HE participated in a follow-up interview (Jim and Adisa).

Fig 3: Participant Table - Interviews with young people in care and care leavers

Young People				
No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Circumstances at Time of Survey
1	Nicola	Female	27	Intending to apply to a HE course 2016-2017
2	Jim	Male	22	Intending to apply to a HE course 2016-2017
3	Adisa	Male	21	Already studying on a HE course (1 st year)
4	Ellen	Female	20	Intending to apply to a HE course 2017-2018
5	Carly	Female	17	Intending to apply to a HE course 2017-2018
6	Rebecca	Female	20	Intending to apply for a FE course 2016-2017
7	Kirsty	Female	17	Intending to apply to a HE course 2017-2018
8	Melissa	Female	Not provided	Referral Studying on a HE course (2016-2017 entry)
9	Mark	Male	17	Referral Intending to apply to a HE course 2017-2018

Fig 4: Participant Table - Interviews with professionals

Professionals and Carers				
No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Role
1	Cathy	Female	Not provided	Care leaver responsibility
2	Karen	Female	Not provided	Participation for care leavers
3	Tina	Female	Not provided	Careers Advisor
4	Paula	Female	38	Care Leavers Manager
5	Charlie	Male	60	Housing Support Worker
6	Bina	Female	Not provided	Leaving Care Team
7	Kelly	Female	52	Care Leaver and Professional - (Mentor)
8	Sandy	Female	Not provided	Outreach Officer
9	Cassie	Female	44	Foster Carer and teacher
10	Kim	Female	50	Manager of third sector agency for careexperienced young people
11	Laura	Female	Not provided	Education Consultant
12	Rose	Female	Not provided	Foster Carer and Professional

4. Analysis

Researchers conducted a statistical analysis of quantitative data from Surveys 1 and 2 using SPSS software. This evaluation acts as a pilot and, due to the small sample sizes, statistical data should be treated speculatively. Quantitative data provides a descriptive snapshot of respondents' views and, while it is indicative and suggests particular directions, findings should not be used to generalise to the wider population.

A thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcriptions and, where appropriate, textual survey data. Thematic Analysis (TA) was chosen for its capacity to broadly identify and capture participants' experiences and thoughts regarding particular phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our analysis is presented according to participant group (i.e. young people/professionals and carers). However, across the 2 groups there are themes which converge, and we note similarities where relevant throughout the analysis section.

4.1 Online Survey 1

Figs 5-7 (below) show the responses from professionals/carers and young people to key domains relating to confidence, decision-making, and knowledge of support. Graphs indicate positive responses with the majority of participants from the 2 groups either agreeing or strongly agreeing that Propel had instigated development in each of the 3 domains.

The majority of site visitors strongly agreed or agreed that Propel had increased their knowledge of support offered by HEIs (n=175) (79.1%) and knowledge of support available for care leavers to access HE (n=173) (78.4%). Similarly, the majority of visitors agreed or strongly agreed that Propel had increased their confidence to apply (young people n=39) (73.6%) or to assist others to apply to HE (professionals & carers n=121) (72%). Responses to the decision-making item were predominantly positive with 55.4% of professionals and carers and 56.6% of young people agreeing or strongly agreeing that Propel had helped them (young people), or a young person they work with (professionals and carers) to make a decision involving HE. However, decision-making showed the greatest variability of any of the domains with the highest proportion of 'unsure' responses (professionals and carers n= 50, 29.8%) (young people n=15, 28.3%).

Fig 5. Increased confidence to apply to HE

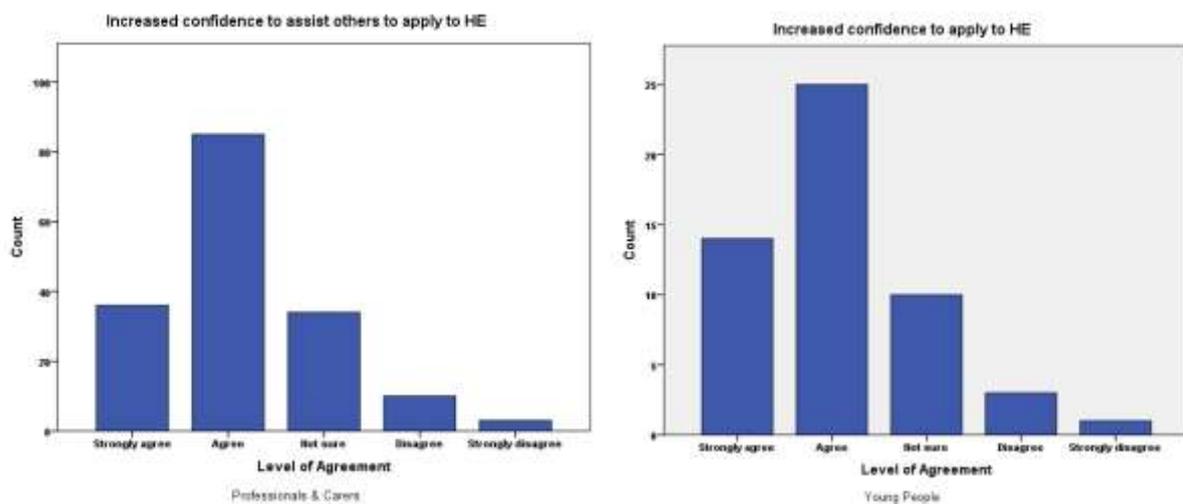


Fig 6. Supported decision making to apply

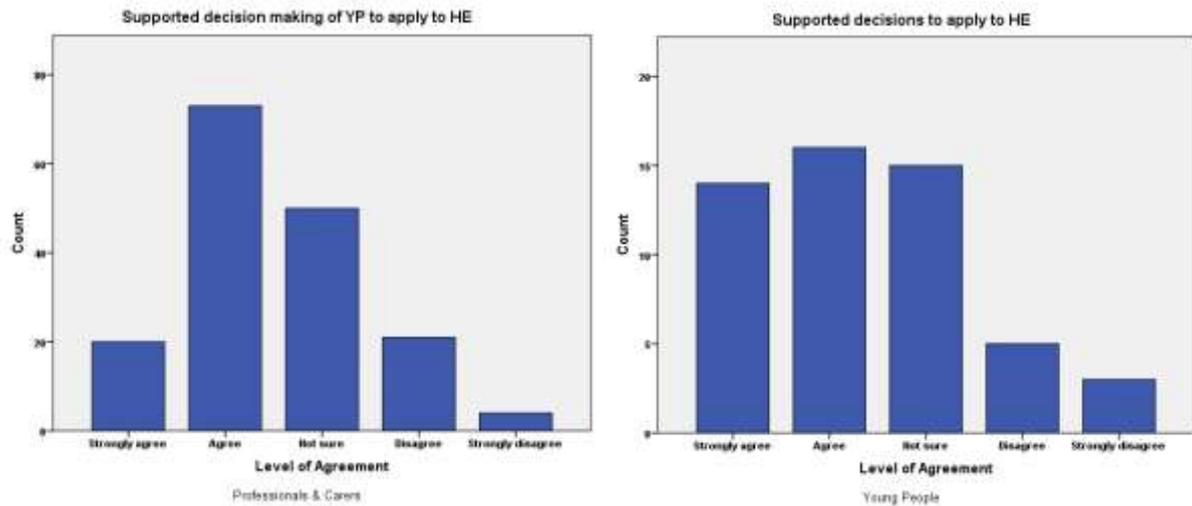
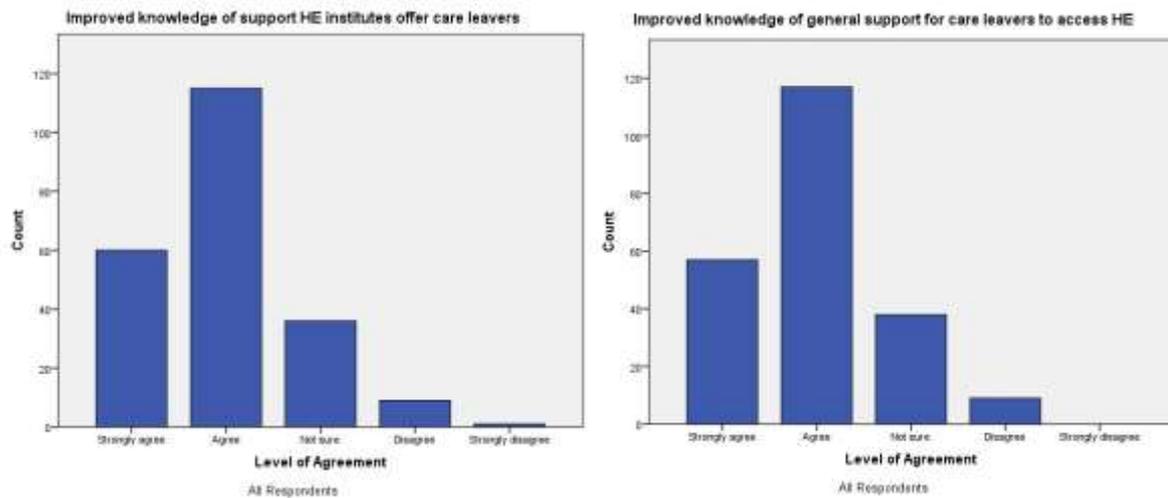


Fig 7. Improved knowledge of support



4.2. Online Survey 2

Findings from qualitative and quantitative survey data are reported below:

4.2.1 Quantitative Findings:

The majority of young people participating in Survey 2 agreed or strongly agreed that since using Propel they had made decisions involving HE (n=5), that their ambitions had changed since visiting the site (n=4), and that Propel had helped them to feel more confident about applying to HE (n=5). Responses from professionals and carers mirror these findings, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing that Propel had supported the decision-making of a young person they worked with (n=10), and that Propel had helped them to feel more confident about assisting young people to apply to HE (n=11). Deviating from the responses of young people, only 5 professionals and carers agreed or strongly agreed to being aware of an increase in a young person/s ambition to go into HE as a result

of Propel – the majority of respondents (n=8) selected ‘not sure’ for this item. For frequency tables and graphs relating to survey 2, see Appendices 6-7.

4.2.2 Qualitative Findings - Young People:

A representative selection of young people’s qualitative responses to key survey items (highlighted in bold text) are provided, below:

Since using Propel, I have made decision/s involving higher education:

It has allowed me to better understand the support I am [entitled] to when I go to university.

I have decided to apply for university thanks to the information I have read on the website.

I have finalised my degree course choices between a few subject areas - Propel + contact with unis /UCAS/uni websites/THE & Guardian rankings/The Student Room.

Propel gave me a named contact of someone that had a wealth of information that just made the prospect of getting into and going to uni possible.

I have been able to compare different universities and the level of support that is offered for when I make my application in October.

Here, some of the key aspects of Propel are valued by young people. The inclusion of a ‘named contact’ in HEIs is designed to provide a key person for accessing support and for posing any questions and queries to. By its nature, it also seeks to personalise young people’s experience of university in what otherwise might be construed as a daunting institution. Propel aims to include a named contact for each of the universities included on the site. This resource is clearly valued by the fourth survey respondent (above), who feels that the designated person not only provided additional information, but showed university to be possible and achievable. In linking young people with designated university contacts, Propel is helping to promote HE as a viable option for careexperienced young people and helping them to make informed decisions. According to these responses from young people, Propel has been influential in helping them to select universities, to finalise choices and to see HE as a feasible option. However, several still felt unsure and perceived a lack of individualised and direct support:

Because sometime I feel that someone should support me to strengthen my decision-making.

Still don't know. Am nervous about doing it.

Propel helped me to make a decision about HE:

Propel gave me great contacts and insight into various levels of support available to care leavers across a number of universities.

I have applied for a higher education course.

Allowed me to compare universities in terms of support systems.

It has allowed me to fully understand the support I could access.

The ability to ‘cross-check’ the support offered by individual HEIs in one site seemed to be valued by young people, some of whom indicated that it helped their selection process. As discussed, and as the first quote (above) illustrates, the inclusion of contacts for designated HEI persons and external agencies on Propel were also considered useful, acting as a sign-post and providing additional information about HE support.

Since using Propel, my ambitions to go into higher education have changed:

My academic and career ambitions are still going strong and if anything they have been strengthened in part due to The Who Cares? Trust helpline and Propel.

It's made me more excited about it and feel it is something that might be possible, because I didn't think it was ever an option for someone like me. I'm just really nervous.

I have always been determined to attend high education and get a degree. Propel has allowed me to have a better understanding about the support I could be offered.

Reading success stories of others encouraged me to try my best to be successful.

For the first respondent (above), Become modes of support assisted in raising aspiration. The Become care advice line and Propel in tandem were significant for this young person in ‘strengthening’ their academic and career ambitions. For the last respondent, the stories on Propel of care leavers who successfully accessed HE, acted as a key source of inspiration and encouragement, motivating them to achieve. In one way or another, the majority of young people made reference to the possibility and achievability of university. This was a theme that echoed throughout the Survey 2 data set, and from their responses, as represented below, most considered their confidence to have been strengthened and supported by Propel:

Since using Propel, I feel more confident about applying to a higher education course:

Propel gave me the realisation that University is very much a possibility for care leavers/experienced people. That realisation in my case at least [h]as helped spur on and grow my confidence in applying and also eventually attending uni.

My confidence has increased.

Reassurance that support would be available.

My confidence has increased because I now understand the support I could be offered.

Young people’s textual survey responses indicate that for most respondents, Propel positively influenced decision-making, increased confidence, and supported aspirations to go into HE in the mid-term. Importantly, young people perceived that HE was a real and achievable possibility for them and, based on information provided by Propel, were able to make informed choices about universities, with

an understanding about entitlements and support provisions of specific institutions. While some continued to feel anxious, others were buoyed by Propel's inspirational stories, the ways care-experienced young people were represented, and were excited about the prospect of going to university.

4.2.3 Survey 2 – Qualitative Findings - Professionals & Carers:

A representative selection of professionals' and carers' qualitative responses to key survey items (highlighted in bold text) are provided below:

Since using Propel, a young person I support has made a decision/s involving higher education:

Young person already had intentions to go into HE but needed support in narrowing down options.

YP decided to apply for degree in Nursing - she was much encouraged by the info on the website re support she would receive, and contact was made with the designated person at the uni who arranged an individual visit.

I encourage my young people to access Propel website which helps them to decide the university they will attend.

Echoing the young people's comments, professionals and carers felt that Propel had positively influenced decision-making, supporting the process of narrowing down options and selecting universities. For the second respondent (above), information included on Propel acted as motivator for the young person they work with, and being able to access the details of a designated person, using Propel led to a university visit. Another professional valued that Propel enabled a kind of 'one-stop-shop' for young people to compare the support provisions of individual HEIs all in one place:

Everything is "under one roof" and can be found easily on this site without having to go to many different university pages to look things up. Really Helpful.

While some professionals informed the young people they worked with/cared for about Propel, encouraging them to explore it, they felt that the stigma of low attainment, coupled with concerns of isolation and not 'fitting in', heavily impinged on young people's capacity to envision HE as achievable:

I introduced the idea to several clients and got some response, the difficult part is trying to engender enthusiasm in a young person who feels they don't belong in higher education.

One professional considered that Propel helped to break through young people's concerns about isolation and enabled them to make informed choices based on the support they *could* access:

A lot of young care leavers are wary of taking up HE if they think they are going to be isolated, and with this support they are now applying.

It would be helpful to understand if/how you use Propel in your work with young people:

I have introduced it to 3 YP on home visits and then they have looked at it again in their own time. V positive feedback and experience.

The information on HE is useful for young people and the handbook, a great resource.

All the young people who have used the website have found it useful, including those who have been unsure of accessing further education.

The above quotes suggest that professionals are introducing Propel to the young people they work with and are receiving a positive response in doing so. Interestingly, the last quote infers that even young people considering further education (FE) are finding Propel helpful. While Propel is geared towards helping people at the point of HE entry, this last quote perhaps points to its utility and value as a tool for career planning – further evaluation might help to evidence this.

The Propel website has helped me to support a young person/s I work with to decide and apply to a HE course:

YP has applied, been interviewed and offered a place. Propel helped them decide by easy to access info.

All my young people have been notified of Propel and encouraged to refer to Propel to assist their decisions. Those that utilise the website find it very useful as it helps with their decisions.

The majority of professionals/carers responding to Survey 2 considered Propel to have been influential in the decision-making of the young people they work with. The first quote (above), illustrates that the website actively supported the identification and selection process.

Since using Propel, I have seen a young person's ambition to go into higher education increase:

From an outright no to serious contemplation with one client.

Some young people never gave any thought to HE. However now that they are aware of additional support some of them are now considering HE.

The main factor that has persuaded a young person to take the HE route is their career goal and financial support available.

YP did not think she had ability to go to HE and was v reassured by visit arranged through designated person. YP made this contact herself using info [from] Propel website. She was v much encouraged by support on offer.

The professionals/carers (above) clearly articulate some touching examples of how Propel has increased ambition and confidence of the young people they work with. Young people who consider university to be out of their reach, or who never even envisaged university as an option, are contemplating HE and actively applying as a result of Propel. This evidences Propel as a hugely powerful and important tool for care-experienced young people and for those working with them in education/career advisory capacities.

Since using Propel, I feel more confident about assisting young people to apply for higher education:

I feel that the website provides a very comprehensive guide to the support available, in one easy accessible place.

The website enables me to show clients that this is a very real option for them.

I feel that I am more likely to encourage y/p to take up HE knowing that there is support there for them and they are not being left to their own devices.

It is all in one place and can compare availability. AND I don't have to worry whether the info is still up to date or remember to carry it with me (Like I did with the HE handbook from Who Cares- although this was excellent).

Not only does Propel seem to be supporting young people, but it also appears to be engendering a sense of confidence in professionals, arming them with resources and up-to-date information for use in their work with young people. 2 of the professionals/carers (above) valued Propel for the efficiency it provides in having resources in one place, which presumably reduces the need for time-consuming cross-checking of multiple websites. Making reference to the Who Cares? Trust HE Handbook, the last respondent (above) suggests that Propel is a development of an already 'excellent' Become resource. This mirrors the sentiments of some professionals/carers interviewed, who valued the capabilities of Propel as a web-based resource to provide the latest information to people, compared to hardcopies which have a tendency to date quickly.

4.3. Semi-Structured Interviews with Young People, Professionals & Carers

4.3.1 Interviews with Care Leavers and Young People in Care

While interviews centred on Propel, participants also oriented discussion towards their current and historic experiences of education. Their reflections provide valuable insights into the contexts that hindered and challenged their educational progress, as well as the resilience with which they overcame adversities. While this data is a slight divergence from the evaluation of Propel, researchers felt it important to include it within this report in order to highlight, as other reports have done (Jackson, 2005; Driscoll, 2013), the difficulties and disadvantages care-experienced young people face in education. In addition, the rich information shared by participants enables us to assess how Propel is useful to young people, not only in practical terms, but also what the availability of resources means to them and of how they locate it within their personal and educational journeys. 5 themes emerged from the interview data set with young people (see Fig 8 below for summary). We entitle these: (i) *Experiences en route to HE*; (ii) *Support in HE: Expectation Vs Practice*; (iii) *Normalising HE*; (iv) *Appearance, navigability & content*; and finally, (v) *Recommendations*. The first 2 themes represent young people's experiences in education, while the last 3 directly relate to participants' perceptions of Propel.

Fig 8: Key themes from interviews with care-experienced young people

Theme Table – Interviews with Care-Experienced Young People			
No.	Theme	Description	Example
1	Experiences en route to HE	Theme 1 relates to the young people’s experiences en route to HE, the challenges they experienced, as well as their capacity to utilise support and resources, and to work towards achieving their ambitions.	<p><i>Jim: My first GCSE exam was a maths GCSE. It was on my sixteenth birthday... It was also the first day I was moved by social services into semi-dependent accommodation.</i></p> <p><i>Ellen: I was just falling behind on my other subjects and then it was beginning to stress me out quite a bit and, with the placement move, it was just too much</i></p>
2	Support in HE: Expectation Vs Practice	Theme 2 relates to the young people’s expectations of support pre-HE and their experiences in practice at university.	<p><i>Adisa: I’m very close with all people, you know, the staff who look after care leavers and stuff at the university</i></p> <p><i>Jim: it wasn't until I'd done the drop in that anyone offered me any kind of support, help or advocacy or advice or anything.</i></p>
3	Normalising HE	Regardless of the stage they were at, the young people interviewed valued the way Propel framed HE as being within reach for care experienced young people.	<p><i>Did the website change any views that you had about care experienced young people in higher education?</i></p> <p><i>Nicola: Yeah it did, because I know a few people I knew from being in care did go on to university, but not very many. The majority went straight into work or having children and things. So it's nice to see that it's probably more common than what you think.</i></p>
4	Appearance, navigability & content	In response to interview questions, young people reflected on how user-friendly they felt Propel was, and shared their thoughts on the accessibility and value of information provided.	<p><i>Ellen: [...] it's really easy to read and stuff about the different bits of information, which I think is the main thing. So no, not really.</i></p> <p><i>Nicola: I like it. I like the layout and I like the colouring.</i></p>

5	Recommendations	Young people made recommendations about how the site could be improved. Suggestions included information in different formats (such as video), links to other agencies, assistance with writing personal statements, chat room facilities and more prominent links to twitter and facebook.	<i>Adisa: An example of personal statements because most people, young people, need personal statement.</i> <i>Rebecca: I think it's quite good, I think it just needs more sort of publicity so more people are aware of it.</i>
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Theme 1 Experiences en route to HE

In spite of the barriers they had experienced, young people interviewed appeared to be hugely driven and determined to achieve. They were eager to engage in personal development, and most spoke about extremely difficult and challenging periods during their lives, which they worked through with a great sense of fortitude and resilience. They drew on resources available to them to work through what some perceived to be a lack of support, disruption, and low expectations to arrive at the point of making decisions about HE. This sense of resilience and motivation did not only strike researchers, but was also voiced by one of the professionals interviewed when reflecting on her work with young people. These findings are in accordance with other authors, such as Jackson (2005), who suggested that participants in her research *'were highly motivated to do well at school'* (p.xi), and Driscoll (2013), who reports *'[young people] all displayed an impressive level of motivation and commitment in pursuing their education and career plans in the face of significant practical and emotional challenges'* (p.147). Theme 1 relates to the young people's experiences en route to HE, the challenges they experienced, as well as their capacity to utilise support and resources, and to work towards achieving their ambitions.

The majority of care-experienced young people we spoke to were actively working towards and pursuing HE, and all of them had experienced barriers and obstacles in one form or another en route. For Rebecca, a lack of confidence proved to be a considerable hindrance to her progression:

Rebecca: I've thought about [applying] and then I didn't in the end [...] I thought it's too big of a thing and then I got too scared to do it and I didn't in the end. But I applied for the Open University but I'm not going to go ahead I don't think this year, I think I'm going to wait until next year.

Int: [...] so when did you start thinking about going to HE?

Rebecca: It's something I've always wanted to do and then it's been since I was about 16, so the past sort of like four or five years I've been thinking about it properly, but I've never really had the confidence to pursue it, kind of thing.

Contrary to representations of care-experienced young people as low in aspiration, clearly apparent in Rebecca's quote is a desire to study, an aspiration which also resonated with the accounts of other young people we spoke to. What holds Rebecca back is not a lack of aspiration, but a lack of confidence and feeling 'too scared'.

It was not uncommon to hear from young people and professionals about the disruption imposed on children's lives at crucial points during their education. For some, GCSEs were marked by changes of placement, changes to care arrangements and relocation not only of home, but also of geographic area and school. These disruptions, in some cases, had a considerable impact on education, as Jim explains:

Jim: My first GCSE exam was a maths GCSE. It was on my sixteenth birthday... It was also the first day I was moved by social services into semi-dependent accommodation. So that just kind of goes to show how much people actually don't consider how much stress there is when a transition is going on. So I ended up with no GCSEs, even though I was estimated in some cases to get A, like in religion education and stuff. I was expected to do quite well but I just didn't. My benefits hadn't even been sorted out.*

Like Jim, Ellen was relocated during her GCSEs:

Ellen: I was just falling behind on my other subjects and then it was beginning to stress me out quite a bit and, with the placement move, it was just too much. Because I got moved out of my local area, it wasn't realistic for me to attend school and then I had to wait for home tutoring to be put in place. That took forever and a day, so I was kind of self...I don't know the word for it, like teaching myself. I was attempting to teach/revise myself.

Unable to travel to her school and without a home tutor, Ellen taught herself. For Ellen, limiting the damage to her education continues to be a source of pride:

Ellen: I got three GCSEs. So I got my English, my maths and my science, which I'm kind of like—I know it's not a lot, but I'm quite proud of because I got moved around the time of my GCSEs, so all my education was a bit kind of messed up. So even just to be able to kind of sit three exams was kind of a big thing for me.

Without her determination and resourcefulness, Ellen may not have restricted damage to her education, and may not have achieved the 3 GCSEs that she did do. The kind of disruption that Jim and Ellen experienced at critical points in their education conveys a message that their education and their futures are not worth protecting, that protocol will be followed regardless of the ramifications it might have on young people's lives, or of the potential long-term costs to society a lack of investment in their education/career may have.

Ill-informed of options

In keeping with findings by Starks (2013), some young people interviewed were not aware of their options, or of the support available to them in FE or HE. While some professionals interviewed described the support provided by local authorities and universities as variable, it is still anticipated that young people in care and care leavers would be provided with basic information in relation to their entitlement. However, some of the young people we interviewed had no knowledge of the support they could access until they visited Propel:

Ellen: I'm interested in going to university but I'm not kind of sure what kind of things are available for me. [...] The support and things like the extra kind of funding you can apply for and things like that.

During interview, 2 young people actively questioned why HE had not been discussed as an option during their early education, as Jim illustrates:

I don't know why I'd not thought of it or the careers adviser hadn't mentioned it along the way. While Mark felt encouraged to explore HE as an option and was sign-posted to resources, to a certain extent he appeared to be left to his own devices to undertake research into financial support:

Int: [...] And how about the careers teacher? Were they able to give you any information about that kind of stuff, finances and support that you might get?

Mark: A little bit but he said really to go search it up and stuff and look at different information.

While sign-posting is useful, the risk is that it could evoke feelings of rejection, and leave some young people feeling overwhelmed and alone in their decision-making.

As might be expected, most of the young people we interviewed voiced concerns about the financial implications associated with HE (such as long-term debt and managing finances), as Kirsty exemplifies:

Kirsty: [...] I was a bit worried of how I was going to pay for food and everything, other than a job.

There seemed to be a disparity in the support participants were aware of, were offered, and/or accessed. Mark talked about the utility of Propel, and of having information readily available for care-experienced young people. In his comment (below) he alludes to inequalities in care and the resultant variability in young people's outcomes, knowledge and self-belief:

Int: So do you think it's helpful to have information specifically for young people that have been in care?

Mark: Yeah. [...] It will be useful because especially, this doesn't really include myself but some people in care don't get told like they can get into uni and stuff, they think, they don't feel like they can do it and they don't get information on it then. But I think having this, like this source of information would be useful for people in care.

As Mark suggests (below), it was only when he accessed Propel that he felt better informed about financial entitlements and reassured that he would be able to cope financially in HE:

Mark: I found out about like the, like the loans and stuff and student loans and that, you don't have to pay them off as soon as you [inaudible], it's like once you get a good income [...] Like I don't need to worry about finances and stuff.

Int: OK, so was that previously a concern?



Mark: Yeah, so I was like, 'how I was going to get money for uni and stuff?'

For some care-experienced young people not aware of their entitlements, misconceptions and misinformation regarding repaying university fees could prevent them from looking into HE, or it could impact on the route they take towards and through HE. For example, believing that she would be better off financially, Nicola (a mother), decided to undertake a distance-learning HE programme on a part-time basis over 6 years alongside part-time work:

Int: So you're hoping to go through the Open University?

Nicola: Yes, I have to, just because of my circumstances. There's no way I can go full-time and do it at university.

Nicola continues:

Int: [...] are you able to talk a little bit about that, the kind of barriers that you're experiencing around going to full-time education?

Nicola: Yeah, of course. So my main one would be I work. I only work part-time and I've got a daughter at home and I'm on my own dealing with that. So, time-wise, I couldn't commit to doing that and being able to do both.

When interviewed, Nicola seemed unaware of *all* options available to her and perceived part-time study as her only option ('*I have to*'). Being enabled to make informed decisions around all possible educational pathways is necessary to prevent care-experienced young people making ill-suited choices, choices which could impact their and their families' lives in the mid- to long-term. Mark suggests that young people should be made aware of Propel and the resources it has to offer early on, when they enter into care:

Int: So you're suggesting that when people first come into care, they're told about the website?

Mark: Yeah. [...] Say like, even like say like a 15-year-old's been put into care, even like a 15-year-old, they should be like told about it when going into like the 16 plus and stuff. [...] instead of leaving it to when you're older, it gives them enough time to think about what they want to do and different options and stuff.

Mark views Propel as having the power to sow a seed, to encourage young people to consider HE, and to help them prepare. Even in her early schooling, Rebecca felt that HE was precluded and, with it, a wealth of occupations and possible futures:

Int: [...] was it ever discussed with you that HE would be an option for you? So sort of early on in your schooling, you know, GCSE level, that kind of time?

Rebecca: No because I wasn't really one of the bright ones and they focused more at my school on the fast track people, so more on the people that they wanted to try and get there and the ones that they thought were going to be there, [...] I wasn't really told that I could get anywhere

In some senses here, Rebecca is describing a kind of 'path-setting' by those working closely with her. These perceived constrictions and limitations imposed on her at such a crucial time in the formation of her educational and occupational identity, have apparently been disabling, not only to her academically, but also to her self-belief and self-construction. It is a testament to her tenacity that in spite of this foreclosing on possible futures, she maintains a desire – no matter how fragile or unplanned – to have a career in an occupation requiring training at HE. Similarly, in spite of her overwhelming fears and anxieties, which have in the past led to her leaving a course, she still holds some hope and positivity about entering into HE:

Rebecca: Yeah, I mean the idea of going is also exciting because you get a lot of prospects at the end of it and I like to learn things so it's exciting to know that you can learn those few things about the subject. And making new friends is good as well and just sort of having the life experience. I'd quite like to gain just that, even if that's all you gain, I could gain I think.

Being able to envision that a particular goal is possible is key to being able to work towards and achieve it (Dweck, 1986; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In Rebecca's case, support to envisage and plan her career and to see what might be possible with incremental steps, might perhaps have benefitted her. Had she had a champion or mentor providing education/career guidance earlier, perhaps she would not be in a position in her twenties, uncertain about her future and fearful about making decisions involving her career.

In direct contrast, Melissa felt encouraged to see HE as a possibility, and describes receiving sustained support throughout the application process during sixth form:

Melissa: Yeah, they were quite helpful actually, they gave us quite a lot of like sources that we could go to and have a look at, they helped us with our personal statements, so I once I wrote like one or two drafts, they would take them back, have a look over them, give them back, give us feedback so we could work on them until we submitted it. And then they had a look over our UCAS, like the whole application just to make sure that everything was correct so we wouldn't like delay the process in getting it sent back and all that. They made sure we applied for like student finance on time, they were quite good at that.

Carly entered into a FE course under the impression that it would enable entry into her desired HE programme, only to discover that it would not provide sufficient qualifications:

Int: [...] how did you go about deciding those specific subjects that you're studying now? Did you get any guidance?

Carly: No, at the time I didn't know like they weren't [recognised], they weren't like college, universities didn't see them as an A Level, I just went along with them but when I was looking for universities, I think like, maybe four months ago, I started realising that a lot of them don't see this as A Levels.

Carly suggests that there is a disconnect between some FE and HE programmes. Accessing Propel enabled Carly to research HE entry requirements, which in turn prompted a realisation that the FE course she was enrolled on fell short. Being unaware of possible onward progression of her course suggests that she was not informed of its limitations. It also alludes to a lack of support with her education/career planning. The result of insufficient knowledge of educational pathways, and particularly of the most effective and efficient ways to fulfil HE entry requirements, results in an interruption and delay to Carly's educational and career pathway. It also means that she will have to negotiate the application process and transition to college for a second time. While Carly does not desist, this kind of disruption could prove to be an obstacle too far for some young people, and could result in them turning their back on education altogether.

Aside from basic information about onward career progression not being communicated, Carly was also not provided with information and guidance around FE application deadlines, despite receiving some support from her local authority care provider:

Int: I'm just interested in the process of changing colleges, are you getting any kind of support with that?

Carly: Because I'm in care with [locality], a lady from [locality] has met me, she has helped with my application but yeah, that's it. But the thing is, because I didn't know there was a deadline to start like enrolling at different colleges, I gave my application really late so I haven't really heard back from them [...] I missed the deadline for applications so I'm one of the last people to put my application in.

A lack of attendance to annual deadlines could have detrimental consequences, including a moratorium or abandonment of education, discontinuity and gaps in Curricula Vitae, economic changes and financial implications. Considering this, there is a sense in which it would be helpful for care-experienced young people showing an interest in pursuing HE, if professionals were resourced to enable a 'striking while the iron's hot' approach in order to reduce delays and avoid young people being discouraged. Clearly though, this would need to be balanced with allowing prospective students time to make informed decisions around future careers, courses and locales.

As might be anticipated, all of the young people we spoke to had experienced difficulties and challenges in one form or another. However, many of the setbacks and delays to their education seemed preventable, and simply required the provision of basic information and guidance. So often, care-experienced young people are tarred with having low aspiration, and yet each individual that we

talked to held dreams and aspirations for their futures, and were hugely motivated to work towards and achieve them. Since setbacks have the potential to impact so heavily on careexperienced young people's lives in the short-, mid- and long-term, a more sustained and consistent approach to providing basic information and career planning as a minimum is essential, in order that young people can make *informed* decisions. As the young people's comments suggest, Propel is helping to address these kinds of gaps, but more support is required from educational institutions (at every level), and by those involved in the care and wellbeing of young people in care/care leavers (such as social workers and personal advisors).

Theme 2 Support in HE: Expectations Vs Practice

3 young people (Jim, Melissa, and Adisa) were enrolled on HE programmes at the point of interview. Theme 2 relates to their pre-HE expectations of support versus their experiences at university.

Based on his prior research, Jim anticipated that he would receive support from the Named Contact once enrolled at his selected university. However, as he illustrates, in practice this support was not as forthcoming as initially anticipated:

Jim: [...] I imagine that relationship [with Named Contact] would be a bit more present and maybe they need to make themselves known to me, whereas that doesn't really happen. I've got a call first term and the only interactions I've had with them or as a care leaver in my university have been when I've gone to the wellbeing team to request support, it's not really been made available to me. [...] I did have someone to contact prior to coming to university but that just kind of almost, it felt like it fizzled away, like all the contact that I had with them had just stopped as soon as I started.

Jim highlights a disparity here between support in university marketing and canvassing, and that in practice. Become base their Propel university webpages on the information provided by each HEI, and as such, they are reliant on them supplying accurate information about what they *actually* offer students. Jim's quote might also indicate a discrepancy between what HEIs *aim* to offer, and what they are *resourced* to offer – perhaps suggesting a need for additional resources of named contact provisions.

Melissa, also in HE, echoes Jim's experience:

Melissa: Well I feel like one thing that it kind of lacks that I'm used to, like there's usually sort of an outreach where they kind of, I don't know they kind of, they come after you and make sure that you're OK, like rather than you having to pursue them when you have a problem, like [inaudible] kind of, usually they like in sixth form, the named person would make themselves known [...] But then with universities, I don't really feel like that's a thing at all, like I haven't even met the person, the named contact. Sort of, it's more or less take a proactive, just like pursue it yourself.

It took Jim's direct request for help to elicit support:

Jim: it wasn't until I'd done the drop-in that anyone offered me any kind of support, help or advocacy or advice or anything. But it took me getting to a point where I felt hopeless and helpless and needed it to go and get it. [...] If I had consistent support, I wouldn't have really gotten to that point, I would have just been cruising by [...]

While Melissa feels well supported by her own network, she envisages that without that support and that of the named contact, she might struggle:

Melissa: I kind of handle things like myself or with my friends or my family, I don't necessarily deal with things and say I'm a care leaver so I'll go to the person that's assigned for care leavers, you know what I mean. I just kind of have my own support network but I feel like if I didn't have those, I'd probably be struggling because they don't really do a great deal.

In contrast to Melissa and Jim, Adisa reports feeling well supported at university, as he illustrates, reflecting on the induction process:

Adisa: [...] if you need it, they will show you the place where you need to go if you need it, to speak to someone or if you've got a problem with your assignments or if you like to make friends, they just show you, you know, in your induction and yeah. They offer you inductions that will tell you everything.

Adisa goes on to reflect on his positive relationship with support staff:

Int: [...] are you in contact with the named contact for care leavers at your university?

Adisa: Yes, yeah, I go, yes. Basically I'm very close with them, I'm very close with all people, you know, the staff who look after care leavers and stuff at the university. [...] We know each other very well [...]

Again, in contrast to Melissa and Jim, Adisa felt that support was forthcoming, with the named contact making the first step to get in touch, and maintaining contact in writing on an annual basis:

Adisa: They contact you first. [...] They will, before you go start university, they send letter, they send you a letter, how you are eligible, about University, what kind of support you will get, you will get, receive a letter. Like every year you receive a letter.

The contrasting experiences of these young people in HE perhaps illuminates variability in the support universities offer. Not only was Jim required to be proactive in contacting HE support staff, but when trying to negotiate access to mental health services alone, he became entangled in bureaucracy:

Int: And in terms of emotional support, is that available at all for you?

Jim (follow-up): That's probably the bit that I'm struggling on at the minute, so I've had to reregister with GPs and stuff like that, [...] my GP had referred me to the Community Mental Health Team, they'd rejected my referral. I was told today that because of my being based out of area, and I mean that's a kind of technical thing that you would imagine happens everywhere with boundaries and stuff like that, but it was just the fact that I am actually in my student halls [...] they're just halls that are so far away, and then I'm kind of having to deal with the rigmarole of the extra work around that rather than it getting explained away or something. So it's just like little things really like that and just the time it takes to get stuff done, I know that is a wider kind of problem.

Jim found himself falling behind with his academic work, and his attempt to access mental health support was met with rejection. Jim attempted to gain control of his spiralling situation, but perceiving his LAC team to have taken a backseat, and apathy from the HEI named support, it unsurprisingly left him feeling alone and frustrated:

Int: [...] Have you got anyone that can kind of be an advocate in that and kind of sort of help you through it?

Jim: Not really, I mean my wellbeing team are quite good in linking me in, like they were the ones that said, you need to register at a doctor, it's going to make stuff a lot easier. They want kind of letters about, one was to be able to be allowed with extensions and stuff [inaudible] to be able to apply for like support funding so I can get kind of a lot more intensive essay support and stuff. But apart from that, not really, I just thought my support worker has taken more of a backseat step now, and it's kind of more like fending for yourself even more so. I mean I was fending for myself anyway but it's kind of like a bit more structured fending for myself I guess.

Below, Melissa appeared well informed about the financial support available to her and received a number of resources at university:

Melissa: Yeah, at [university] I think they have a normal sort of bursary for I think low income people, not from the university but from [charity] and they have a scholarship they offered me, that included accommodation with the rent covered and also a bursary as well. Yeah.

The disparity could, amongst other factors, mark a difference in support available in geographic areas. Either way, discrepancies equate to an inequality of knowledge transfer and, in turn, of HE access. Furthermore, they illustrate a need for greater awareness-raising and publicity around available provisions in order that *all* care-experienced young people are well informed and knowledgeable about their entitlements. Disparities echo those elicited by the child-centred 'readiness to learn' practice in operation in mainstream schooling, which perhaps suggests that it continues into FE and HE. Interestingly, Jim alludes to the 'readiness' approach in HE in relation to learning and accessing support:

Jim (follow-up): I guess it's the delivery of the support that is kind of, it's total different change so it kind of explained to us about the differences in education between university and school and how in school and college to some degree information is pushed to the student and the student can then gravitate towards it, whereas at university it's kind of just put out there and you're expected to pull it towards you, and I feel like that kind of follows through with the feeling towards support as well, it's kind of expected for you to grab out and reach out for it, than it is kind of laid out for you and stuff like that. So, maybe that's just a part of, my part of being a bit naive or, I'm not sure.

'Readiness' is at its core a meritocratic approach, criticisms of which are that it is wide open to reproducing rather than tackling existing social inequalities by favouring those resourced and enabled to be 'ready' to learn (Burman, 2008). In order to help care-experienced young people, like Jim, who have experienced discontinuity and disruption to their early education (and poor educational outcomes as a result), and who may be less inclined to take a proactive stance to accruing entitlements, support needs to be delivered in ways that engage young people and prevent them falling through gaps. Support needs to be aimed at promoting 'readiness' and 'preparedness' in order that they can compete with their (non-)care-experienced peers to work towards and succeed in HE (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007).

All 3 people we spoke to in HE reflected on things they were finding difficult, and particularly on the things they perceived as potential barriers to their education, as Jim illustrates (below):

Jim (follow-up): [...] my tenancy in my halls is for 51 weeks and 5 days, so just short of a full year, the majority of students actually have tenancies which are around 34 to 43 weeks, so they're more typical students that have kind of home accommodation. And it's kind of a trend that I've noticed throughout student life, there is a kind of structured idea of what a student looks like and what a student's life looks like, so everything I've applied for has, what's your term time address and what's your actual home address, for me my term time address is my home. Just like when Christmas time just went, everyone was asking me, oh are you going home, and I kind of just made a point to say, I live here, this is my home, so it's just that's a big differential and that kind of has a knock-on effect.

Reflecting on university structures and services and 'typical' students, Jim articulates a sense of feeling at odds, of not fitting in. This sense of being different, of feeling marginalised, indicates a lack of support aimed at integration, and a lack of emotional support to cope with the culture of university life. Feeling that university is not a place for them is potentially a key deterrent to care-experienced young people. For those, like Jim, who move beyond their concerns and make the leap into HE, there is a risk that once there, if their fears are realised and they are isolated and marginalised and not adequately supported, they will drop out. The young people's experiences in HE indicate a need for a greater level of continuity in the support promised in some university marketing campaigns and that offered in practice.

Theme 3 Normalising HE

Regardless of the stage they were at, the young people we spoke to valued the way Propel framed HE as being within their reach. Some were especially enthused by the success stories of young people in HE:

Adisa: It's just I read some other young people's experience, their stories, some other young people's stories on the website. So I read that and it gave me more motivation.[...]

Int: Why do you think it's important to hear other young people's stories?

Adisa: It's very important. Crucial. Very crucial because, like I said, it gives you more motivation to see other young people doing better. Why not you don't follow them? It was very important for me. Very, very important.

Even though Adisa had already made the commitment to apply to university prior to accessing Propel, he still drew inspiration from the stories of others in HE, and they acted as a 'crucial' source of motivation and hope. Others suggested that Propel represented HE not only as achievable, but also as 'normal':

Jim: The website makes it feel more like it's a normal thing.

Ellen: Some of the stories on there of real young people that have kind of done it and realising that just because you might not have had the best start in life doesn't mean that you can't achieve as much as what anybody else does.

Mark: [...] it made it feel like it's more possible for me.

Rebecca echoes the above sentiments:

Rebecca: I didn't realise that it was so widely a possibility, like I thought only a few people did it, I didn't realise that it's quite a normal thing to do.

Propel seemed to play an important role in conveying messages of hope to the young people interviewed, and even in the cases where they had already made decisions to apply to HE, or were enrolled at university (like Adisa), the success stories provided a means of understanding others' experiences in HE, as well as enabling them to envisage positive futures for themselves.

Informing HE decisions

Young people reflected on how Propel (in)directly helped them to make decisions about HE. It made some aware of the practical, material or emotional support they would be entitled to, and assisted others to finalise their decision:

Jim: I don't think it helped me make a particular decision. Oh no, perhaps it did because it provided the way to make the decision. It provided me with the contact details of the uni that I wanted to go to. So in that sense it did help physically.

Jim envisages an indirect connection between Propel and his decisions around HE. Contact details enabled him to get in touch with the named person for care leavers at his chosen university. Ellen felt that the site answered important questions relating to issues which she considered could make or break her decision to enter into HE:

Ellen: [Propel] just provided me with the information. When you've got questions of, am I going to be able to afford it, is this going to be for me, can I do it because I'm now like an adult, as a care leaver; I'm living independently but I'm not sure that I can still go to university, type of thing.

Ellen articulates multiple concerns including finances and of her ability to cope in HE as a mature student and as a care leaver. Ellen verbalises exactly the kind of doubts and fears that Propel seeks to quash, doing so by providing reassurance and framing HE as possible, achievable and within young people's grasp.

Propel helped the young people to feel better informed about the availability of support specifically for care leavers:

Kirsty: I would kind of say that I now know more about what there is out there for care leavers.

Mark: I looked at it and I thought there was a lot of information on it and I just felt there was loads of information like, how to get support and stories of other people and stuff. [...] I found the page on like the, well the support and how to get it's quite, it was useful.

Kirsty: [...] My first option was looking at [name] University and I can't remember like the whole reason why I didn't choose that one but I then came across the University of [name], there was a lot more support

Information about support increased young people's awareness of provisions and made them feel better informed about support HEIs offer.

Supporting selection process

Some young people felt that Propel assisted in the process of decision-making, especially of supporting them to make informed HE selections. For example, Melissa consulted Propel as part of her multi-tiered strategy to whittle down her university choices:

Melissa: OK, so I kind of split it into like a range of different like priorities for myself basically, so I looked at the Guardian and had a look at the league tables and kind of where they, where my universities laid, so I could see kind of how good they were in comparison to other universities. From there I kind of picked around five or six maybe and I read through like the course outline, which ones I preferred and visited them. And then I had a look at the, like the financial provisions like what kind of support they offer for care leavers or for, support from like low income families, that sort of thing, and then I looked at Propel and looked at what support they had for care leavers specifically and then from there I kind of narrowed it down to five options and then to two and then through my 'insurance' and my 'firm', that was the sort of process I went through.

Here, Melissa describes a thorough, systematic approach to selecting viable HE options. She adopts a three-pronged approach, reducing her short-list at each stage. She researches universities remotely, conducts visits in person and, finally, accesses Propel in order to make final decisions based on care leaver support and resources. Financial support heavily influenced Melissa's selection, as she illustrates:

Melissa: Well when I was using Propel actually, I found out that [university] has like a scholarship available for like care leaver people that are having like difficulties at home and I applied for that and luckily I got it, so if I hadn't got that I probably would have, I probably would have went to [another university] and just stayed in halls but kind of, that scholarship was a deciding factor [...]

Like Melissa, Jim considers his decision-making to have been supported by Propel, as he discovered the HE course he later enrolled on during a website visit:

Jim: [...] And it was actually Propel that led me towards [university – second choice] because I didn't know they had it in foundation, it's not a big thing for units to offer a foundation year, so when I found out about [university], it meant my chances were a lot better. And also as a university it seemed there's a lot more academic and it's quite highly regarded, especially in scientific fields, so I guess Propel really widened my scope and my opportunities

Both Carly and Rebecca valued that Propel offers information specific to young people in care and care leavers:

Rebecca: It helped knowing that there is, that they do acknowledge people and stuff, it's not just a sort of, like there is extra support and stuff. So it did help in that way.

Carly: I found out about [Propel] by the Who Cares? Trust, so I went on it and it's actually one of the most helpful websites I've ever been on. [...] just because it's exclusive to either people who are in care or who are leaving care and it tells you, like everything, not everything you need to know, but like it tells you what the universities can bring to you and stuff like that, so

I found that very helpful rather than going on university websites individually and finding what they offer and you can also find if a university does your course [...]

Young people we spoke to appreciated the way that Propel challenged dominant messages of low attainment by showing HE as possible, achievable and 'normal' for care-experienced young people. For most young people interviewed, Propel supported decisions around HE in one form or another, helping them to finalise selections, to see what support they could be entitled to, or by providing motivation and encouragement to pursue HE.

Theme 4 Appearance, navigability & content

The response by young people interviewed regarding the appearance, navigability and content of Propel was overwhelmingly positive, as Nicola exemplifies:

Int: And do you think that there are any ways that the site could be improved at all?

Nicola: No, it's really good. I use it on my phone mostly, to be honest I use the smart phone for pretty much everything, and it comes up really fast and you can see everything on there. You can navigate and it's pretty clear.

These sentiments are echoed by other participants, who also considered Propel to be clear and simple to navigate:

Ellen: [...] it's really easy to read and stuff about the different bits of information, which I think is the main thing. So no, not really.

Rebecca: Yeah, it was really easy to follow.

Carly: It's quite like, an easy site to use.

While the majority of young people found the site to be simple to navigate, Kirsty experienced some difficulties when accessing Propel on her mobile phone:

Kirsty: I did it through my phone [...] I seem to remember that I had some difficulties navigating round but I could do it. [...] I think it was trying to work out how to get to different sections of the website.

Int: OK. Did it not seem intuitive?

Kirsty: No.

Kirsty suggests that the facility to navigate on mobile devices might not be as intuitive to use as it could be. This issue was also raised by a small number of professionals/carers interviewed.



The majority of interviewees approved of the layout, as the quotes below illustrate:

Melissa: I thought it was good, like the layout and all that and what it provides, I think it was really useful. [...] Yeah, it was definitely easy to navigate, definitely, yeah, very easy.

Nicola: I like it. I like the layout and I like the colouring.

Rebecca: the layout was really good because you could see by just typing in what you wanted to do or the location or whatever, you could see, you had like the little key at the top of different things of which ones offered support and that kind of stuff, you could see very quickly which ones offered what, I quite liked that idea.

As we have highlighted in previous themes, young people greatly valued the content of Propel. Ellen considers it to have increased her knowledge of financial assistance:

Ellen: [...] I didn't realise there was kind of like different grants and bursaries and stuff that you can apply for, and just how many different things there are kind of out there. [...] I'm kind of wanting to stay local to where I am, so I guess kind of, yeah, it showed me universities that offer the support for care leavers and who the main contact is as well. Obviously quite handy to have as well.

Even though Ellen had settled on a locality, visiting Propel better informed her about the packages local universities offer care leavers. Adisa and Nicola reflect on the links and contact details of agencies embedded into the Propel site:

Adisa: So the website is great because there's also a UCAS link as well. If you are looking for any kind of universities, you can look on the Propel website and find it. You can find any information you are looking for.

Nicola: It did have some contact details for people on there as well, which I have contacted and they've given me extremely good advice. They couldn't help, but they did help at the same time. They couldn't do what I was wanting them to do, but at the same time they've given me additional information. So even though what I was looking for wasn't there, it wasn't a barrier, it wasn't a 'no'. It was just that they've provided information to go somewhere else.

Both Adisa and Nicola valued the 'signposting' to external agencies, and Nicola, in particular, made use of the contact details provided on Propel.

Reflecting on his HE accommodation requirements, Jim expresses the importance of being informed about exactly what different providers offer:

Int: Are you looking to live in halls?

Jim: Yes, for the first year at least. That was another thing that I really liked about Propel, that they did tell you about whether they offered or guaranteed accommodation for the first year.

Furthermore, he valued the way Propel acts as a kind of 'central hub', enabling him to locate information in one place:

Jim: The thing I like about [Propel] it was everything together in one place and you can basically go and find out a little bit about everything.

Like Jim, others welcomed the way that Propel functions as a kind of 'one-stop-shop', enabling visitors to access information in one place. In this sense, Propel supports the research and selection process by making it more accessible and reducing the need to cross-reference information from individual university websites. Without Propel, the process of cross-referencing would likely be much more time-intensive, potentially confusing and even off-putting.

Theme 5 Recommendations

While young people predominantly found the website to be intuitive and user-friendly, some suggested improvements including the availability of information in different formats (such as video), additional links to external agencies.

On entering the site for the first time, Nicola questioned whether it would be 'worth looking at':

Nicola: The other thing, possibly, is the menu does seem quite small, and I think, oh, is going to have anything even on here that's worth looking at, kind of thing. When I've looked at the menu, there's like three options that come up, but then you obviously extend them. That was the only part that I thought, oh, is there going to be anything on here.

As she navigated deeper into the site, Nicola felt that the simplicity of the menu did not reflect the extent of the information available. As the main menu is potentially the first contact with Propel, it needs to be engaging and to give an impression of the information visitors can expect to find. Questioning the utility might lead potential visitors to click off of the site before they have taken the time to explore it in more depth.

In relation to navigability and ease of use, Rebecca felt that perhaps more information about universities could be included on Propel pages, to avoid having to open up university websites:

Rebecca: I quite liked it, I think it would be good if it explained more about each [university] instead of you having to go to the website and open it and then that would be good.[...] like obviously you can't put everything on but just a bit more information would be quite nice.

Overwhelmingly, young people valued the site, but some considered that it needed additional marketing and publicity in order to have a broader reach:

Rebecca: I think it's quite good, I think it just needs more sort of publicity so more people are aware of it.

The complexities and struggles of writing personal statements in application of HE was raised as an issue by young people and professionals alike – as Jim and Adisa's comments exemplify:

Jim: The personal statement and the writing was really daunting and I didn't find out about the trusts, like that Who Cares? Trust, so that may be something they could look into. If they can't provide their own advice on application preparation, then maybe linking up or having a partnership with others that can provide that help.

Adisa: An example of personal statements because most people, young people, need personal statement. If it kind of shows some examples or show young people personal statement, and of the PowerPoint, you know, to show young people – sometimes I know a lot of people are struggling with personal statements.

Here Jim and Adisa recommend that Propel either provide direct guidance on writing personal statements on the site, provide examples of personal statements, link up with a partner agency to offer help with constructing personal statements, or provide links to external agencies that support young people in the application process.

One participant recommended that Propel provides links to Twitter and Facebook, and while these are already embedded on the site, perhaps they might be made more prominent to ensure that visitors are aware of them. In addition to the forms of social media Propel already taps into, Jim suggests (below) that a forum or chat room facility might be established on Propel specifically for young people in care or care leavers to discuss HE-related issues:

Jim: I don't know if you know about the forums, the student rooms or whatever they're called. [...] Where students go and talk about their offers and stuff like that. Having a website that's for care leavers normalises it a bit in my mind, and maybe that's something I'd probably look at using, is the forum aspect, because student rooms actually offer a way students can anonymously log applications. I can log the course I'm applying for and my predicted grades, which is obviously [anonymous] and stuff like that, and show the offers that I've got. So it's kind of showing what the course is actually like and a lot of the information is updated in a Wiki format, so students contribute to it in the forum and stuff like that. That might be a good way because that's going to ensure that Propel has got an effective website. It's always going to have up to date knowledge.

Here Jim envisages how Propel might be expanded beyond its original remit to include a virtual space in which young people in similar circumstances can communicate their experiences in an informal forum. In making this suggestion, Jim reveals the importance he places on being able to share his experience of navigating university with other care-experienced young people.

Mark felt that navigability could be simplified further by introducing icons for specific types of support:

Mark: [...] say it was like you can click, there was this bit about an icon, like when you see this icon it means you can get financial help, like maybe like a link to it, just say more, like even more information on like different financial help you can get and stuff.

In accordance with some professionals interviewed, Melissa and Rebecca felt that Propel might provide information for care-experienced young people considering alternative routes, not just HE:

Melissa:[...] maybe it might be helpful to have like some other links or sections for people that don't really want to go to university but they want, I don't know like a way to like kind of, what am I saying? So like, I know that it's raising aspirations but I think there's other pathways for that, do you know what I mean, so like maybe apprenticeships, give information about apprenticeships or other organisations

Recommendations proposed by young people were varied and wide-ranging. To summarise, they included increased publicity and marketing of Propel, links to external agencies, additional information about universities and alterations to layout (including introducing icons and changes to the menu). Furthermore, suggestions included embedding a forum or chat room into Propel, and providing information about alternative routes, such as apprenticeships.

4.3.2 Interviews with Professionals & Carers

Like interviews with young people, those conducted with professionals and carers were very rich, not only providing an evaluation of Propel, but of how it functions as a resource in their practice, and how it fills a gap in the general landscape of work with care-experienced young people. Interviews were focused on capturing experiences of Propel, and yet interviewees oriented discussion towards their experience in practice. While this kind of material might appear a deviation to the evaluation, we represent it here as it provides insight into the contexts professionals and carers are operating in, their experiences of working with care-experienced young people, and the challenges they face. 5 themes emerge from the interview data set with professionals and carers (see Fig 9 for summary): (i) *Raising aspiration: Requirements & challenges*; (ii) *Barriers to HE*; (iii) *Using Propel in working practices*; (iv) *Appearance, navigability & content*; and finally, (v) *Recommendations*. The first 2 themes represent professionals' and carers' experiences in practice and the last 3 directly relate to their perceptions of Propel.

Fig 9: Key themes from interviews with professionals and carers

Theme Table – Interviews with Professionals & Carers

No.	Theme	Description	Example
1	Raising aspiration: Requirements & challenges	This theme relates to aspiration, how it can be elevated and the challenges in doing so.	<i>Sandy: So one of those, one of the big obstacles is about not allowing young people in care to have dreams and to have aspirations. And also, within that, it's like limiting aspirations of the people that are supporting them which again I think is really detrimental.</i>
2	Barriers to HE	This theme represents the challenges professionals' and carers' experienced in trying to support young people to access HE.	<i>Tina: Communication tends to be a big barrier. Information gets emailed out to allocated workers for the young people and then it's expected that those workers will get the information out to the young people. But sometimes it's not done in a timely fashion, so they miss out through that.</i>
3	Using Propel in working practices	This is the most prominent theme to emerge from interviews with professionals and relates to their use of Propel in practice.	<i>Bina: Well it's just when I go out with young people, I always refer them to— I say, "Look at the Who Cares Trust website and look at Propel. You'll find all the university information," to encourage them to start looking as well in their time.</i>
4	Appearance, navigability & content	Experiences of navigating Propel, including content, layout and usability.	<i>Sandy: I think it's very easy to navigate and I'm a bit rubbish with navigation things, I just think it is easy to navigate.</i>
5	Recommendations	Recommendations made by professionals with a view to improving their experiences of using Propel and increasing the range of information available. Suggestions included simplifying layout and navigability, enabling an easy print version, including additional signposts to relevant agencies, providing guidance on writing personal statements, including information about FE institutions, and strengthening messages of hope.	<i>Sandy: I think the case studies need to be regularly updated [...] so if you're using the website on a regular basis, it would be nice to have new case studies [...]it makes it more real for the young people, they can identify with it better.</i>

Theme 1 Raising aspiration: Requirements & challenges

The professionals and carers we spoke to talked about how young people's hopes and aspirations are supported and restricted by the young people themselves and by those working with them. This theme relates to aspiration, how it can be raised and the challenges in doing so.

Below, Karen talks about some of the difficulties faced by young people which make committing to personal development in the form of workshops and courses challenging:

Karen: Now we've only ran that course [focused on entitlement and raising aspiration] maybe about three times, as I say, our young people are particularly difficult to engage with. And quite often they'll sign up for a course and then nearer the time they will drop out; you know, social anxiety, mental health difficulties, that kind of thing. A lot of the things get in the way of them attending.

Karen considers that young people's emotional and mental health impacts on their ability to commit to personal development sessions. Conversely, Charlie locates responsibility for young people's low achievement firmly with the professionals who work with them:

Charlie: [...] a young person that's been through a lot of what some of the care leavers have been through, it's not something that automatically springs to mind that they want to do. It's something you've got to make interesting. You've got to make it sound exciting. You know, if you just say, well no, this would be really good, get you a good job, well, you're going to get nowhere because you could go for a degree and end up at McDonald's, because I see that every day. You've got to build the expectation, sort of use it as a goal and say, well, can you imagine what that would leave open to you, where you could go, what you could do, and actually build that. But if you just say, "Do you want to go to university?" "No." "Okay," tick the box. [...] I mean, that's the answer you're going to get.

Charlie implies that young people are not sufficiently enthused by those in close contact with them to think about, identify or work towards careers that interest them. Charlie perceives that raising aspiration requires professionals to actively engage young people, to inform them of the potential opportunities that HE might open up for them, and how it might positively impact their futures. Others echoed these sentiments, and felt that care-experienced young people were sometimes limited by the low expectations of others:

Sandy: so many people tell [young people] that they can't do things and not allow them to dream because they're afraid that they will you know, fall and crash but actually you know, having a dream and having a plan is OK because, it is a good thing as long as it's realistic and achievable so it's not just about saying, like saying, oh you know, I'm going to be a rocket scientist when I'm 21, do you know what I mean, it's about kind of like allowing people to have those dreams but providing the support, like any good supporter, parent, would do. So one of those, one of the big obstacles is about not allowing young people in care to have dreams and to have aspirations. And also, within that, it's like limiting aspirations of the people that are supporting them which again I think is really detrimental. You know, just because that person doesn't think that they can do it, they don't think that the young person that they are caring

for can do it either or supporting can do it either, I think that's really detrimental, whether they're a teacher, whether they're a social worker, whether they're a foster carer, whether they're a mentor,

Similarly, Cassie illustrates how her foster child's academic ability was automatically in question because of her background and school transitions:

Cassie: When she came to us there had been questions raised because obviously she'd had quite a difficult childhood, she's been in [multiple] primary schools in the time she came to us, there was a question about her academic ability, but in actual fact when her assessments came through in the first year, it kind of triggered that she was actually very, very bright and then from, you know, right from the start we were saying, you know, you can do this, you can do that, you know, what are your, you know, this is what you should be thinking about. So academically, we had always said university was an option and she really had made the decision by the time she was in the third and fourth year, that would be like the year after being with us that she was looking at her university placements.

In spite of Cassie's unending belief in her foster child's academic ability, she struggled to get it recognised by others:

Cassie: Sometimes as well, people will sit back and go, well she's doing well, what, why are you worrying? You know, what's the deal? You know, from a looked after children point of view, she's superb, you know, she's exceeded the expectations but I think sometimes their expectations are quite low and it's, you know, don't make a big deal because she's doing OK. And I certainly find that with other ones as well, you know, kids previously who had, I would think of academic potential, it was, well we just should be grateful that they're just getting by, you know, because of their experience, which, you know, I'm not saying that it's not, you know, sometimes it's just amazing that kids, we have got kids that can put socks on in the morning and get out of the door, it's an absolutely amazing feat for quite a lot of them but I do feel that, certainly my point of view from having a child been through who desperately wanted to get into Higher Education, has been a real battle this year, very difficult.

The professionals and carers (above) felt that others' expectation of low attainment sometimes dominated young people's educational experiences. Expectations had the potential to hold back care-experienced young people, limit educational outcomes, and prevent them from envisaging HE as a possibility. Portraying a contrasting account, Tina considers a lot of her clients to be aspirational, and her colleagues to be supportive of that aspiration:

Tina: I've always had high aspirations for my care leavers. So it's just about them being selfaware, being aware of opportunities open to them. A lot of my young people are quite aspirational and the support on offer from the virtual school, for example, and their social workers and personal advisers is quite good.

Many of the interviewees considered that support and encouragement need to be implemented early on in young people's lives in order to 'sow a seed', and help them to see HE as a possibility in order that they can take the necessary steps towards it:

Kim: [...] the sooner that we can encourage [young people] to consider [HE] as a possible future for them, the better chance we have of influencing them to take the necessary qualifications in order to have the ability to enter and some of that work needs to start, you know, down at 13, 14 years of age.

Laura: I'm a big believer in early intervention so I think young people need to be, I think all the interventions where universities have got, you know, Year 7s plus going to universities is a really, really positive thing because I think it needs to be in the psyche of carers. I think, you know, and it's about making sure that those people around the young people are supporting them rather than saying, oh you can't go to university, it would cost too much money, la, la, la, la, it's like, no, you can go to university and this is how we're going to make it happen and this is what we're going to do. So I think there's a big, that's important in the process.

Interviewees considered that the expectations of professionals and carers had a significant influence on the care-experienced young people they work with. The majority considered that expectations of low attainment and low educational outcomes were dominant representations which prevented professionals from being able to view HE as possible for the young people they worked with, which in turn limited young people's aspirations, and restricted their access to information. For one foster carer, even where great academic ability was evident, she still struggled to get others to shake off their low expectation and to offer support. Overwhelmingly, professionals and carers considered that dominant representations of care-experienced young people as low-achieving act as a self-fulfilling prophecy and obstruct young people reaching their full potential.

Theme 2 Barriers to HE

This theme represents the challenges professionals and carers experienced in trying to support young people to access HE. These challenges were wide-ranging and diverse, for some, issues of communication were a source of frustration and hindered not only them in their support roles, but also young people's access to HE. For example, Tina (below) illustrates how opportunities to attend organised trips to HEIs were not always filtered down to young people by their allocated workers in time:

Tina: Communication tends to be a big barrier. Information gets emailed out to allocated workers for the young people and then it's expected that those workers will get the information out to the young people. But sometimes it's not done in a timely fashion, so they miss out through that.

The result of a delay in communication means that care-experienced young people may miss out, and may not have the same opportunities as their peers to attend site visits, to learn about university life, or to speak to staff. These kinds of trips are designed to raise aspiration, but if young people are not given the opportunity to participate, it is a loss for those whose interest in HE might have been sparked had they taken part. As a foster carer, Rose felt that timely communication was essential in order to be included in activities involving her foster child's education:

Rose: [the school] have information days, and they do, you know, quite a lot with the actual parents. But where, when you have a foster child, you don't have parental rights. [...] if the school's looking for say information for Mark to go to maybe a seminar about education, it would have to go through his social worker.

Charlie considered that the option of HE may not always be communicated to young people leaving care:

Charlie: [...] I know my children have all had conversations with me for a long time running up to leaving school about university and it was an option. It was always considered that it was something they could do. Whereas with young people leaving care, I'm not sure they've had that option put to them.

Silence on the matter of HE sends a message that care-experienced young people are not capable of pursuing or achieving in HE. If HE is not discussed as an option, it may also mean that young people are left without the building blocks, knowledge of how to work towards and apply to HE, entry requirements, and available support.

Below, Cathy describes a lack of continuity between marketing and practice around the support packages HEIs offer care-experienced young people:

Cathy: [...] One of our young people went with a member of my staff to look round a university and the member of staff said to the person who was showing them around, a member of staff, "Oh, what support do you give to care leavers?" and that person said, "We don't give support to care leavers." And yet when we went on the website, there was support for care leavers...So, again, like our workers, if the young people ask the first person they come across and they say we don't, then they'll believe that.

Cathy's quote illustrates the importance of university staff being aware of the exact support that their HEI claims to offer – especially since the provisions (as marketed) could encourage a care-experienced young person to submit an application. Cathy illuminates the complexities for young people (let alone professionals) of navigating their way through discrepancies in marketing and practice to make sense of the *actual* support they are likely to receive if they accept a place at university. Contrasting somewhat with Cathy's experience above, Bina reflects positively on the provisions her local authority and local HEIs offer:

Bina: I just take an extra interest in providing information about the support that universities offer and support our young people who go to university who are care leavers. Part of that can be helping them set up extra visits instead of just a general open day by contacting the universities, finding the contact person, alerting them to we have a care leaver who really wants to come and see the university and meet the lecturers, and do a bit more of an individual visit. If the universities don't fund the visits, then we would. And sometimes, if they want me to go with them, I can go with them. We've done also overnight stays and it all depends upon which university offers what really.[...] I will visit them at university and sometimes try, if they agree, to speak to their support tutors. Normally every year there's accommodation because we pay for their accommodation while they're at uni, and they have a living allowance. They're very well looked after in [location].

The ongoing support Bina's local authority offers throughout HE differs from that described by the young people we spoke to, where in some cases students felt that local authority support waned once they were in HE. This perhaps illustrates the variations in local authority support across the country. Further illuminating variations, Bina (below) talks about the differences in the financial support available for young people in training, in FE, and in HE:

Bina: [...] there has been a huge difference in the finances that have been available to those going to university compared to the finances available to those doing an apprenticeship or an internship. That is something we are seriously looking at now in trying to balance those equalities really. [...] We still only have a minority of numbers that go to higher education and perhaps far more trying to access internships and traineeships and the finances that are available for those. It's still very sad to see how many of those struggle really.

Like Bina, others referred to the lower levels of financial support available for FE students:

Sandy: [...] in my experience, [FE] hasn't had the same momentum as Higher Education, there wasn't as much investment, whether that's financial or whatever, I think that, you know, it's kind of a different kettle of fish really because they are dealing with such a bigger range of students that have all got particular needs. So I think there still is a lot of work to be done to that and I know from anecdotal experience of friends that have got children at college, foster children at college, the support isn't always there in the way that they would expect it

Here, both Bina and Sandy suggest that an increased level of support is required to support young people undertaking apprenticeships and internships in order to bring it more in line with financial resources available for HE students. Improving accessibility of FE could act as a stepping stone and lead to increased engagement in HE.

Another potential barrier for young people accessing HE was identified by Cassie, and centres around accommodation:

Cassie: [...] they're concerned about their accommodation and it's, they're taking all the baggage along with the fact, it's yet another move so I think there's an issue around that, that's a barrier to stop them from going because they think, oh I would have, you know, this is me leaving again, where do I go after I've been there? We've found, from our young person is, she's very concerned that her bedroom's not going to be her bedroom any more.

Concerns about losing their care placement could put young people off going to HE, or influence their university selection. Deciding to go to HE requires a leap of faith, it is a huge risk for those without the reassurance of a permanent home - if they fail, or have difficulty finding work post-HE, they risk homelessness.

Barriers for young people accessing HE, as identified by the professionals and carers we spoke to, were diverse, and revolved around issues of communication, discrepancies between HEI marketing and practice, low levels of financial support at FE, and concerns around accommodation.

Theme 3 Using Propel in working practices

This is the most prominent theme to emerge from interviews with professionals and relates to their use of Propel in practice. The majority of professionals we spoke to had direct contact with young people and had begun to implement Propel in their work. Professionals used Propel in a number of different ways, either accessing it to help a specific young person they worked with to make decisions around HE or introducing it to groups during classroom-based activities. Those without direct contact used Propel for professional development – to build their own and others' knowledge around HE support for care leavers.

Tina uses Propel in conjunction with a number of other resources to support young people to make informed decisions around HE:

Tina: In terms of the Propel website, I do utilise it as one of my resources in supporting young people with their higher education planning.

Tina uses Propel resources to instigate partnership working between her local authority and care leaver contacts within HEIs:

Tina: Well through the Propel website, [...] I'm able to [see] who the care leaver contact person is. For my young people, I aim to make those links and, with the young person's permission, I get consent to share with that care leaver contact that they have a [Name removed] care leaver coming to their institution. So additional support in terms of accommodation, budgeting, as well as academic support can be sourced through that link.

In order to ensure that the young people her local authority is responsible for are being appropriately supported, Tina establishes contact with the named person at the HEI. She makes contact with a view to galvanizing support and ensuring that a two-way conversation is maintained between the local authority and the HE providers.

Sandy has embedded Propel into her dissemination activities, which aim to promote awareness of the support available for care-experienced young people:

Sandy: [...] I was able to go in and talk to foster carers and professionals, social workers [...] I used the Propel website as an example, look this is a really user friendly resource that allows you to see and compare, you know look at what this institution is providing to that institution, let's see, you know, why is that the case, do you know what I mean, and start to kind of question about that, which I think is really important. [...] I will be using the Propel website as a basis of our awareness raising, because it just makes sense, then they can, social workers can look at that as opposed to phoning us up and us having to kind of go, well did you know that the, you know, there's more support here or you can get support there, it's like, it's a great resource I think for that.

In a similar vein, Karen uses Propel in her classroom-based training sessions with young people:

Karen: [...] we've created a short course, it runs for one day, probably about five hours long, on entitlement for care leavers. So it's an overview of what people can expect from [locality]

County Council, from housing and other bits and pieces that are out there. Now I wanted to raise the aspirations of our care leavers, so we have a big focus on education and training. [...] there's a short piece about The Who Cares Trust handbook, which now I've changed so that it's the Propel website. Which is going to be a lot more useful because then we can actually click into it.

Like Karen, other professionals we spoke to were in the process of transitioning from the WCT HE Handbook to Propel, and during interviews they spoke about the pros and cons of each of the formats. For the most part, professionals were positive that Propel could provide the most effective means of disseminating up-to-date information. Below, Bina and Cassie reflect on their use of Propel with young people:

Bina: Well it's just when I go out with young people, I always refer them to— I say, "Look at the Who Cares Trust website and look at Propel. You'll find all the university information," to encourage them to start looking as well in their time. If I'm with them, then I will do it on my laptop, just simply, "Look, have you seen this website? This website can take us and tell us who's the support person and what support they offer for care leavers."

Cassie: [foster child] looked at the site more, she's looked at the contact information but because we've had, obviously we're accessing this after the fact if you know what I mean, she's already decided that she's going, has got the contact details of the person already. So, but she did look at the stories of young people who had been successful in education, so she went back in and I had suggested maybe go back in and have a look at that

Here, Bina and Cassie frame Propel as a tool to encourage and inspire young people. Like Bina and Cassie, Kelly used Propel directly with young people she worked with, but felt that it required further assistance for the young person to be able to fully make sense of the information Propel provides:

Kelly: So we looked at the site and she's now going to be doing a maths course in September. Now she's signed up for it, she's been accepted on it, whether or not she actually does it is a different story but, you know, we're supporting that ambition. And that was a result of going onto the Who Cares? Trust and then going onto the Propel website, so I can, that was showing what can be achieved and what is available in terms of the university but it needed quite a bit of translation if you like in between, from me and actually from her PA too.

While Kelly perceives that Propel facilitated the young person's decisions around HE and supported university selection, she alludes that information perhaps needs to be simplified a little more to ensure it is understandable for young people.

Drawing on the interview data, it seems that information from Propel is being cascaded down (in)directly to young people via the professionals and carers who work with them. Those we interviewed are encouraging access to Propel, filtering down information, or are making reference to Propel in individual or group contact sessions. Those that do not have direct contact with young people seem to be sharing information with their professional networks. More professionals responded to our online surveys than any other group. While this does not evidence who the principal



site visitors are, interview data might indicate that even if fewer young people access Propel, they may still access resources and information indirectly via the professionals and carers working with them.

Theme 4 Appearance, navigability & content

While young people interviewed largely responded positively to the appearance, navigability and content of Propel, professionals' responses were more variable. Cathy considered navigability to be an issue, suggesting that there is an opportunity to improve it to ensure site visitors can access information more quickly and efficiently:

Cathy: I didn't find it particularly user-friendly from a professional's point of view. I don't know whether that's because you use icons. I just found it very difficult to get that information I needed quickly enough. [...] if I'm going to promote such a website, I need to feel confident that if I go in, if I just look up a university at random, that I'm going to be able to show them what they can get after going to that university, and I don't feel like that at the moment.

Cathy experienced difficulty locating information about a particular university. She goes on to imply that a lack of computer literacy skills is a generational issue which is perhaps related to the problems she had in accessing the information:

Cathy: [...] my experience of working in leaving care is the leaving care workers are older. They tend to stay in leaving care and they don't move on, so they're not as computer literate as, say, some of the childcare social workers. So if they can't find what they're looking for the first time they look for it, they're not going to go back a second time.

Drawing on Cathy's comments, it is tentatively proposed that there might be an opportunity to ensure that the site meets the needs of professionals, carers and young people equally, as Cathy goes on to suggest:

Cathy: [...] I think the idea is absolutely fantastic and I think to have something for care leavers specifically like this is brilliant. Just with a bit of tinkering it could help old fuddyduddies like me.

Ensuring both professionals and young people have easy access is especially important as practitioners are seemingly using the site with a view to filtering down materials and information to the young people they work with. Also in relation to navigability, Tina suggests that it might not be clear where visitors to the site need to click to activate searches:

Tina: I think when you press on the 'start my search' and then you put in a university – I'm just going through it as I speak – I think for some young people it hasn't been so clear that they need to then click on the university logo in order to get the additional information.

Like Tina, Paula also felt that direction around the site was a little unclear:

Paula: [...] I don't find it as easy on the website, if I'm honest, because you go in and it brings up a screen, the home screen, and sometimes it comes up differently. [...] There's the menu tab and you click on the menu tab and then nothing actually comes up on it. [...] But yeah, that

top bit, unless you knew and you scrolled further down to click on it [...] So for me, sometimes a paper document, you can have it in front of you with the young person. We don't always have access to computers. We have given the website to all our young people who looking to go off to university.

Due to the difficulties she experienced in accessing information on the site – unsure where she needed to click to activate searches – when comparing the WCT HE Handbook and Propel, Paula favours the Handbook, suggesting it is less complex, more user-friendly, and accessible without the need for computer technology. During the evaluation period, this finding was communicated by Researchers to Become, who subsequently added a facility to print HEI information from Propel. This simulates the HE Handbook and gives visitors the option of using a hardcopy.

Echoing others (above), Cassie describes difficulties navigating Propel:

Cassie: I must admit I was terrible when I used the website, I was using it on my phone and I was like, I'm rubbish at this and then [foster child] came and showed me it and I was like, that's great, isn't it? You know, all that information is there. So my response to the website wasn't as positive, purely because I was using it on a mobile and I didn't feel that I was using it properly. [...] I went to use it, I thought oh I'll just look up the courses that Bonnie is actually interested in, so I clicked on it and tried to put in, you know, the subject that she's doing [...] and it come up saying 'sorry, no results'. [...] So I had a conversation with the foster child, and I said I can't find those courses that you're actually doing, and she said oh I'll go and have a try again, she went on the iPad and she did it straight away. [...] It could be something about the mobile site, or as I say, if you go on your mobile setting and it works, fine, it will be my technique, but I certainly couldn't get it to work on the mobile site, I went in again and tried again and couldn't do it.

As her foster daughter could access Propel using an iPad, Cassie wondered if perhaps her problems related to the device she was using. Cathy suggested that simplifying layout would make navigation more intuitive:

Cathy: [...] if they could make that a bit simpler really, that would be great. And it's probably a work in progress. But yeah, my immediate gratification (laughs) wasn't there.

In contrast to comments above, Bina and Sandy responded positively to questions about navigability:

Bina: I'd say it's just clear, easy to access.

Sandy: I think it's very easy to navigate and I'm a bit rubbish with navigation things, I just think it is easy to navigate.

There was a wealth of interview data related to content, we provide representative examples below. Kim hugely valued Propel as a resource, particularly for its capacity to inform people about support:

Kim: [...] we are really supportive of the existence of this website, any measures that are out there that build toward an environment where a young person from care feels it's absolutely

standard to go to university we would strongly welcome. And so my feedback is given in the context of it's a very welcome site

Kim felt though that there was room to further engage and inspire through the appearance and content of the site:

Kim: I just think that that content is just a bit static and a bit dull.

Echoing this sentiment, Laura thought that a reduction of textual information would help to engage young people:

Laura: [...] it needs to be more, it's quite wordy to read it all the way through, you know. I think if you're, I'm not a young person at all, but if you, you know, the way that we read in our website, it needs to be that people just want to read the quick headline.

Also in relation to content, Laura felt that the top 10 reasons included on Propel for attending university might inadvertently alienate rather than encourage care-experienced young people to consider HE:

Laura: One thing I didn't like was the top reasons why you should go to university and I thought you'll be able to live independently and make your own decisions, I just thought that's so not the first top ten reason why you should go to university, it's just, do you know I just thought actually children in care are often quite isolated and, you know, I just think that's not always, that's actually for them one of the most scariest things, that would be my initial thought.

For Cassie and Tina, even though they worked with care-experienced young people regularly, accessing Propel increased their knowledge of the growing support available in HE:

Cassie: I think it opened my eyes as well to more opportunity and that came from really reading the stories.

Tina: I think what [Propel] has brought to light is in terms of the growing number of institutions and higher education institutions that are actually taking into consideration the needs of care leavers and are providing additional support for them.

Responses in relation to navigability, content and appearance of Propel, although variable, provide insight into professionals' and carers' experiences of using the site, what they found useful and areas for improvement. Navigability seemed to be the main issue, and considering professionals are implementing Propel into their practice with young people, this is perhaps an area that requires simplification.

Theme 5 Recommendations

Professionals made recommendations with a view to improving their experiences of using Propel and increasing the range of information available – some of which resembled recommendations made by

young people. Suggestions included simplifying layout and navigability, enabling an easyprint version, including additional signposts to external agencies, providing guidance on writing personal statements, including information about FE institutions, and strengthening messages of hope.

Young people who had previous experience of the WCT HE Handbook preferred the website, considering it to be more user-friendly. While the majority of professionals valued Propel for its ability to provide up-to-date information, some preferred to use a paper copy in their work:

Bina: For me, for my generation, oh, I prefer the hard copy any day (laughs). [...] For the young people, I think it's probably easier to keep it up to date. Obviously what I was finding was part of it would be out of date as soon as it was written. I think it's probably easier to keep— The Propel website, which takes us straight to the university website, is probably more accurate, more up to date, and I can imagine that it's easier to keep that updated than with the hard copy.

Like young people, professionals recommended that additional links to external agencies could be embedded into the site:

Karen: Maybe links to outside services would be of use to care leavers, that's unless they're already on there, but that might be useful...Stuff like Mind for mental health, Shelter for housing, National Student Union, I don't know, stuff like that.

Tina: Yeah, there was just one thing that might be useful for the actual university, if there was an additional page on Propel listing local authorities and the relevant contact person in the local authority. We, as local authorities, have a named person at the university, but also for the university it might be nice if they had a named person at the local authority.

Tina envisages that the inclusion of local authority care leaver contacts on Propel would support partnership working and promote a two-way dialogue between HEIs and local authorities. Potentially this could also help to normalise HE in the eyes of those working with care-experienced young people, elevating their expectations of those they work with.

Some professionals expressed concern that Propel would only 'speak' to those who were ready to access HE, and may struggle to engage those at an earlier stage in the process, or those who do not envisage HE to be achievable:

Laura: [...] you're working with the young people who've got there, you're not working to help those that haven't got there.

Kelly: They quite often don't have English or maths to begin with. And they don't have a sense of what it's like to have structure. And they don't have a sense of what it is to get up in the morning [...] The socialisation of work and getting to university and the socialisation of the structure is a massive deal for a lot of young people. [...] And I don't see that reflected on the website, it's very geared to university and it's very geared to, you can do this, you can go to university. [...] They would go to that website and go, well there's nothing on that for me, it's all about going to university and I can't even add up.

Suggesting that Propel may not be so accessible to some young people, Kelly and Laura illuminate the difficulty of raising aspiration and supporting the education of a social group stigmatised by low expectation and low attainment. In relation to Propel's ability to raise aspiration, Kim suggests the following:

Kim: I think that in terms of that other element which is about inspiring and trying to trigger a desire and an aspiration, I think it's less successful. I see there are, you know, some case studies, there's I think, there are two on the landing page and then you can click through to some more, I wonder about whether or not our dialogue could, I actually like the dialogue in the top ten and it talks, you know, the language is structured in a way that's a direct conversation toward a young person which I think is strong. I just wondered whether or not it might be more effective to have just more dynamic content on it. [...] just a little bit more direct conversation from individuals, from students, from young people to our potential young person.

In order to engage young people further, especially those who had not previously considered HE, Kelly proposes that Propel could be more dynamic, textual information more informal, and feature content *from young people to young people*.

Cassie also reflected on the challenges of raising aspirations of those who had not considered HE:

Cassie: I think it's so difficult for them to say, 'well I want to be a writer' or 'I want to be a', I don't know, what other course, 'I want to be a geologist' or something like that, it's so far removed.

Here, Cassie identifies an obstacle for young people, and suggests that Propel *could* be developed to help young people to select subject areas, to identify pathways, and to see how their skills might be transferable to particular education/career routes.

Several professionals and carers perceived there to be inequality in local authority support offered to young people in FE, and those in HE - with the latter receiving greater financial assistance. Like Cassie, some felt that Propel might provide information to prospective FE students:

Laura: So I think there's something around that pre-university, OK, I've really, you know, the last three years have been really difficult for me, how do I re-engage with university access courses, what support's available in regards to getting maths and English? All of those sorts of things, I think that is a big area that actually stops people because people come back to [education] later on, you know, the number of young people we had that just came back at 19, 20, and it was like, oh my god, you know, what do you do, where do you go, what is the offer for them?

As the interviews with young people illustrate, the point at which young people are considering reentry into education is a crucial one. If obstacles are considered to be insurmountable, there is a risk that they might disengage. If young people in care or care leavers feel supported to make informed choices about FE, and have an understanding of the support they are entitled to, it may mean that more young people consider FE *and* HE to be viable options, within their reach.

Some of the professionals and carers we spoke to felt uninformed about Propel, and had either stumbled upon it by chance, were sign-posted, or discovered it after trawling the internet for information. Many considered that there was more room for additional marketing:

Sandy: We've got the Propel website, it needs to be, you know, sort of like advertised and highlighted much, much, much wider

Laura: And then get yourself out there because I didn't know, I didn't realise it was there, it seems to be that, not I'm slightly, maybe I'm a bit out of the field [...] I do think it would be good, they should PR, they should publicise it a lot more.

Rose: The one I work for, which would be [fostering agency], they definitely do not have that information because if they did, they would make sure all their foster carers would know about it.

Cassie: I wasn't aware that website existed and I definitely had looked after children in my tutor class that I could have been passing onto them and saying, 'look, have you looked at this website?'

Many professionals highly regarded Propel for its up-to-date and accurate information, as Kim exemplifies:

Kim: For me, the take home message was this is detailed, up-to-date information that you can rely upon, so I think it gives confidence that the information that is there is comprehensive, consistent, clear. So that for me, is it's about it being reliable, that was the take home message for me.

However, in order to keep visitors returning, several felt that information needed to be changed regularly. For example, rather than being referred to a separate website in relation to changes to funding, Laura felt that Propel could draw visitors' attention to important changes:

Laura: So in some ways what would have been helpful is that the Propel website would have said, as of 2016, the change, you know, care leavers are no longer eligible for the maintenance grant as they were before but they are entitled to the maintenance grant as allocated in a loan, [...] it would just have been helpful if on the Propel they said, please note these changes as of this time.

Clearly there would be practical consequences to consider in implementing this suggestion, but it would mean that Propel functioned as a live 'hub' of HE information, constantly evolving and alerting prospective HE applicants to relevant changes. Sandy echoes these sentiments, and suggests that the update of inspirational stories might help to keep young people engaged:

Sandy: I think the case studies need to be regularly updated [...] so if you're using the website on a regular basis, it would be nice to have new case studies [...] it makes it more real for the young people, they can identify with it better.

Recommendations were made by professionals and carers with a view to making Propel as userfriendly and accessible as it can be, and to ensuring that aims to raise aspiration, and provide information on HE support are met. Recommendations were wide-ranging, but did fall into 4 key categories. These include: embedding additional links; raising aspiration by supporting those not considering HE to identify education and occupational pathways; to promote Propel further through publicity and marketing; and finally, to keep Propel live and engaging by updating inspirational stories, and by drawing visitors' attention to HE changes.

5. Discussion & Recommendations

The evaluation of Propel has enabled an account of visitors' immediate response, as well as the perceived short- to mid-term impact. The phased mixed-methods approach to data collection has captured participants' experiences of Propel in relation to domains of confidence, knowledge development, decision-making and ambition.

Analyses of quantitative Survey 1 data indicate that the majority of participants from each of the 2 groups (young people, and professionals/carers) perceived Propel to have facilitated an increase in each of the key areas. This evaluation acts as a pilot and due to the small sample sizes, statistical data should be treated speculatively. Quantitative data provides a descriptive snapshot of respondents' views, and while this is indicative and suggests particular directions, findings should not be used to generalise to the wider population.

While interviews with young people were focused on the Propel website, participants also oriented discussion towards their experiences of mainstream education and their educational journey prior to exploring HE. As such, their reflections provide valuable insights into the contexts that hindered and challenged their educational progress as well as the resilience with which they work(ed) to overcome adversities to redefine their identities and prepare for HE. Predominantly, young people valued the inspirational stories, the details of named contacts, and the ability to access information about universities on one site.

Interviews with professionals not only provide an assessment of Propel, but enable us to understand how it functions as a resource, and how it fills a gap in the general landscape of work with careexperienced young people. Drawing on survey and interview responses, professionals largely seem to be using Propel as a tool in their work with young people, either accessing it to help specific young people they work with to make decisions around HE, using it as a classroom-based activity with young people, or for professional development – to build their knowledge around HE support for care leavers. In addition, many professionals and carers we spoke to were embedding Propel into their everyday working practices, with a view to better supporting young people, or to raise awareness of support/increase aspiration within their professional networks. Most interviewees framed Propel as a tool not only for raising awareness of HE support for care-experienced young people, but also for challenging dominant messages of low expectation and low achievement.

Due to the nature of Propel, it was hoped that young people would account for the largest percentage of visitors to the site and respondents to the survey. However, the make-up of respondents was in keeping with Become's historic experience, with professionals outweighing careexperienced young

people. Survey respondents are not necessarily indicative of site visitors and, as such, potentially a greater number of young people accessed Propel but chose not to participate in the survey. However, if we consider survey respondents as reflective of site visitors, we *could* conclude that professionals are utilizing the site and searching for resources and information to use in their practice with young people – and the qualitative interview data supports this theory. In this case, young people might be accessing Propel indirectly via the information cascaded down from the professionals/carers working with them.

While young people were largely positive about the navigability and content of the site, some of the professionals and carers we spoke to had at times experienced difficulty in locating specific information, or navigating effectively. In this respect, to ensure that Propel is able to meet the needs of young people and professionals/carers, while the recommendations from professionals and carers were varied and wide-ranging, it is suggested that Become consider using these findings to guide future developments of Propel to ensure that it is user-friendly and intuitive for professionals and carers.

An important issue raised by a number of interviewees was around marketing and publicity. Some had not been aware of the site until they either stumbled upon it by chance while trawling the internet for information, or until they were sign-posted to it. These participants in particular, felt that as a resource, it was important that Propel was disseminated as widely as possible to help support young people and raise aspiration. As such, they proposed that it receives additional advertisement and publicity.

Several young people, professionals and carers interviewed talked about the challenges and barriers for young people returning to education. These professionals perceived that local authority funding was lower for students accessing FE, training or apprenticeships, than is provided to HE students. As these routes are pre-cursors to HE, disengagement from them equates to disengagement from HE. It was suggested by some that the inclusion of information relating to FE and alternative routes on Propel could potentially support rates of young people eventually accessing HE, and raise aspiration by engaging those who do not initially consider HE to be achievable.

Findings have illuminated the potential for building on this evaluation, and for the possible direction of future research. These are itemised and discussed, below:

- If Become decide to implement specific adaptations to the site based on recommendations by interview participants (e.g. improved usability/navigability/inclusion of FE resources, etc), there would be an opportunity to further build on this evaluation.
- Since only 2 young people in HE took part in interview, there is room to further explore similarities and variances between HEIs' support in marketing versus support in practice. Recruitment to an evaluation of HEI support would require careful consideration so as not to alienate HEIs, particularly as named contacts would be well placed to support recruitment and engage young people in the research.

- Interview data raises questions about the kinds of support care-experienced young people receive in their early education, at GCSE and in FE, to consider their futures and plan education/career pathways. There is potential for an evaluation of educational/career planning, and young people's/facilitators' experiences of it.
- Professionals and carers we spoke to were implementing Propel into their working practices in one way or another, either directly with the young people they work with, via their professional networks, or for their own/others' professional development. Drawing on this, we propose that there might be an opportunity for Become to formalise this, perhaps by creating an awarenessraising training workshop/programme/or e-course for professionals. This could be aimed at social workers and personal advisors involved in young people's pathway planning, and for educators and carers involved in young people's career development. In this instance, an evaluation could explore the efficacy of this as an intervention for arming professionals with resources/knowledge/skills to support the young people they work with to consider/access HE. As a workshop-type intervention, this is also something that could perhaps be developed specifically for use in schools or FE institutions with young people and their teachers. In this case, the evaluation of its use as a tool for career planning would be helpful in assessing efficacy.

In the near future, authors plan to work with Become to disseminate evaluation findings via 2 academic publications. We propose that 1 article will focus on Propel as a tool for inspiring change, and the other will be based on young people's experiences in education (en route to and in HE).

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7. Appendices



Appendix 1. Online Survey 1

Page 2: The Website

2. How did you find out about Propel? (You can select more than one option)

* Required

Please select between 1 and 5 answers.

- Social media
- The Who Cares? Trust
- Colleague
- Friend
- Professional
- Other

2.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

Page 3: About you

3. Please tell us who you are: * Required

- Young person in care
- Care leaver (up to and including the age of 25)
- Care experienced person (aged 26+)
- Parent/family of a young person in care/care leaver
- Carer
- Professional
- Other - Please provide further details below:

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

3.b. If you are a professional/carer, please provide your job title or carer type:

Page 4: Reasons for visiting Propel

4. I am a young person who is...

- Already studying on a higher education course?
- Intending to apply to a higher education course starting in 2016-2017?
- Intending to apply to a higher education course starting in 2017-2018?
- Generally wanting to learn more about higher education support available for care leavers?
- Other

4.a. If you selected Other, please specify your reasons for visiting the Propel website:

4.b. If you are a professional/parent/carer, please specify your reasons for visiting the Propel website?

Page 5: The Propel Website

5. What do you feel is the most important thing needed to support care leavers in higher education? * Required

[More info](#)

6. Please select the relevant box: * Required

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Propel website has improved my knowledge of the support that higher education institutions themselves provide for care leavers:	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7. Please select the relevant box: * Required

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The Propel website has improved my knowledge of general support that is available for care leavers accessing higher education:	<input type="checkbox"/>				
--	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

8. Please select the relevant box: * Required

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a young person, the Propel website has helped me to decide to apply to a higher education course:	<input type="checkbox"/>				
As a professional/carer, the Propel website has helped me to support a young person I work with to decide to apply to a higher education course:	<input type="checkbox"/>				

9. Please select the relevant box: * Required

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
--	----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

As a young person, the Propel website has made me feel more confident about applying to a higher education course:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
As a professional/carer, the Propel website has made me feel more confident about assisting others in applying for higher education:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page 6: Additional

Would you be happy to help us again?

We will be continuing our evaluation of the Propel website by speaking to care leavers and professionals and by carrying out another survey. If you would be happy for us to contact you in the future with further information about this, please tick 'YES' below.

10. Happy for us to contact you about the Propel evaluation? * *Required*

YES

NO

If you're happy for us to contact you about our evaluation, please provide your details below:

10.a. Name:

10.b. Age:

10.c. Email:

10.d. Phone number:

Page 7: 5 - Thank you

Thank you for completing this survey.

The Who Cares? Trust 'Propel' website is designed to provide information about Higher Education providers to help guide young people's selection of a HE institution, and to raise aspirations by presenting HE as an accessible choice for care leavers.

We are inviting all visitors to the Propel website (aged 16+) to participate in this online survey so that we can evaluate the website and see if it has an impact on widening care-experienced young people's access to Higher Education. If you would like any further information about our evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' website, please contact the research team at unars@northampton.ac.uk

Appendix 2. Online Survey 2a: Young People

Please tell us your views on Propel - Follow up (Young People)

Page 1: Introduction

You kindly completed our online survey for the Propel website a few months ago. Propel is designed to provide information about higher education for young people with care experience and the professionals who work with them.

We're carrying out a follow up survey and would like to invite you to take part. Our aim is to catch up with you and find out if Propel has had an impact on decisions you've made about college or uni. This will help us to find out the impact of the website and how we can improve it! Please help us by answering a few short questions. Thanks for your time.

Data Protection Act 1998

In providing information and submitting this survey, you are agreeing to the processing of your personal data for the reasons specified above. This will greatly assist our evaluation of the Propel website aimed at care leavers and the professionals working with them. Taking part in this survey is voluntary and you can stop the survey at any point. Although there are some mandatory questions (which we need you to answer to make the survey useful) you do not have to provide answers to 'non-compulsory' questions if you do not wish to, but the more complete the set of answers we have the more useful it will be. Personal data provided by you will be treated as confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be anonymised to protect your identity and data will be used solely for the purpose of evaluating the Propel website and disseminating findings (through publication and presentation). If you would like further information on how we will use the confidential information you provide, please contact us at: unars@northampton.ac.uk

1. I confirm that I have read the information above and understand why the information is being collected. *Required

Yes

Page 2: Please tell us who you are

2. Please tell us who you are * Required

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

- A young person in care
- A care leaver (up to and including the age of 25)
- A care experienced person (aged 26+)
- Other - Please provide further details below:

2.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

Page 3: What are your current circumstances?

3. I am a young person who is... * *Required*

Please select between 1 and 2 answers.

- Already studying on a higher education course
- Intending to apply to a higher education course starting in 2016-2017
- Intending to apply to a higher education course starting in 2017-2018
- Generally wanting to learn more about higher education support available for care leavers
- Other - Please provide further details below:

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

Page 4: Since using Propel...

4. Please select the relevant box: * Required

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Since using Propel, I have made decision/s involving higher education	<input type="checkbox"/>				

4.a. Please state as fully as possible your reason for your answer (e.g. What decisions have you made and how did you make them?): * Required

<input type="text"/>

Page 5: Since using Propel...

5. Please select the relevant statement * *Required*

- Since using Propel I have applied to a higher education course
- Since using Propel I have decided that I will make an application to a higher education course in the future
- Since using Propel I have not made any decisions about higher education
- Other - Please provide further details below

5.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

5.b. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for your answer: * *Required*

Page 6: Higher Education Decisions

6. Please select the relevant box: * *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Propel helped me to make a decision about higher education	<input type="checkbox"/>				

6.a. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for your answer (e.g. how did Propel help you to make a decision?): * *Required*

<input type="text"/>

Page 7: Ambitions

7. Please select the relevant box: * *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Since using Propel, my ambitions to go into higher education have changed	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7.a. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for giving this answer (e.g. What are your ambitions now? What were they before using Propel? What changed them?): * *Required*

Page 8: Confidence

8. Please select the relevant box: * *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Since using Propel, I feel more confident about applying to a higher education course:	<input type="checkbox"/>				

8.a. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for giving this answer: * *Required*

8.b. Could your confidence be increased? If so, how? * *Required*

Page 9: Anything to add?

9. Please use this text box to tell us anything else you think is relevant:

Page 10: Thank you

Thank you for completing this survey.

The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' website is designed to provide information about higher education providers to help you make informed decisions about where to study. We are inviting visitors to the Propel website (aged 16+) to participate in an online survey so that we can understand the impact of the website.

If you would like any further information about our evaluation of Propel, please contact the research team at unars@northampton.ac.uk

Appendix 3. Online Survey 2b: Professionals & Carers

Please tell us your views on Propel - Follow up (Professionals/Carers)

Page 1: Introduction

You kindly completed our online survey for the Propel website a few months ago. Propel is designed to provide information about higher education for young people with care experience and the professionals who work with them.

We're carrying out a follow up survey and would like to invite you to take part. Our aim is to catch up with the young people and professionals who completed the first survey to find out if Propel has had an impact on young people's decisions involving higher education and their confidence in making applications. This kind of information will help us to evaluate the website and see if it has had an impact on widening care-experienced young people's access to higher education. Please help us by answering the following questions. Thanks for your time.

Data Protection Act 1998

In providing information and submitting this survey, you are agreeing to the processing of your personal data for the reasons specified above. This will greatly assist our evaluation of the Propel website aimed at care leavers and the professionals working with them. Taking part in this survey is voluntary and you can stop the survey at any point. Although there are some mandatory questions (which we need you to answer to make the survey useful) you do not have to provide answers to 'non-compulsory' questions if you do not wish to, but the more complete the set of answers we have the more useful it will be. Personal data provided by you will be treated as confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be anonymised to protect your identity and data will be used solely for the purpose of evaluating the Propel website and disseminating findings (through publication and presentation). If you would like further information on how we will use the confidential information you provide,

please contact us at: unars@northampton.ac.uk

1. I confirm that I have read the information above and understand why the information is being collected. * *Required*

Yes

Page 2: Please tell us who you are

2. Please tell us who you are * Required

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

- Parent/family of a care-experienced young person
- Carer
- Professional
- Other - Please provide further details below:

2.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

2.b. If you are a professional or carer, please provide your job title or carer type:

Page 3: How do you support young people?

3. Please select the relevant statement: * *Required*

- I support a young person/s already studying on an HE course
- I support a young person/s intending to begin a HE course in 2016-2017
- I support a young person/s intending to apply to a HE course starting 2017-2018
- Other - Please provide further details below:

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

3.b. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for giving this answer: * *Required*

Page 4: Since using Propel...

4. Please select the relevant box: * *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Since using Propel, a young person I support has made a decision/s involving higher education	<input type="checkbox"/>				

4.a. Please state as fully as possible your reason for giving this answer (e.g. What decisions has the young person made and how did they arrive at them?):

* *Required*

Page 5: Who Cares? Trust Resources

5. It would be helpful to understand if/how you use the Propel website in your work with young people (e.g. do you introduce the website to those you work with, and if so, what have your and their experiences been?):

6. Other than the Propel website, have you used any other Who Cares? Trust resources (Such as the handbook)? If so, what have you used and how?:

Page 6: Higher Education Decisions

7. Please select the relevant box: * Required

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Propel website has helped me to support a young person/s I work with to decide and apply to a HE course:	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7.a. Please state as fully as possible your reason for your answer (e.g. Has the young person applied? Do they intend to apply? Did Propel help them to decide?): * Required

Page 7: Ambitions

8. Please select the relevant box: * *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Since using Propel, I have seen a young person's ambition to go into higher education increase	<input type="checkbox"/>				

8.a. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for giving this answer (e.g. What are the young person's ambitions now? What were they previously? What do you think changed them?): * *Required*

Page 8: Confidence

9. Please select the relevant box: * *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Since using Propel, I feel more confident about assisting young people to apply for higher education:	<input type="checkbox"/>				

9.a. Please state as fully as possible your reasons for giving this answer: * *Required*

9.b. Is there anything else that would further support you to assist young people to apply for higher education? * *Required*

Page 9: Anything to add?

10. Please use this text box to tell us anything else you think is relevant:

Page 10: Thank you

Thank you for completing this survey.

The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' website is designed to provide information about higher education providers to help guide young people's selection of universities and colleges. In addition, the website aims to raise aspirations by presenting higher education as an accessible choice for care leavers. We are inviting visitors to the Propel website (aged 16+) to participate in an online survey so that we can evaluate the website and see if it has an impact on widening care-experienced young people's access to higher education.

If you would like any further information about our evaluation of Propel, please contact the research team at unars@northampton.ac.uk

Appendix 4. Participant Forms: Interviews with Young People Pre-HE

Tell us what you think about The Who Cares? Trust's new website for care experienced young people! We need your views!

The Who Cares? Trust is a charity which supports children in care and care leavers and works to improve the care system.

The charity has created a new website called 'Propel' and we'd like to know what you think about it! Propel provides:

- Information on the different types of support that colleges and universities, which provide Higher Education courses offer you (e.g. accommodation and financial support.)
- General information about what support you are entitled to when you go into higher education.
- Inspirational stories about other care leavers who have gone to university or college to study a higher education course.

As this website is new we are trying to find out who is using it, if it is useful and how we can make it better. If you are a care experienced young person aged 16 or over and would like to help us we want to hear from you! We're inviting young people to talk to us in an informal interview lasting approximately 30 minutes via phone or skype about their thoughts on higher education and to find out their views on Propel and if it can be improved.

The interview will last about 30 minutes and it will be private (so we will not tell your friends/family/carers or teachers what you say). It is important that I remember what you say, and so I'll record our chat on a voice recorder. After we've finished talking, the recording will be written out word for word – however your name and all names you mention will be deleted. When I write about this evaluation of the website, I may write down some of the things you've said, but I will make sure that your name isn't used, and that no-one will be able to tell that it was you speaking.

If at any time you want to stop the interview you can ask to do so and you also don't need to answer all the questions if you don't want to. The audio recording will be stored on a password protected device. Consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet, and stored separately from the recordings. Taking part is on a voluntary basis and it is up to you whether you take part or not.



Researchers from Northampton University will be leading these interviews. If you are interested in knowing more about this work, or if you'd like to take part, please get in touch with us by emailing Jo Alexander at: unars@northampton.ac.uk

Thank you – we hope you're able to take part in this exciting project for!



Consent form: Young People Pre-HE

Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' Website

I have read and understood the information sheet for the project 'Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust 'Propel' Website', and I have agreed to participate in this research.

Please tick to show your consent in participating in this research.

I understand that:

1	I can stop the interview if I want to, at any time during the interview. I don't have to give a reason for this, if I don't want to.	
2	I can withdraw at any point up to four weeks after my interview by contacting the researcher, Jo at: unars@northampton.ac.uk. This would mean that anything I say in my interview would not be included in the research project and my interview recording would be destroyed.	
3	If I don't want to answer a particular question, I can just say so and the researcher will move on to the next question.	
4	The interviews will be voice-recorded.	
5	My interview will be written out word for word, and some of the things I say may be quoted in research reports and published. However, my name will be changed, and the researchers will do their best to make sure that I cannot be identified from the things I've said.	
6	I can contact the researchers if I have any questions.	
7	The researcher will not tell anyone anything I have said unless I have told them something that makes them worry that I (or someone else) might be in danger. If this happens, the researcher will tell me first, before they tell anyone else.	

I understand that the research is aimed at evaluating the 'Propel' Website. I have decided that I would like to talk to the researcher (Jo) about the project: Yes () No () I

am 16, or older: Yes () No ()

Signed.....

Please print your name.....

Date.....

Interview Schedule: Young People Pre-HE

Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' Website

This informal interview will focus on your thoughts about University, also known as higher education or 'HE', and your views on the Propel website and if/how it is useful or might be improved.

1. How did you find out about Propel?
2. Why did you use Propel?
3. What are your goals and aspirations for the future?
4. Are you planning on studying a Higher Education (HE) course at university or college?
5. Are there any challenges you face in applying/going to university or college to study a Higher Education course? If so, what are they?
6. What types of things do you think could help you to apply/go to university or college to study a Higher Education course?
7. Do you know about the types of support available for care-experienced young people to go to university or college to study a higher education course?
 - If so, what types of support do you know about? Did you find out about this support on Propel?
8. Was the website useful? If so, how?
9. Did the website help you to make any decisions about university or college?
10. Did the website change any views you had about care experienced young people in Higher Education?
11. Would you recommend Propel to a friend?
12. Could the site be improved? If so, how?

Is there anything else you would like to talk about today?

Thank you very much for your help.

As part of our evaluation of the Propel website, we plan to invite 10 interviewees who go into Higher Education (2016-17 entry) to take part in a follow-up interview. In the follow-up interview, we would explore your experiences of



being in HE. Would you be happy for us to contact you in the future to invite you to take part in a follow-up interview?

Appendix 5. Participant Forms: Interviews with Professionals

Participant Information: Professionals - Interviews

Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' Website

The Who Cares? Trust is a charity which supports young people in care and works to improve the care system.

The charity has created a new website called 'Propel' for children in care and care leavers and we'd like to know what you think about it! Propel provides:

- Information on the different types of support colleges and universities, which provide HE courses, offer care leavers e.g. 365 days accommodation and financial support.
- General information about what support care leavers are entitled to when you go into higher education.
- Inspirational stories about other care leavers who have gone to university or college to study a higher education course.

As this website is new we are trying to find out who is using it, if it is useful and how we can make it better. If you work with or support care leavers or young people with experience of care we want to hear from you! We're inviting professionals who work with young careexperienced people to talk to us in an informal interview via phone or skype about their thoughts on higher education and to find out their views on Propel and if it can be improved. *We are also interviewing young people aged between 16-25 so do let us know if you know of any young people who would like to get involved too!*

The interview will last about 30 minutes and we will explore your experiences of supporting care experienced young people, the kinds of support that is available for them to access HE, and your thoughts about the 'Propel' website. Our talk will be private (I will not tell your colleagues, organisation, clients, friends or family that you have participated). Our chat will be voice recorded so that we have an accurate record for transcription purposes. This recording will be transcribed word for word, but all identifying information (names, organisations, place names etc), will be changed to pseudonyms, to protect your anonymity.

We will analyse the interviews and develop themes, and when we write these up for official reports and for scholarly dissemination, we will use quotes from all interviews to illustrate the themes. Names, organisations and other identifying information will be removed from these quotes.



The audio recording will be stored on a password protected device. Consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet, and stored separately from the recordings.

Taking part is on a voluntary basis and it is up to you whether you take part or not.

Researchers from Northampton University will be leading these interviews. If you are interested in knowing more about this work, or if you'd like to take part, please get in touch with us by emailing Jo Alexander at: unars@northampton.ac.uk

Thank you – we hope you're able to take part in this exciting project for!



Consent form: Professionals - Interviews

Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' Website

I have read and understood the information sheet for the project 'Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust 'Propel' Website', and I have agreed to participate in this research.

Please tick to show your consent in participating in this research.

I understand that:

The purpose of the study has been fully explained to me	
I have the right to withdraw at any point during the interview, and up to four weeks after by contacting the researcher (at: unars@northampton.ac.uk)	
I have the right to omit questions as I wish.	
I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded	
All interviews will be transcribed word for word, but my name, organisation, locations and other identifying information will be removed from the transcripts to protect mine and others' anonymity.	
Anonymised quotes from the interview will be used in the report and any subsequent scholarly publication/dissemination, and may be used for teaching and training purposes.	
I can also contact the researcher if I have queries.	

I understand that the research is aimed at evaluating the 'Propel' Website. I have decided that I would like to talk to the researcher (Jo) about the project: Yes () No () I am 16, or older: Yes () No ()

Signed.....

Please print your name.....



Date.....

Interview Schedule: Professionals - Interviews

Evaluation of The Who Cares? Trust's 'Propel' Website

- What are your experiences of working with care-experienced young people?
 - What is your role?
 - How long have you worked in this kind of context?
- Where did you hear about the Propel website?
- What were your reasons for visiting the site?
- In your experience, what resources and support are available for care-experienced young people to explore, access and achieve in Higher Education?
- What are some of the enablers and barriers for care-experienced young people to:
 - Explore HE institutions?
 - Access HE?
 - Achieve in HE?
- Was the website useful?
 - What are the 'take home' messages?
 - Did the website change any perceptions you had about care leavers in Higher Education?
- Do you think the Propel site could help the young people you work with? If so, in what ways?
- Could the site be improved to better support care leavers to achieve their ambition of entering into Higher Education? If so, how?

Is there anything else you would like to raise in relation to our discussion today?



Thank you very much for your help.

Appendix 6. Survey 2 – Quantitative Findings – Young People

Propel helped me to make a decision about higher education

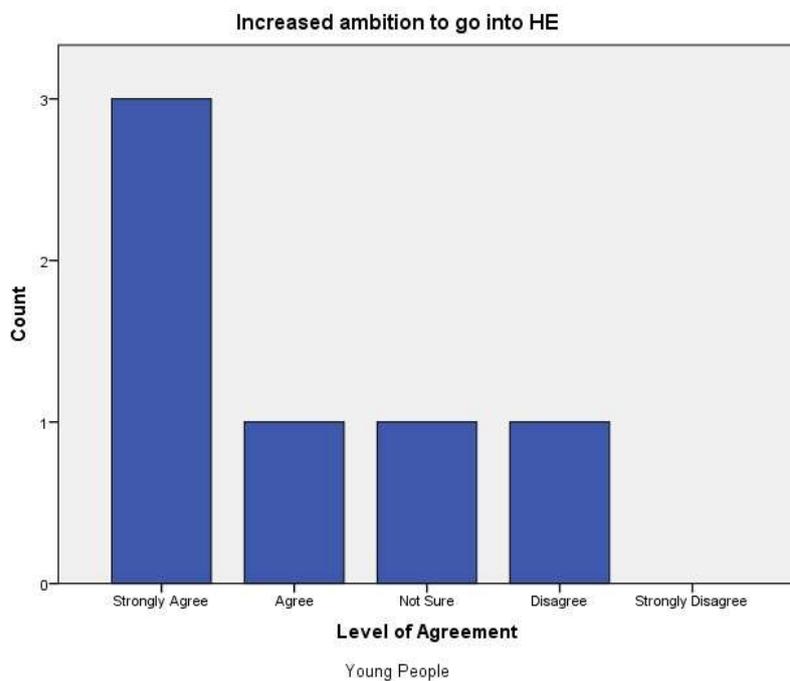
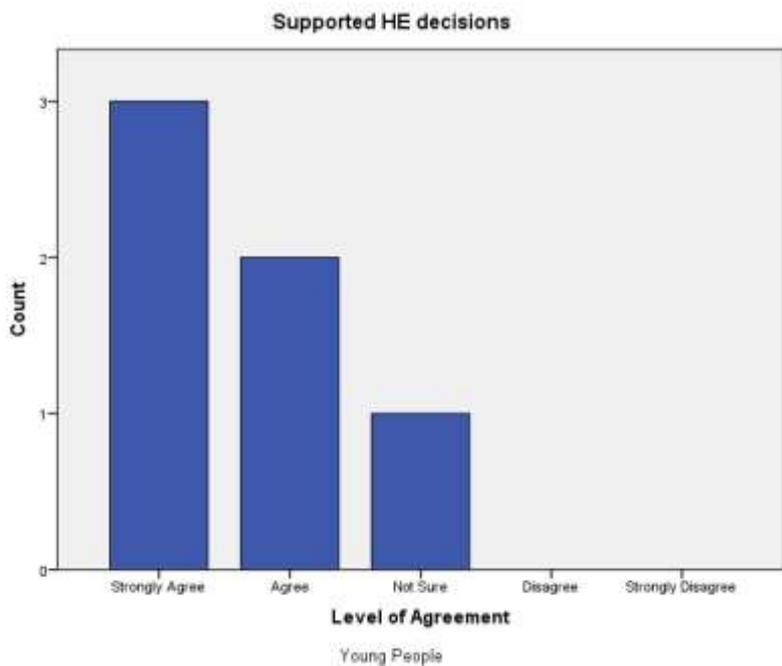
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	3	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	2	33.3	33.3	83.3
	Not Sure	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	6	100.0	100.0	

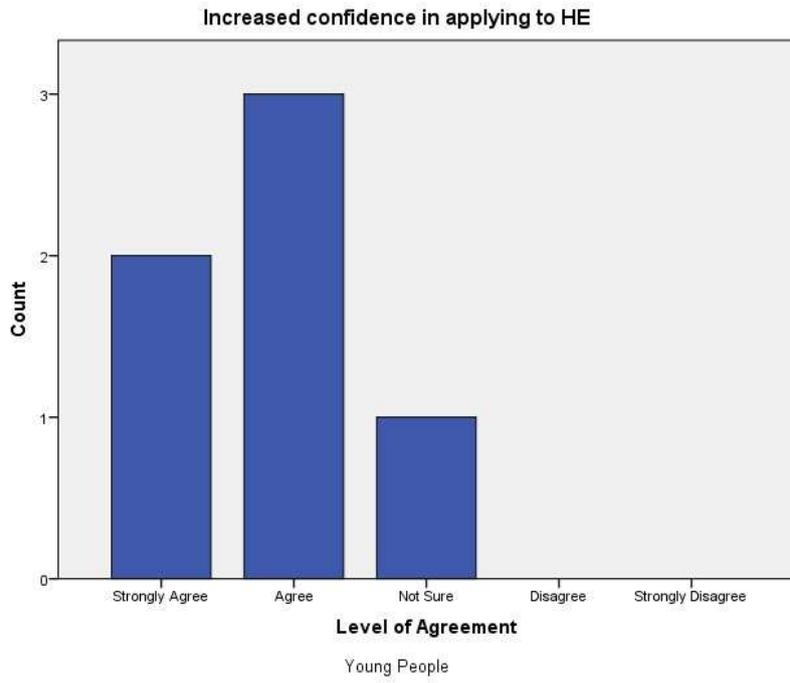
Since using Propel, my ambitions to go into higher education have changed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	3	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	1	16.7	16.7	66.7
	Not Sure	1	16.7	16.7	83.3
	Disagree	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	6	100.0	100.0	

Since using Propel, I feel more confident about applying to a higher education course:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	2	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Agree	3	50.0	50.0	83.3
	Not Sure	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	6	100.0	100.0	





Appendix 7. Survey 2 – Quantitative Findings – Professionals & Carers

