

**Understanding Homelessness in Higher Education: Care Leavers'
Accounts**

Melissa Evans

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ABSTRACT

Background: In England, 6% of care leavers (CLs) access Higher Education (HE) in comparison to 43% of their non-care experienced peers (Department for Education, 2020). Those who do enter HE experience a range of challenges, which increases the likelihood of their withdrawal (Harrison, 2017), including an increased risk of experiencing homelessness (e.g. O'Neill et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2020). Despite this being recognised, there is an absence of research exploring CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE.

Aims: This qualitative research focused on the small number of CLs who have defied the odds in accessing HE and aimed to explore their accounts of homelessness in HE. This research aimed to understand what CLs viewed as contributing to and/or preventing their experiences of homelessness and how they were able to navigate such challenges to remain in HE.

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews were completed with 11 CLs who attended a London university. A thematic analysis was undertaken of the resultant interview data, informed by a critical realist epistemology.

Results: Three main themes were identified: (1) Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation, (2) Self-Reliance, and (3) Higher Education Can Offer Protection and a Better Future.

Conclusions: This research brings awareness to CLs' experiences of homelessness and hidden homelessness in HE, highlighting this area as a hidden problem. Despite the additional policy and provision in place for supporting CLs in HE, experiences of homelessness were not prevented. Contributing factors included system failures, structural factors, and relational factors, which were interrelated. Further, this research highlights repeated homelessness throughout the year suggesting CLs experiences of homelessness in HE may be more prevalent than previously considered. The findings highlight how interventions across multiple levels could bring awareness to, and also prevent, CLs' experiencing homelessness in HE.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
CL	Care Leaver
CLCA	Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000)
CP	Clinical Psychologist
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
PP	Pathway Planning
PA	Personal Advisor
TA	Thematic Analysis
TIE	Trauma Informed Environment
UK	United Kingdom
YP	Young Person

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research and literature relevant to understanding care leavers' (CLs) experiences of homelessness and hidden homelessness in higher education (HE). The chapter starts by exploring the outcomes of young people (YP) who have left local authority (LA) care. Among a range of poorer outcomes, CLs are more likely to experience homelessness and hidden homelessness during their transition from, and after leaving care (Gill & Daw, 2017; Wade & Dixon, 2006). Additionally, in comparison to their non-care experienced peers, CLs are disproportionately less likely to access HE, and those who do access HE experience numerous challenges which make them more likely to withdraw from HE (Harrison, 2017). One such challenge includes the experience of homelessness or hidden homelessness (e.g. O'Neill et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2020). This research focuses on the small number of CLs who have defied the odds in accessing HE and explores their accounts of homelessness and hidden homelessness whilst in HE. This chapter explores the scarce literature in this area. Relevant policy and legislation will be described for supporting CLs transitioning from care, in HE and in relation to homelessness prevention. Finally, the aims of the research and research questions will be outlined.

1.1. Definitions

1.1.1. Defining Care Leavers

In England, there is a legal framework for defining those who are considered CLs. The legal definition is derived from the Children Act (1989) and the Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000) (CLCA), which support YP as they move from LA care towards independence. Legally, a CL is someone who is aged 16 or over, who has previously been looked after by their LA. LAs have a unique responsibility to YP who are in or have left care as their corporate parent (Department for Education (DfE), 2018a). The corporate parent responsibilities of the LA depend on the YP's care status. The CLCA (2000)

made the distinction between 'Eligible,' 'Relevant,' 'Former Relevant,' and 'Qualifying CLs' as outlined below:

Eligible Child: Aged 16 or 17, has been looked after by their LA for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and remains in care.

Relevant Child: Aged 16 or 17, has been looked after by their LA for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, ending after the age of 16, and has subsequently left care.

Former Relevant Child: Aged between 18-21 or 18-25 (if they are in full time education) and were previously an 'Eligible' or 'Relevant Child.'

A Qualifying CL: Aged between 16-21 or 16-25 (if they are in full time education) and were looked after by their LA on or after their 16th birthday, but are no longer looked after, and do not fulfil the criteria for an 'Eligible' or 'Relevant Child'.

1.1.1.1. *Critique of Definition*

The definitional variations applied to CLs impacts the level of support a YP is entitled to by their LA once they leave care (see Appendix A for summary of entitlements). For those who fulfil the legal definition of a CL and are therefore considered a 'Former Relevant Child', the LA are required to support CLs to live in safe, suitable and stable accommodation and provide financial assistance connected to their engagement in education (Children and Young Persons Act, 2008). Those who do not meet the legal definition of a 'Former Relevant Child' (either by not being in care for 13 weeks prior to their 16th birthday or by leaving care before their 16th birthday) are then not entitled to full leaving care status and corporate parenting duties (DfE, 2018a). In practice, this can impact those with less stability in their care pathway and can come down to an arbitrary difference of a few weeks. This means CLs receive differing levels of support, with support being offered by narrow definition rather than based on need.

Internationally, YP in care are known by an array of terms and therefore the terminology and definitions used to refer to YP who have left care also varies, (e.g. ageing out, former foster youth). These varying definitions and terminology, as well as the policy context in which they are situated, have implications for summarising the international literature (Cameron et al., 2018; Strahl et al., 2021).

1.1.1.2. *Defining Care Leavers in HE*

HEIs in England tend to be more expansive in their definitions of CLs compared to LAs, however, this also varies between institutions (Hauari et al., 2019). Some HEIs use the formal legal definition outlined by the CLCA (2000) whilst others engage with a broader group, considering anyone who has experience of care at any stage as a CL. This, in turn, means that there are variations between HE practices and support for CLs (Hauari et al., 2019).

1.1.1.3. *Definition for Current Research*

For the purposes of this research, an expansive definition of a CL will be adopted, including those who meet the LA definition of a CL as well as those who identify as having care experience. Those who are considered 'estranged students' and by definition are estranged from their families (Office for Fair Access, 2016) will not be included. Whilst it is recognised that these students may come from a comparable background to CLs (Simon, 2008), they will not be included due to not having been looked after by the LA.

1.1.2. Defining Higher Education

The terms HE, HEI and University will be used interchangeably to refer to tertiary education which leads to the award of an academic degree.

1.1.3. Defining Homelessness

There is a legal framework for defining homelessness in England. The Housing Act (1996) considers homelessness as the 'absence of accommodation'. This includes instances where accommodation may be

available, but there is either insufficient legal status to occupy it or there are difficulties in occupying it (despite having the legal status to do so).

1.1.3.1. *Critique of Definition*

This definition fails to capture and conceptualise homelessness as a multifaceted and complex problem which involves deprivation across a number of different dimensions (Somerville, 2013). As such, the definition does not consider the interrelated factors which contribute to experiences of homelessness (Mago et al., 2013). Further, despite attempting to define homelessness beyond 'rooflessness', the legal definition fails to capture different forms homelessness such as 'hidden homelessness' with temporary living arrangements. This is where someone may be homeless, but they have mitigated this by 'sofa surfing', which is common among CLs (Clarke, 2016). Additionally, the definition does not detail what an adequate home is, meaning that people can be occupying inappropriate and unsafe living conditions without this being acknowledged and considered. Consequently, this narrow definition can limit understanding of homelessness and hinder the development of targeted strategies to alleviate or prevent homelessness.

1.1.3.2. *Definition for Current Research*

It is important to acknowledge the difficulty in defining homelessness (Clarke, 2016). Therefore, for this research, a broad definition of homelessness will be adopted, encompassing and capturing a range of experiences. This research will use the definition of 'core homelessness' (Bramley, 2017), which captures rough sleeping, occupying temporary or unsuitable accommodation and experiences of hidden homelessness.

1.2. **Young People in Care**

The Department for Education (DfE) frequently publishes statistics on YP who are in care and 'looked after' by the LA. The most recent figures show that there are 80,850 YP in care in England (DfE, 2021). This figure is rising and is currently the highest it has been for 30 years. The majority of YP enter the looked after care system between the ages of 10 and 15, however, this

age is variable and changing over time. For example, in 2020- 2021, 23% of the YP who became 'looked after' were aged 16 or over (DfE, 2021). The number of YP entering care after the age of 16 has increased by 40% over last 10 years (DfE, 2020). Coming into care at a later age has been associated with poorer long-term outcomes (Sebba & Luke, 2019) and yet these YP do not meet the legal LA definition of a CL, nor are they eligible for the subsequent cooperate parent responsibilities.

It is clear that YP in care are not a homogenous group, however most of these YP will have experienced trauma and difficulties prior to becoming 'looked after' (Evans et al., 2021). The primary reasons for YP entering the care system in England are due to abuse or neglect (66%) (DfE, 2020). Abuse and neglect encompass a range of reasons for entering care, including sexual, physical and emotional abuse (NSPCC, 2018).

The trauma experienced prior to entering care can contribute to poorer outcomes for YP in care. It is important to note that the contributing factors are complex and intersectional, and outcomes are also influenced to by the traumatic nature of YPs experiences whilst they are in care, such as frequent placement moves (Koh et al., 2014). Concerningly, recent figures show that one in ten CLs were reported to have more than three placement moves in a 12-month period (DfE, 2020).

In terms of documented outcomes for YP in care, 45% of YP in care were reported to be experiencing mental health difficulties (DfE, 2020). YP in care also had lower levels of educational attainment across all stages of education (Sebba et al., 2015) with 17.5% of YP in care having achieved a GCSE pass in English and Maths compared to 58.9% of those who were not in care (DfE, 2018b).

1.3. Care Leavers

YP in care cease to be legally looked after when they turn 18 years old, are adopted or return home. YP however can 'leave care' from the age of 16.

Those who cease to be looked after on or after their 16th birthday are then considered 'CLs' (DfE, 2020). In 2019-2020 reports, 10% of YP left care when they were aged 16 or 17 and 35% left on their 18th birthday (DfE, 2020). Qualitative research with 263 CLs from 12 LAs in England reveals that almost half of CLs felt they had little (16%) or no (32%) choice in when they left care (Dixon et al., 2015). It should be noted that the DfE figures only include those YP who the LA have remained in contact with. In 2019-2020, only 8 out of 152 LAs reported that they knew where all their CLs were living. LA's were not in touch with 27% of YP who left care aged 17 and 9% of YP who left care aged 19-21, meaning they could not report information on where they were living or whether they were in education, training or employment (DfE, 2020).

Existing UK research has consistently shown that CLs face greater disadvantage compared to YP without care experience. On entering adulthood, CLs are at increased risk of social disadvantage and homelessness (Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), 2015; Wade & Dixon, 2006). The DfE (2020), concluded that outcomes for CLs remained poor in comparison to their counterparts, with 39% of CLs aged 19-21 not in education, training or employment in comparison to 13% of their non-care experienced peers. This places CLs at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion (Powell, 2018), highlighting the multiple and intersecting levels of disadvantage faced by CLs. Furthermore, societal discourses of 'low expectations' and 'limited ambitions' compounds these disadvantages (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

1.4. Transition from Care

As noted, the majority of YP leave care either on or before their 18th birthday. Upon leaving care, the majority of YP move into independence, which is vastly different to their non-care experienced peers at this age. The Office for National Statistics (2019), noted that the average age that an adult in the UK leaves the family home is 23. Upon leaving care, CLs reported that they do not feel sufficiently prepared for independence and experience multiple problems in transitioning from care to independence (Adley & Jupp Kina,

2017). Duncalf and the CLs' Association (2010) highlighted the lack of support for CLs, which involved poor accommodation, feelings of isolation and financial issues. CLs also described that the process of leaving care did not involve adequate planning, they felt they had limited practical skills and were not psychologically ready to leave care (Butterworth et al., 2017).

The transition out of care has been highlighted as a particularly vulnerable period due to the sudden and accelerated transition into adulthood (Stein, 2006). For CLs, this is without the 'safety net' afforded to their non-care experienced peers of gradual independence (Goldfarb, 2014). Indeed, most YP without care experience will navigate this challenging phase gradually with the support of their parents and other adults (Sebba et al., 2015; Settersten & Ray, 2010). CLs usually lack the support networks available to their non-care experienced peers, as well as the possibility of returning to a home if they encounter hurdles (Singer & Berzin, 2015). There isn't a gradual phasing out of support and gradual transition to independence; the process often happens rapidly, without attention to the developmental processes which occur during this period.

There has been minimal theoretical discussion in relation to the poorer outcomes for CLs, leading Stein (2006), to describe this area as having a 'poverty of theory'. A developmental approach can provide multiple lenses in which this accelerated transition and subsequent difficulties can be understood. 'Emerging adulthood' broadly refers to ages of 18-26 as a time of transition from adolescence to young adulthood, and there is a growing body of theory and literature exploring this period. It is recognised as the distinct developmental stage that facilitates the development of human, social and identity capital, which supports the journey towards independence (Singer & Berzin, 2015). Caution however should be noted owing to the socially constructed and performative nature of age and markers of independence can vary across societies (Sirriyeh, 2013). Nonetheless, those in this period tend to lean more on their parents' support due to the longevity and demanding tasks of this period, which include transitions in the areas of housing and education (Arnett, 2015). This is recognised as a challenging period for CLs who navigate this time period without sufficient support and experience this stage not as gradual, but one of 'instant adulthood' (Singer &

Berzin, 2015). Combined with pre-care and care experiences, this can culminate in disadvantage and poorer outcomes including homelessness and impacted educational achievement.

Focal theory was developed as a framework for understanding psychosocial transitions, which recognises that YP go through many changes during middle-late adolescence. Coleman (1989) describes that during this period, YP without care experience tend to focus on challenges in succession rather than contending with them simultaneously. Hollingworth and Jackson (2016) found that during the period of emerging adulthood, CLs navigated multiple disruptions and uncertainty. It was therefore difficult for CLs to pace their transitions, be supported and plan ahead in the way that focal theory and theories of emerging adulthood would suggest is desirable. Focal theory suggests negotiating several transitions simultaneously is likely to lead to less favourable outcomes (Cameron et al., 2015). Indeed, YP leaving care are often navigating multiple changes simultaneously, such as leaving and starting education alongside transitioning to living independently (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019). This is also alongside the 'drawing back' of support and having to survive the emotional and practical upheavals of living independently (Rogers, 2011; Stein, 2012).

1.5. Policy Context for Leaving Care

CLs are of interest in the policy and legislative landscape due to the poorer outcomes they experience, and because they represent a substantial and distinct group for which the LA are the corporate parent. Responsibility is placed on the various agencies that make up the LA to support CLs, which should be equivalent to the support and care of a 'good parent' (DfE, 2018a).

The legislation sets out that CLs in England have access to a range of entitlements upon leaving and transitioning from care. The duty of the LA depends on the CL's status (see Appendix A for summary of CL status and entitlements). Each of the Acts discussed below builds upon the previous, providing regulations and guidance for supporting CLs. Whilst the legislative

framework is expansive, for the context of this research the summary that follows will focus on the areas of accommodation and education.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act, (2000) (CLCA): The CLCA (2000) provided the legislative pathway for YP who have been in LA care. Prior to the CLCA (2000) an overarching statutory framework was lacking for CLs. Each LA determined the level and nature of support it provided, meaning this varied considerably. The introduction of the CLCA (2000) increased the leaving care age from 16 to 18 years. This aimed to delay the transition from care, allowing time to gradually prepare for independence.

The Act placed a duty on LAs to support CLs transitioning to independence and independent living. To facilitate this, YP are appointed with a personal advisor to collaboratively develop a pathway plan prior to the YP leaving care. This involves the assessment of the YP's needs and planning in the areas of accommodation, education, training or employment, emotional and behavioural development and self-care skills. Upon leaving care, those considered a 'Relevant' or 'Former Relevant Child' should be supported with finding and maintaining suitable accommodation. To be considered suitable, accommodation must be reasonably practicable for the CL given their identified needs. The LA have a duty to remain in contact with and assist CLs with accommodation and living costs, up to the age of 25 if they remain in education, to the extent that their welfare or education requires. However, this is vague, unclear and open to interpretation, therefore what constitutes an appropriate level of support may differ between LAs. The CLCA (2000) specifically stipulates that if a 'Former Relevant Child' or 'Qualifying CL' is enrolled in full-time HE and their term-time accommodation is not available, the LA has a responsibility to provide accommodation to prevent homelessness.

Pathway Planning (PP) and Personal Advisors (PA): As aforementioned, CLs' transitions from care are guided by PP. Some CLs have described the process as helpful, but other CLs found it irrelevant and stressful (Dixon et al., 2015). A systematic review of the literature by Atkinson and Hyde (2019) found CLs frequently experienced PP as a tick box exercise which was not

personalised, with priority given to practical aspects of transition. Indeed, the elements put in place from a PP tend to promote individualised strategies (e.g. money management skills) and neglect the wider contextual environment in which CLs are situated (Turner, 2013). Although PP should be a process to guide a gradual transition, research has found that it tends to be a singular event (Glynn & Mayock, 2019). This research also highlighted the crucial role of trust and transparency in the PA's relationship with the YP in facilitating the transition.

PAs are regarded as a supportive presence under the CLCA (2000). CLs are entitled to PA support up to the age of 21, or 25 if they remain in education. Concerningly 54% of 16-18-year olds reported that they felt unable to talk to their PA about issues affecting them (VOYPIC Organisation et al., 2014). Research shows that one quarter of CLs have either never had a PA or are not in contact with them and the high caseload of PAs can undermine the chance to build supportive and effective relationships (CSJ, 2015). This raises questions about the number of YP who have a collaboratively developed PP to support their transition from care to independence. In a review of leaving care services, Ofsted inspections found that 63% of LAs were providing services which either required improvement or were simply inadequate, with the common short fallings including poor PP and a lack of support from PAs (Oakley et al., 2018).

Children and Young Persons Act (2008): This Act was introduced following recommendations from *Care Matters: Time for Change* and *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and YP in Care* (DfE and Skills 2006, 2007) which highlighted the poor outcomes for CL in terms of education and the transition from care. This Act required LAs to give CLs £2,000 if they progressed to HE, which aimed to increase participation. The Act also extended the duty of the LA to appoint a PA and keep the PP under regular review for a 'Former Relevant Child' who starts HE after the age of 21 and who are under the age of 25.

The Care Leaver Strategy (2013): This highlighted the poorer prospects for CLs and attempted to address the disparities in areas such as suitable

accommodation and education, among others. Part of this was to improve the inconsistent quality of services for CLs and address some of the consequences of policies that were not aligned. As part of this strategy, 'staying put' guidelines were introduced to support CLs to remain with their current foster carers if appropriate, which later became embedded in policy in the *Children and Families Act (2014)*.

Children and Social Work Act (2017): This aimed to continue to improve support for CLs following the policy briefing *Keep on Caring: Supporting YP From Care* (HM Government, 2016). This recommended that CLs should be supported to live independently and feel stable, safe and secure in their housing. It highlighted CLs should, if they want to, be supported by a PA and PP up to the age of 25 regardless of their education status. It also highlighted the need for improved access to education, employment and training for CLs and emphasised the need to embed corporate parenting responsibilities across society. Within this Act, the corporate parenting principles for LAs were outlined. LAs were also required to publish their local offer for CLs and detail which services they offer that could assist CLs with independence, including in the areas of education, accommodation, homelessness relief and prevention. Concerningly, the discretionary local offer varies between LAs, meaning CLs from two neighbouring boroughs or councils can be offered varying levels of support upon leaving care (Ellis & Johnston, 2019).

Wilkinson and Baker (2019) completed reviews of several LAs and concluded major improvements were required. These reviews highlighted the importance of addressing the variation between LAs, with support offered to CLs described as a 'postcode lottery'. Despite the renewed focus on corporate parenting responsibilities and recognition of effectively preparing CLs for independence, practices and levels of support vary. Subsequently many CLs experience this transition without sufficient or consistent support (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019) which can contribute to outcomes such as homelessness (Gill & Daw, 2017).

1.6. Homelessness and Care Leavers

Research consistently highlights that CLs are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness in comparison to their non-care experienced peers (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, 2019; Whalen, 2015). The DfE (2020) reported that in 2019-2020, 1% of CLs experienced homelessness, and, in the same period 1.2% of those who were owed homelessness relief duties were CLs (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), 2020).

It is important to note that these figures are likely an underrepresentation of the true extent of homelessness among CLs, since they are based on those in touch with their LA or in contact with homelessness services. As previously highlighted, there are a substantial proportion of CLs with whom the LA have not remained in contact (DfE, 2020). Additionally, CLs may be reluctant to seek (or are unknowing of) the available support or their entitlements. Therefore, those not accessing services remain unaccounted for (Clarke, 2016). Estimations of homelessness among CLs are further complicated in terms of defining homelessness; specifically as certain forms of homelessness are not captured, such as hidden homelessness. Action for Children (2015) reported that amongst CLs, homelessness is more likely to be hidden and Gill and Daw (2017) reported that 26% of CLs had experienced hidden homelessness. Consequently, the official figures represent 'the tip of the iceberg' and accurate figures are difficult to obtain.

Attempts have been made to explore the prevalence of homelessness among CLs beyond the official figures. Gill and Daw (2017) surveyed 87 CLs about the challenges they had faced leaving care and found 14% of CLs had 'slept rough' since leaving care. In a review of the literature, Wade and Dixon (2006) reported that 35% of CLs experienced homelessness within two years of leaving care. More recently, Greaves (2017) concluded that one third of CLs (33%) experienced homelessness in the first two years after leaving care. In terms of people who have experienced homelessness, 25% of all single homeless people have been in care (Greaves, 2017) meaning CLs are overrepresented among homeless populations.

1.6.1. Unsafe and Inappropriate Accommodation

Appropriate, safe and affordable housing is the foundation for any YP's success (Coatham et al., 2011) and central to CLs feeling that they have control over their lives (Glynn & Mayock, 2019). Such housing has also been associated with improved overall wellbeing and improved mental and physical health (Braden et al., 2017), as well as increased engagement in education, employment and training (Stein, 2009).

Despite CLs being recognised as a priority group for such housing requirements, they are often not given a choice about their accommodation and due to accommodation availability, it is not uncommon for CLs to be residing in temporary, unsafe and unsuitable housing (St Basils, 2021). This is despite recognition that as part of a CLs PP, an assessment of the quality and suitability of accommodation should be undertaken. Concerningly, the CSJ (2015) found that half of CLs had difficulty securing stable and appropriate accommodation. Gill and Daw (2017) reported that 57% of CLs felt unsafe where they were living after leaving care and Baker et al. (2019) reported that 32% of CLs did not feel their accommodation was suitable for their needs. This is in comparison to Government figures (DfE, 2020) reporting that 85% of CLs were living in suitable accommodation upon leaving care, indicating a clear discrepancy between CLs reported experiences and inaccurate government statistics.

CLs should be offered a variety of semi-independent and independent accommodation options (The Care Leavers (England) Regulations, 2010). Given the estimates of homelessness prevalence amongst CLs and the literature regarding the importance of gradual transitions, it is recommended that when YP leave care, their transition is aided by moving into semi-independent accommodation. This aims to reduce the likelihood of tenancy failure and subsequent risk of homelessness (Gill & Daw, 2017). However, recent research conducted by St Basils (2021) found that while many CLs reported they did not feel ready to live independently, only 11% of YP who left care, moved into semi-independent (supported) accommodation. Fortune and Smith (2021) illustrated that those who moved into semi-independent

accommodation had a range of experiences. Some reported there was very little support and that they found the experience traumatic, including exposure to drug and alcohol use and exploitation. They concluded that the standards were variable and recommended quality standards be introduced for semi-independent accommodation to ensure consistency and suitability.

The largest proportion of CLs live independently (DfE, 2020). This can either be through social housing or the private sector. The availability of social housing varies greatly between LAs, with affordable social housing greatly declining in recent years (Gill & Daw, 2017). Fortune and Smith (2021) concluded that whilst LAs may give CLs priority allocation, they are not always placed in the highest category. This means CLs face additional challenges if they have to rent from the private sector, such as finding rent guarantors. They found those who moved into independent accommodation found the process 'daunting' and 'scary'. CLs reported that they did not feel they had been prepared with the skills to live independently and described feeling 'unsupported' and 'isolated'. They also revealed that the accommodation offered to CLs was sometimes of very poor quality leading to CLs feeling it was unsuitable.

1.6.2. Understanding Homelessness for Care Leavers

As discussed, the transition to independence comes with a number of challenges which culminate in the increased risk of homelessness, hidden homelessness and CLs residing in unsuitable accommodation. Explanations of causes of homelessness tend to focus on structural factors such as poverty or the housing crisis or personal factors such as vulnerabilities and behaviours. However recent discussions emphasise the interrelated and complex nature of these causes (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Such understanding is reflective of a social-ecological model of homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2014), where homelessness is resultant of a complex interplay between structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances rather than a single cause.

In a report highlighting the issues faced by CLs who are at risk of homelessness, Whalen (2015) found the contributing factors to be: having to

manage alone, the accelerated transition to independence and the lack of preparedness for independent living. Structural factors included a lack of affordable housing and a lack of semi-independent transitional housing. Gill and Daw (2017) completed a piece of comprehensive research examining why YP were leaving the care system and becoming homeless. This included surveys and interviews with CLs and practitioners from LAs. CLs were at risk of homelessness due to deficiencies in transitional support, a lack of suitable accommodation, social isolation and accommodation moves coinciding with critical periods in education. In terms of individual circumstances, research has linked adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to later homelessness, particularly experiences of abuse (Herman et al., 1997). CLs have commonly been exposed to high rates of ACEs (Simkiss, 2019) which cumulatively contribute to the risk of homelessness (Grey et al., 2019) suggesting that the trajectories to homelessness are complex and multifaceted.

1.6.3. Homelessness Legislation for Care Leavers

There are a number of legislative frameworks designed to prevent and relieve homelessness among CLs, which recognise the need for specific policy and practice (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2018; Jackson, 2002). These are situated within the corporate parent responsibilities as highlighted in the CLCA (2000) and outlined in the Children and Social Work Act (2017).

Housing Act (1996): This Act noted that LAs have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless CLs up to the age of 21. The housing duties of those considered a 'Former Relevant Child' in HE (up to age 25) are met within the CLCA (2000).

Homelessness legislation focuses on establishing priority need for those owed housing duties by the LA. Despite efforts to prevent homelessness by considering CLs as a 'priority group', support generally does not materialise until crisis point (i.e. where homelessness is experienced), and additionally relies on suitable accommodations to relieve homelessness. In practice, homeless CLs may be placed in emergency temporary accommodation and,

given the urgency around sourcing accommodation, it may not be suitable (Fortune & Smith, 2021).

Homelessness Act (2002): This aimed to shift the emphasis from a crisis response to a preventative approach (Jackson, 2002). This Act required LAs to have a strategy for preventing homelessness. It sought to bring local agencies together to prevent and relieve homelessness ensuring that appropriate tailored advice and support was provided to CLs as an at-risk group with separate needs.

Homelessness Reduction Act (2017): This amendment of the Housing Act (1996) introduced new duties for LAs. It placed a duty on the LA to prevent or relieve homelessness, if an individual is at risk of experiencing homelessness within 56 days. It supported those at risk of homelessness, regardless of their 'priority need' or 'intentionality', which includes those with care experience who do not meet the LA definition of a 'Former Relevant Child'. It stated that those at risk of homelessness are entitled to a personalised housing plan, which details actions required to prevent or relieve homelessness. This should be contained within the CLs PP if appropriate, highlighting the importance of joint working for preventing homelessness. In terms of CLs, this means there should be earlier recognition and opportunity to prevent homelessness regardless of their CL status.

1.6.4. Preventing Homelessness for Care Leavers

Homelessness prevention can be broadly described as policies, practices and interventions that reduce the likelihood of an individual experiencing homelessness (Gaetz & DeJ, 2017). Given the multifaceted and complex contributing factors to homelessness, a prevention-based approach seeks to impact homelessness at a structural level and through early intervention practices, thereby also addressing individual and situational factors. Critically, prevention requires a definition of what is to be prevented, which has been highlighted as problematic in terms of adequately capturing the broad range of homelessness experiences for CLs.

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework was created by St Basils and Barnardo's (2019). It promoted interagency collaboration to prevent and relieve CLs experiences of homelessness. It also aimed to assist LAs in supporting and strengthening their local offer. This framework highlighted that, for the prevention of homelessness, planning should occur and cover CLs accommodation options. CLs should have access to a range of 'move on' and longer-term housing options, which include both independent and semi-independent options. The framework suggested that homelessness can be prevented by providing CLs with planned, gradual exits from care as well as contingency plans. Generally, CLs should have access to housing and support as needed, such as supported accommodation and appropriate emergency accommodation. In an attempt to prevent tenancy failure and subsequent homelessness, CLs should be supported with tenancy and life skills training. The framework therefore attempted to situate homelessness within recognition of broader social marginalisation.

This framework was informed by the *Positive Pathway Framework, Preventing Youth Homelessness and Promoting Positive Transitions* (St Basils, 2015). This allowed services to identify the gaps in their responses to homelessness. It focused on minimising the housing crisis through homelessness prevention and enabling housing supply. It therefore covered all stages of housing experience, not just homelessness. The framework outlined five stages, which are (1) universal prevention, such as providing information and advice, (2) targeted prevention, to those who may be at risk of homelessness such as CLs, (3) crisis prevention and relief of homelessness, using a collaborative approach between housing and children's services, (4) commissioned accommodation and support, and, (5) sustainable housing. This framework was designed to be adopted flexibly, based on local circumstance and need (St Basils, 2015). To work effectively to prevent homelessness these elements need to function and balance. For example, if there is an adequate supply of housing but inadequate support, tenancy failure may be likely, leading to homelessness. Fortune and Smith (2021) highlighted that more needs to be done in terms of supporting YP

transitioning from care to prevent homelessness. This includes those who may be transitioning from care to HE or entering HE after having left care.

1.7. Care Leavers in Higher Education

1.7.1. Positive Outcomes

As highlighted, research and policy has attempted to address the transition to independence, and much of the literature focuses on those CLs who have the least positive outcomes (e.g. Atwool, 2020). The literature thus far has emphasised that CLs are a disadvantaged group and at risk of experiencing a range of poorer outcomes including homelessness and impacted educational outcomes (Wade & Dixon, 2006). Some studies have attempted to address the personal and institutional factors which can impact upon successful outcomes and transitions for CLs (e.g. Dixon, 2016; Stein, 2005). However, within the research literature, there is a scarcity of qualitative studies exploring CLs accounts and perspectives after leaving care, particularly during the period of emerging adulthood (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019).

Outside of the research literature, there are writers and speakers who talk about their lived experience of being in care and the period of emerging adulthood. One example is Sissay (2020), who writes about his experiences of the care system and his transition to independence in his memoir *My Name is Why*. He includes both excerpts of his social care records which reflect an institutional version of events, interspersed with poems and narratives that speak of the resilience and determination necessary to emerge from the adversity he faced. As the previous chancellor of the University of Manchester, he aims to support CLs into HE, advocating for a strengths-based perspective grounded in systemic and collective aspiration. Alongside this, he aims to challenge the negative narratives surrounding CLs and their outcomes through elevating the voices of CLs.

Indeed, Häggman-Laitila et al. (2018) and Parry and Weatherhead (2014), demonstrate that there is considerable variation in CLs' transitions to

independence and outcomes, highlighting that CLs are not a homogenous group. However, due to the predominant research focus on CLs with poorer outcomes, even less is known about CLs who navigate the period of emerging adulthood but experience more positive and successful trajectories and outcomes. Smith (2017) therefore recommends that future research needs to expand beyond the deficit-focused research surrounding CLs' outcomes. One group who could be considered to have had a more positive trajectory would be CLs who have accessed HE against the odds (Harrison, 2017; Martin & Jackson, 2002) of which little is known (Harrison, 2020).

1.7.2. Care Leavers in Higher Education

The majority of the UK literature has focused on outcomes for those in care in relation to compulsory education (Sebba et al., 2015). More recently, the literature has increasingly focused upon the subject of HE, however, this is limited (Mendes et al., 2014).

The most recent official figures suggest that only 6% of CLs access HE (DfE, 2021). This figure has remained around 6% for the last 15 years despite the increasing policy and legislative focus on educational support for CLs. This figure should be interpreted cautiously as it represents the number of CLs who have entered HE at the earliest opportunity and up to the age of 21. It is likely that a greater number of CLs pursue HE after this point, given the complex pathways into HE (Harrison, 2017). Additionally, this figure excludes those who are no longer in contact with their LA which, as discussed can be a significant proportion of CLs. Further, this figure is based on those who meet the narrow LA definition of a CL and excludes those who have had care experience but do not meet this definition. With these critiques in mind, other studies have considered participation in HE to be larger. The 'Moving On up Report' (Harrison, 2017) used data from the National Pupil Database and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This included YP with care experience who may not meet the definition of a CL, those who may not be in contact with their LA and those up to the age of 23. This report suggested that 11.8% of CLs access HE. Whilst this is higher than the DfE (2021) estimate, it still remains markedly different to YP without care experience, of which 43% access HE (DfE, 2020). This demonstrates a persistent inequality

which has widened over time, meaning that CLs are recognised as one of the least represented groups in HE (Harrison, 2017). This inequality in access to HE is similar internationally (Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Wilson et al., 2019).

A number of reasons could be suggested for this. As aforementioned, CLs are less likely to have the early educational attainment to access HE (Sebba et al. 2015). Indeed, Gorard et al. (2006) concluded that the main predictor of whether individuals accessed HE was their attainment at school. Lower educational attainment can be attributed to a complex combination of pre-care and in-care experiences (O'Higgins et al., 2015). However, Harrison (2017) concluded that CLs remained 11% less likely to access HE in comparison to YP with similar qualification levels, suggesting the influence of other factors.

1.7.3. Withdrawal from Higher Education

The participation figures discussed represent the number of CLs who have entered HE, but are not reflective of those who withdraw from HE. Research has found those with care experience are 38% more likely to withdraw from HE than those without care experience, even when demographic and entry qualifications are controlled for (Harrison, 2017). Reasons cited for withdrawal included financial difficulties and academic challenges (Harrison, 2017).

These high withdrawal rates indicate that CLs are facing challenges in HE that are not being mitigated or understood. This is concerning as HE can be a transformative and stabilising factor for CLs (Office for Students, 2021). Research has concluded that CLs enter graduate employment or further study at a rate comparable to their peers (Harrison, 2020). However, this was only the case when background demographic and educational factors were accounted for, highlighting the intersectional inequality for CLs and HE outcomes. Furthermore as discussed, poorer educational outcomes can be linked to increased poverty and homelessness among CLs (Mendis et al., 2018), suggesting that educational attainment could be a protective factor against poorer outcomes.

1.7.4. Widening Participation

In recognition of the poorer rates of participation of CLs in HE, 'widening participation' efforts have aimed to target under-represented students. Widening participation seeks to give everyone an equal opportunity to participate and succeed in HE (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013).

Harrison and Waller (2017) propose that a coherent epistemology for assessing the success of CLs HE is lacking, as success is solely viewed as 'gaining access to HE'. Critically, widening participation efforts are then reductionist, focusing on short term measurable gains (such as entry), and do not understand the complexity of student experience. Widening participation efforts can be criticised for failing to address hegemonic structures that create inequality and therefore maintain structural inequalities (Harrison, 2018). A student life-cycle approach recommends understanding CLs experiences throughout HE, and goes beyond the scope of neoliberal agendas focused on access (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2017) and HE marketisation (Simpson & Murphy, 2020). A student life-cycle approach looks at the whole HE experience, including housing experiences and, therefore, preventing homelessness in HE. Despite the increased interest in terms of access, there is a paucity of research on CLs' pathways into and experiences whilst in HE, particularly in terms of how CLs overcome difficulties to remain in HE (Cotton et al., 2017).

1.7.5. Targeted Support in Higher Education for Care Leavers

In 2006, the Buttle Quality Mark was launched to address the specific challenges that CLs face in HE. Buttle UK aimed to develop a comprehensive policy for support which intended to embed service standards for CLs in HE (Simpson & Murphy, 2020). Experiences of homelessness have been recognised among CLs whilst in HE, particularly out of term time (Jackson et al., 2005). Following these findings, in order to prevent homelessness, HEI were advised to provide 365-day accommodation to CLs in HE. This is alongside the CLCA (2000) duty which stipulates that CL should be accommodated out of term time (if their term

time accommodation is not available) and provided with financial security to contribute to safe, stable and appropriate accommodation.

The Buttle Quality Mark also led to changes in the HE application process where University and College Admission Service (UCAS) forms encouraged CL applicants to identify themselves as CLs at the point of application. This aimed to alert student support services to provide advice and assistance before and during the transition to HE as well as within HE. By 2015, 114 HEI in the UK had been awarded the quality mark (Hauari et al., 2019). The organisation felt that since CLs were recognised and supported by the sector, the mark would be discontinued, with a view to embedding practice into mainstream provision. In a review of the *Buttle Quality Mark*, Rawson (2016) concluded that most HEI had developed some form of dedicated provision for CLs. This was in regards to collaborative multi-agency partnerships and specialist support, including the introduction of CL services.

It has been recognised that current arrangements for CLs are insufficient as they should permit full engagement in student life (Hauari et al., 2019). Stevenson et al. (2020) reported that some HEI were using rigid definitions of a CL, meaning that those with similar experiences were being offered differing levels of support. Additionally, support is often age limited and not available to CLs over the age of 25.

Since the discontinuation of the *Buttle Quality Mark*, these standards have become embedded into the CL Covenant (Spectra First, 2018). This represents a commitment from public, private and voluntary organisations to support CLs, including those in HE. This includes specific support from HEI, such as a dedicated point of contact, CL bursaries and 365-day accommodation. However it fails to fully acknowledge or explain the role HEIs have in their wider 'duty of care' as part of the extended corporate parent role in providing continuity of care (Simpson & Murphy, 2020).

1.8. Homelessness in Higher Education

Prior to discussing the literature in relation to CLs experiences of homelessness in HE, it is important to explore students experiences of homelessness in HE more generally. HE students and homelessness are not commonly associated, however widening participation efforts are targeting those at increased risk of experiencing homelessness (Mulrenan et al., 2018). Many of the individuals targeted by widening participation initiatives are overrepresented among homeless populations (MHCLG, 2020) and those who enter HE are increasingly from disadvantaged backgrounds (UCAS, 2020).

Mulrenan et al. (2018) conducted explorative research with a focus on students who experienced homelessness in HE in London. The qualitative study involved 16 students, five attended a focus group and 11 were interviewed. Whether they had care experience was not detailed so conclusions regarding CLs' experiences cannot be drawn. However, the authors noted further research into homelessness within HE was warranted. Four of the participants had previously experienced homelessness and ten of the participants were currently homeless, owing to the temporary nature of their accommodation. The causes of homelessness were both structural and personal, with common personal factors (e.g. the breakdown of relationships or loss of income) and structural factors (e.g. being asked to leave their residence at short notice). Many of the students were placed in emergency accommodation outside of their home boroughs and these poor housing conditions and distance meant that students were unable to focus and attend to their studies. Concerningly, most of the students had not discussed their experience of homelessness with university staff, friends or family, reporting a sense of shame. Several of the themes identified focused on how these students were able to remain in HE. HE was found to contribute to participants 'having a purpose,' alongside the external support from family and friends.

Estranged students have also been highlighted as a group who are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness in HE. As previously noted, they may have a comparable background to those who have been in care, but have not had LA involvement. Costa et al. (2020) interviewed 21 estranged

students in a HE in England. All students noted that their social and economic capital were deficient. This culminated in some of these students struggling to afford their rent, where they expressed concern about resultant homelessness.

1.9. Care Leavers' accounts of Homelessness in Higher Education

1.9.1. Prevalence of Care Leavers Experiencing Homelessness in Higher Education

There are no official figures of the number of CLs who experience homelessness whilst in HE, highlighting this area as a hidden problem. Indeed, Harrison (2020) concluded that research of CLs in HE is disadvantaged by conflicting definitions and inadequate data. Attempts have been made to explore the prevalence of homelessness among CLs in HE. The New Starts report (Bland & Shaw, 2015) drew on survey data and reported that 14% of those with CL or 'estranged student' status had either registered as homeless or considered registering as homeless during their time HE. Although this gives an indication of the prevalence of homelessness, the sample of 275 students included both CLs and estranged students therefore the experiences of CLs alone are difficult to deduce. A recommendation of the New Starts Report (2015) was that further qualitative research was needed, particularly to understand the challenges CLs navigate whilst in HE. It was specifically noted that future research should include an exploration of the impact of both formal and informal homelessness.

1.9.2. Approach to the Review of the Literature

The purpose of the scoping literature review was to identify research on and evidence of CLs experiences of homelessness, hidden homelessness or housing instability whilst in HE. A literature search was conducted using EBSCO, SCOPUS and Google Scholar databases. The search terms centred on the three broad areas: CLs, Homelessness and HE (see Appendix B for details of the search terms and procedures). All searches were restricted to articles that were in English. A date range was not

specified to ensure screening was completed of all literature on the subject. Although geographical filters were not applied, due to the terminology used (e.g. 'care leaver' rather than 'former foster youth'), the vast majority of the studies yielded were from the UK. As noted, definitions and subsequent policy, legislation and support vary internationally (Cameron et al., 2018; Strahl et al., 2021). Even geographically proximate countries differ in contexts, such as CL demographics and policy objectives (Boddy et al., 2011). It was therefore not possible to include search terms to capture all of the international literature and apply this to the context of CLs accounts of homelessness in HE in the UK. From the results generated, article titles and abstracts were reviewed, and articles were selected based on their relevance to the topic. Reference lists were examined to identify further relevant literature. The scoping review also included resources published outside of the academic framework. This included research commissioned by third sector organisations and charities exploring CLs' experiences in HE.

1.9.3. Existing Research Exploring Care Leavers' Accounts of Homelessness in Higher Education

The earliest research in this area is the 'By Degrees' project (Jackson et al., 2005). This was instrumental in highlighting the needs and experiences of CLs in HE and remains the most substantial piece of research in this area. The 'By Degrees' project explored the issues, challenges and successes that CLs faced in HE. It followed three cohorts of CLs (129 CLs in total) into and through HE over three years. The research adopted a longitudinal approach which included periodic interviews and group events with CLs. Surveys were also sent to LAs and HEIs to elicit their perspectives. Participants reported a mix of challenges that were either distinct from those experienced by other students or were heightened by a background in care. In relation to homelessness and housing instability, CLs reported to have been offered accommodation that was inadequate and unsuitable, and some described periods of homelessness during their time in HE. This was particularly noted out of term time, where some CLs described having to vacate their accommodation during the summer period. LA and HE support was focused on supporting CLs during the academic term time, and the absence of support or planning for out of term time was viewed as a contributing factor

to CLs experiences of and fears of homelessness. Of note, was the significant variation in support provided by LAs. Some CLs highlighted there was a lack of support in finding appropriate and suitable housing, leading the authors to conclude there was a reluctance by some LAs to provide what was required to prevent CLs experiencing homelessness. In terms of the sample, CLs were nominated to take part by their LA, and, as such, only included those who the LA had remained in contact with, which may not capture a broad spectrum of experiences.

The concerns raised by the 'By Degrees' project had a significant impact on the policy landscape and governmental concern for CLs in HE. As result of this study, recommendations were made for HEI to have 365-day housing provision for CLs, a dedicated point of contact, as well as additional financial support such as the CL bursary. In a recent feasibility study which explored the consistency in what was offered for CLs, the authors concluded that only 33% of HEI offer 365-day accommodation to CLs and only 40% of HEI offer to support to help CLs with finding somewhere to live, which resulted in housing fragility (Ambrose et al., 2021). Critically, the study was completed with stakeholders and not CLs, therefore their voices are not captured. The summer period continues to be highlighted as a specific area of concern, leading to housing instability and worries about subsequent homelessness (Haurai et al., 2019). For those HEIs who offer 365-day accommodation, it was noted that there were often additional charges out of term time making this an unaffordable option, leading to housing instability. Financial provision and accommodation were highlighted as major concerns for CLs, leading the authors to stress the importance of continuity of support alongside flexibility in provision for CLs in HE.

Given the early concerns raised in the 'By Degrees Project', there has been surprisingly little research since that has focused on understanding CLs experiences in HE, and no known research that specifically focused upon understanding CLs accounts of homelessness in HE. Where this has been highlighted, it was noted as a part of a wider exploration of the challenges CLs face in HE. For example, as part of a qualitative study exploring the experiences of CLs in HE, Pinkney and Walker (2020) interviewed eight

students who were CLs at one HEI in England. Within this research they asked 'What are the issues that care experienced YP need support with while they study?' one area that was consistently described was housing and subsequent fears and experiences of homelessness. Critically, a further exploration of these fears and experiences was not conducted, neither were factors which contributed to or acted to prevent and relieve these explored. In an earlier study, Cotton et al. (2014) explored CLs experiences in HE using a resilience framework. Threats of homelessness were noted in interviews with CLs as a risk factor impacting their resilience and ability to remain in HE but, again, CLs' accounts and what contributed to or mitigated these experiences was not explored.

In attempt to contribute to the stark gap in understanding CLs experiences in HE, the HERACLES (HE: Researching Around CLs' Entry and Success) project, was commissioned by the National Network for the Education of CLs (NNECL) (Harrison, 2017). This research analysed the responses to an online questionnaire completed by CLs in HE. Whilst this research did not have the depth of the 'By Degrees' study, it aimed to offer a more up-to-date view of CLs' experiences. The research focused on eliciting the perspective of CLs in HE, however, the authors noted that due to the looser definition of a CL applied in HE, the findings also include those with care experience.

A total of 212 CLs responded to the questionnaire from around half of the HEIs in England. It is important to note that the response rates for some HEIs were significantly higher than others. Additionally, there was a self-selection bias for CLs who chose to respond. In terms of housing, the data indicated that 36% of CLs were living independently, 31% resided in a shared house, 21% in halls of residence and 12% were living with family. In total, 46% of CLs reported to be experiencing financial difficulties in HE, which included difficulties affording rent. Unfortunately, due to the questionnaire design, the consequences of these challenges (i.e. experiences or fears of homelessness) were not explored. Qualitative questions allowed CLs to expand on their experiences. Some CLs spoke about these financial difficulties impacting the stability of their housing and accommodation. Concerns about homelessness were reported in relation to

the lack of access to year-round accommodation. Homelessness was also noted as a concern and experienced during term time, but due to the questionnaire design these experiences were not further examined.

O'Neill et al. (2019) aimed to build upon the HERACLES study to broaden and deepen the understanding of the barriers and facilitators experienced by CLs in HE. The study used a survey design and included responses from CLs at 18 out of 19 HEI in Scotland (137 responses). Whilst the policy landscape is similar in Scotland, the term CL refers to someone who has a looked after background, so the study included those with care experience as well as CLs. Additionally, students from Scotland, who study at Scottish HEI don't pay tuition fees. This study had a greater focus on housing and accommodation and, therefore, had the potential to more substantially capture homelessness experiences. A total of 45% of students with care experience reported housing concerns. Students described having to move university accommodation out of term time and described that the emotional impact of these moves was compounded by their early trauma.

Concerningly, 18% of students reported that they were forced to move accommodation suddenly and only 23% of students reported that they were offered out of term time accommodation, indicating that experiences in HE were not homogenous. Of those who were offered accommodation out of term time, their experiences were varied. Some had positive experiences and others experienced significant instability and disruption. Whilst housing concerns were noted, the survey design did not allow for detailed qualitative accounts. Therefore, an understanding of their accounts and factors which may have contributed to homelessness were not explored. Furthermore, information was not captured in terms of how these situations were experienced by participants, or how they could have been prevented. Over 50% of those who responded to the survey considered leaving their course, and 45% of students rated their experience in HE as mixed or negative, which was more likely the case for those not living in their family home or in halls of residence.

Experiences and fears of homelessness are not just experienced by CLs who are in HE but are also a factor in whether CLs decide to access HE. The

CSJ (2019) published a paper titled '12 by 24' which aimed to double the number of CLs accessing and remaining in HE from 6% to 12% by the year 2024, therefore reducing the stark inequality between CLs and their peers in HE. The research included interviews with 15 YP aged 14-24, seeking to explore perspectives at various stages of academia (including five CLs who were in HE). The research also included a survey which was completed by 160 looked after children asking about their thoughts around entering HE. In terms of accessing HE, respondents shared worries about being able to support themselves financially in HE. Accommodation and concerns about experiencing homelessness were found to be an overarching theme as to why CLs may not go to university. Furthermore, CLs who lived independently prior to accessing HE, worried about losing their home, expressing fears of subsequent homelessness if university didn't work out. This impacted either their choice about entering HE or meant that CLs felt they were limited to a geographically close university, which impacted upon participation when in HE. Critically, the research focused on increasing access and retention among CLs who were aged 19-21, and therefore did not consider the longer trajectory into HE for CLs (Harrison, 2017). Furthermore, the small sample of CLs who were in HE made it problematic to delineate CLs experiences from those who were still in care.

Stevenson et al. (2020) explored the factors which affected access and retention for estranged students and students with care experience in HE. They adopted a mixed methods approach which gathered the perspectives of both students and stakeholders. They conducted several inductive focus groups and interviews exploring experiences of HE. This involved 21 students as part of focus groups and 20 individual interviews. The authors concluded that it was not uncommon for those with care experience to be living in fragile, insecure and temporary accommodation in HE. Typically, those who met LA criteria of being a CL were less likely to experience such challenges. Those who didn't meet this narrow definition were more likely to experience homelessness or hidden homelessness, with financial concerns and poverty driving accommodation choices. Some reported that they were allocated a place in halls of residence which they could not afford. However, it was not clear how CLs navigated this to avoid homelessness or whether

this resulted in homelessness. Furthermore, due to fears of homelessness, some CLs remained in situations which posed a threat to their wellbeing. This was compounded by challenges associated with leaving these situations, such as having to pay rent in advance or deposits for private accommodation. In terms of unsuitable accommodation, CLs felt that their personal circumstances and trauma histories were not considered (e.g. history of parental drug or alcohol use). Preventative support came from students' peers, which included offering temporary accommodation and formal support was only received at crisis point. It was identified that this was partly due to students not being aware of what institutional support was available.

The specific experiences of homelessness were not explored in this research, with the aim of the research being to elicit factors which affected access and retention across a number of different areas. Factors which acted to prevent or relieve experiences of or fears of homelessness were not explored, nor how CLs were able to navigate these challenges to remain in HE. However, it is not clear how the sample was recruited, and demographic details are not reported. Therefore, it is not clear how many participants in the sample were estranged students. This makes it challenging to draw meaningful and distinct conclusions about CLs accounts of homelessness in HE.

1.9.4. Implications of Covid-19

It is important to situate the context of this research within the Covid-19 pandemic and the implications this has had for CLs in HE and their experiences of homelessness. It is particularly essential as the Covid-19 pandemic brought to the forefront many of the inequalities experienced by CLs in HE (Roberts et al., 2021).

In terms of housing, the majority of non-care experienced students were able to return to their family home during the lockdowns, which would not be an option for the majority of CLs. For those who remained in halls of residence or shared student houses, feelings of isolation and difference were exacerbated (OfS, 2021). For those CLs residing in temporary or unsafe

accommodation, they were unable to escape their surroundings or access support in dealing with these situations (Roberts et al., 2021).

There is scarce research exploring the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic for CLs in HE, particularly in relation to experiences of and fears of homelessness. During the first week of the national lock down (23rd- 27th March, 2020) a small UK-wide survey was published by NNECL (2021). This included 251 CLs in HE who reported fears of homelessness though losing their accommodation either due to an inability to pay their rent or due to decisions made by their accommodation providers. More generally in terms of HE, Roberts et al. (2021) concluded that whilst the delivery of online education has been challenging regardless of care experience. This needs to be considered in the context of the additional educational barriers already known to impact those with care experience (Mannay et al., 2017) which may be exacerbated if CLs are not residing in suitable and stable accommodation.

1.10. Research Rationale

Whilst it is recognised that CLs are not a homogenous group, research and policy have consistently highlighted the importance of a gradual transition to independence and to safe, suitable and appropriate accommodation upon leaving care. Despite this, CLs are more likely to experience homelessness, hidden homelessness and housing instability upon leaving care (Wade & Dixon, 2006), and those who experience homelessness are more likely to be from a care background (Greaves, 2017). A review of the literature has highlighted that experiences of homelessness do not dissipate for CLs once they enter HE (e.g. Stevenson et al., 2020) and both definitional and data issues make it difficult to understand the true extent and nature of homelessness in this context. The earliest research in this area brought to the forefront CLs' experiences of homelessness whilst in HE (Jackson et al., 2005) and this led to significant policy change and guidance within HEI and the Government. However, despite this research being conducted over 15 years ago, CLs are continuing to experience homelessness and housing

instability whilst in HE. Where this has been described since (e.g. Harrison., 2017; O'Neill et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2020), this has either been part of a wider exploration of the challenges faced by CLs in HE, or limited by questionnaire research designs or combined samples. Whilst it could be suggested that CLs' experiences (such as homelessness) should not be explored in isolation, there is an absence of research that has comprehensively explored CLs experiences of homelessness in HE. Consequently, what has contributed to, prevented or relieved these experiences for CLs has not been deduced or examined. Exploring CLs' accounts could contribute to the prevention and relief of homelessness amongst this vulnerable group, who are known to experience higher rates of withdrawal from HE (Harrison, 2017).

Beyond experiences of actual homelessness, fears about homelessness have also been found to impact whether CLs feel they can access HE. Given the considerable development in policy, it would be expected that HE participation should be increasing and withdrawal rates reducing. Even when considering the definitional variations applied to CLs, this is not the case, particularly in comparison to those without care experience (Harrison, 2017). This indicates that there is further work needed to understand the challenges CLs face in HE to support access and retention. This is particularly important given the potential for HE to transcend earlier disadvantage (Harrison et al., 2020).

There is a scarcity of research on CLs in HE, particularly qualitative research exploring their experiences beyond acceptance to HE (Hauari et al., 2019). It is imperative to listen to and understand the accounts of CLs in relation to their experiences of homelessness, including the factors which may have contributed to, prevented or relieved these. This is a pertinent time to be exploring CLs accounts of homelessness in HE, not only because they are missing from the literature, but also due to the disrupting effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent impact on housing and isolation (Roberts et al., 2021). It is hoped this research will lead to a greater understanding of CLs accounts of homelessness in HE and produce

recommendations to enhance the practice of supporting CLs experiencing or at risk of homelessness whilst in HE.

1.11. Research Aims

The research is not purely concerned with producing knowledge about CLs' subjective accounts, but also aims to understand and make meaning of the factors which may have contributed to and/or prevented experiences of homeless, as well as how individuals were able to overcome these challenges to remain in HE.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE?
2. What do CLs view as contributing to and/or preventing homelessness whilst in HE?
3. How do CLs navigate the challenges of actual or potential homelessness to remain in HE?

CHAPTER TWO : METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the methodology of the research. Firstly, the epistemological position of the research will be introduced. From this, the design of the research will be presented as well as the process of analysis: thematic analysis (TA). Finally the chapter will address quality criteria and ethical considerations of the research.

2.1. Ontology and Epistemology

To coherently underpin the research, Holloway and Todres (2003) highlight that it is fundamental to make the ontological and epistemological position clear. Outlining this position informs the methodology, how knowledge can be collected (Anfara & Mertz, 2014) and interpreted (Ponterotto, 2005).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of the world and ‘what there is to know?’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Willig, 2013). This research assumed a realist ontological perspective, which assumes that there is a world that exists independently of our knowledge of it (Willig, 2019). As such, homelessness occurs and exists as a reality independently of the researcher. Epistemology is concerned with ‘what knowledge we are able to have of ontology?’ this research assumed a critical realist epistemological perspective. Critical realism suggests that despite there being an ontological reality, there are multiple factors which reflect the conceptualisation of this, meaning data may not accurately reflect reality (Healy & Perry, 2000). Regarding the current research, whilst homelessness exists, its existence is dependent on our understanding, where the contributing factors to homelessness are not direct or linear (Fitzpatrick, 2005). As such, critical realism identifies the role of agency, contextual, structural and socio-cultural influences that impact people’s reality (Given, 2008), acknowledging that people may not be fully aware of these factors although they impact accounts (McEvoy & Richards, 2006). Participants therefore interpret their accounts through a filtered lens and the researcher also interprets the data

through a filtered lens, meaning accounts cannot be accessed objectively, only interpreted (Harper & Thompson, 2012).

2.2. Design

2.2.1. Qualitative Approach

A qualitative research design was selected, as this places emphasis on exploring individual experiences and phenomena (Cope, 2014). It can amplify the voice of those whose accounts tend to be marginalised or discounted (Willig, 2013) which has been continually highlighted as an important factor to account for when conducting research with CLs (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019).

2.2.2. Selecting a Qualitative Method

TA offers a method to interpret themes by answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021a). TA has been described as a theoretically flexible method, owing to it not being tied to a specific epistemological position, and can provide rich and detailed accounts of data (Nowell et al., 2017). It can be argued that the flexibility of TA can lead to a lack of consistency when developing themes, however this can be facilitated by outlining the epistemological position of the research (Holloway & Todres, 2003) and specifying the approach to TA. In this research, reflexive TA was adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

TA can be used for inductive or deductive analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Inductive analysis utilises a bottom-up approach, remaining close to the data (Boyatzis, 1998) where coding and theme development are driven by the data content (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). For this research, an inductive approach was utilised as there were no known pre-existing thematic categories and owing to a desire to remain close to the data content. It would be naïve to claim that the research adopts a purely inductive approach, as themes do not ‘emerge’ from the data but are constructed. This reflects the epistemological position of the research (Fine, 1992) and reflexive approach to TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

For this research, a latent level of analysis was utilised, which goes beyond describing the surface meaning of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is consistent with the epistemological position of the research, which aimed to not only describe CLs' accounts of homelessness but to understand and make meaning of the factors which may have contributed to or prevented homelessness. TA was therefore considered appropriate for the study's aims as it enables interpretation of individual accounts in the context in which they arise and captures patterns of meaning across data sets.

2.2.3. Participants

Eleven CLs participated in interviews. Qualitative studies often recruit a small number of participants who are context specific (Bold, 2012). The literature recommends a sample size of between five and ten participants (Bagnasco et al., 2014). Some researchers conclude that data collection should continue until saturation has been achieved (Mason, 2010), however this can be problematic, and the richness of data should be reflected upon when considering the number of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

2.2.3.1. *Inclusion Criteria*

Given the hidden nature of CLs in HE, along with the hidden nature of homelessness, broad inclusion criteria were adopted. To be included in the study, participants were required to:

- Be a current student who self-identifies as a CL or as having care experience.
- Have experienced a period of homelessness or been threatened with, or fearful of, homelessness during their time in HE.

No exclusion criteria were applied.

2.2.3.2. *Participant Demographics*

See Table 1 for participant demographics. Participants were aged 18-31 (average age 22 years). Five participants identified as male and six

participants identified as female. All participants were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Participants were enrolled on a range of undergraduate courses and two participants were completing postgraduate courses. Whilst the entry into HE was not explored, two of the participants described accessing HE via access/foundation courses. In some cases, participants described that their course choice was influenced by their care experience, this was particularly the case for participants completing their studies in the areas of social work (three participants) and law (two participants). These participants noted that they wanted to use their experience of the care system to positively change the landscape for future CLs. These altruistic motivations for course choice have been noted in previous research (e.g. Cotton et al., 2014). Some participants noted their course choice was influenced by directly accessing a profession such as within the area of education (two participants) or healthcare (two participants). The remaining two participants were completing studies in line with their interests.

On average, participants had been in care for 6 years and left care aged 17.5 years. In total, nine out of the eleven participants met the LA definition of a CL. Although participants were not specifically asked about their experiences of homelessness whilst they were in care (prior to HE), participants described a range of care experiences culminating in many moves, placements and various periods of street homelessness and hidden homelessness. Again, the reasons for entering care were not explicitly explored, but where these were discussed they were revealed to include experiences of sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Length of time in care (Years)	Age left care	Meet LA CL definition	Accommodation whilst in HE	Number of accommodation moves whilst in HE	Age on entry to HE	Year of course
1	Black Caribbean	Female	5	17.5	Yes	Semi-Independent Accommodation Hidden Homelessness Independent Accommodation	5+	20	3
2	Other Asian Background	Female	0.5	15	No	Temporary Accommodations (e.g. Hostel/Bedsit)	5+	20	3
3	Asian British	Female	4	18	Yes	Semi-Independent Accommodation Hidden Homelessness Independent Accommodation	4	20	2
4	Asian British	Male	2	17	Yes	Returned to Family Home	1	18	2
5	Other Ethnic Group	Male	3	18	Yes	Independent Accommodation	2	18	1

6	Black African	Female	7	16	Yes	Temporary Accommodations (e.g. Hostel/Bedsit)	3	23	2
7	Asian British	Female	2	17	Yes	Temporary Accommodations (e.g. Hostel/Bedsit) Independent Accommodation Hidden Homelessness	5+	18	2
8	Other Ethnic Group	Male	11	18	Yes	Independent Accommodation	1	30*	1
9	Black British	Male	13	18	Yes	Staying Put Agreement Hidden Homelessness	3	18	1
10	Black African	Male	9	18	No	Independent Accommodation Hidden Homelessness Temporary Accommodation (e.g. Hostel/Bedsit)	5+	27*	1
11	Multiple Ethnic Background	Female	11	18	Yes	Independent Accommodation Hidden Homelessness	3	24	2

* Enrolled on Postgraduate Course

2.2.4. Research Setting

The research was undertaken in a singular London HEI. As acknowledged in the introduction, HEIs are often more expansive in their definition of a CL.

The HEI in this research defined a CL as someone who has care experience and offered support if they were under 25 years old and a full-time student.

The HEI had a dedicated CLs' advisor who provided assistance with both HE and LA support. The national Propel website (<https://www.propel.org.uk/UK/>) contains details of support offered by each University. At this HEI, CLs were able to apply for a £1000 yearly bursary and have priority access and support with accommodation costs if they chose to live in halls accommodation.

During the consultation phase (September 2020) there were 124 known CLs enrolled at the university. It was recognised that this was a likely underestimation, given the documented reluctance of some CLs to disclose this information (Stevenson et al., 2020). At the start of the recruitment phase (March 2021) 80 CLs were enrolled, indicating a reduction in access or increase in withdrawal over this period.

2.3. **Procedure**

2.3.1. Involvement of CLs

Consultation was sought prior to the research commencing. During this phase, two CLs with experiences of homelessness, who were enrolled at the university, consulted on and informed the interview schedule, participant information sheet, consent form and debrief information as well as other aspects of the research procedure. Feedback included suggestions around integrating demographic information into the interview schedule, incorporating examples of homelessness and providing participants with individual vouchers for their time rather than a prize draw. These two CLs provided further consultation following the initial theme development (see 4.2.4.4.).

2.3.2. Developing the Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interviews provide a focused but flexible framework (Wengraf, 2001). The interview schedule (Appendix C) consisted of ten questions. Questions were developed to reflect the research questions and were based on, and as a result of, the scarce existing literature in the area. Therefore, it was important to have minimal prompts and allow participants to describe their experiences. The interview schedule was further developed following consultation with the research supervisor and as aforementioned, during consultation with CLs (see 2.2.1.).

2.3.3. Recruitment

A purposive sample was recruited via the CLs advisor at the HEI. For the purposes of anonymity and data protection, the CLs advisor emailed a participant information letter (Appendix D) to all CLs enrolled at the University. This included CLs who had either indicated their CL status during their UCAS application or on arrival at the HEI. CLs who were interested in participating were invited to make contact directly. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to complete a consent form (Appendix E). Following the interview participants were emailed a debrief information letter (Appendix F) and asked to complete a brief information form required by the HEI to receive a £10 electronic voucher in recognition of their time commitment.

2.3.4. Interviews

Interviews were conducted on Microsoft teams between February and November 2021, therefore spanning two academic years. The average length of interviews was 50 minutes (ranging from 39 to 63 minutes).

2.3.5. Transcription

Interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and checked against the original recordings to ensure accuracy. Transcription included verbal and non-verbal utterances (Appendix G) and included the removal of potentially identifiable information. An example transcript extract can be found in Appendix H.

2.3.6. Analysis

The analysis followed the six phases of TA outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021; 2006). Although presented in a linear fashion in this section, it is acknowledged that TA is an integrative process involving movement between phases (Terry et al., 2017).

1. *Familiarisation with the data:* A reflexive journal was added to following each interview, which documented initial reflections and thoughts (Terry et al., 2017). This can be considered as marking the beginning of data analysis (Tuckett, 2005). Familiarisation was then sought via prolonged engagement with the data. This began during the transcription phase, where transcripts were checked against the interview recordings for accuracy. Following transcription, familiarisation was achieved through the repeated active reading of the transcripts. Throughout this phase the reflexive journal was continued (Nowell et al., 2017).
2. *Coding:* A code captures a singular idea, concept or meaning associated with a segment of data (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). This research adopted a bottom-up inductive approach to coding the data. This involved identifying all segments of relevance within the data and labelling them with a few words to capture their meaning (e.g. 'did not disclose CL status'). Relevance was considered with regards to answering the research questions and, in order to align with Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, the entire data set was worked through systematically.
3. *Generating initial themes:* The third phase involved categorising the initial codes into potential themes. Themes are interpretative stories about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and involve thoughtful and reflexive engagement with the data. During this process, a central organising concept is identified which underpins the theme (Braun et al., 2014) and is shared across the codes. A provisional thematic map was utilised at this stage, to facilitate the process of mapping between

codes and themes, and between specific themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

4. *Developing and reviewing the themes*: During this phase, themes were reviewed to ensure they were meaningful, consistent and reflective of the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During this phase the final thematic map was developed (Appendix I).
5. *Refining, defining and naming the themes*: In this phase, the significance of each theme was identified, as well as how each of the themes were intertwined and fit together to tell a story about the data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Terry et al., 2017).
6. *Writing up*: In this phase, a clear and coherent account of the data within and across themes was provided. This was done by weaving together the participants quotes and analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the University of East London Ethics Committee (Appendix J/K).

2.4.1. Informed Consent

All participants gave written consent for their participation prior to the interviews and consent was re-confirmed verbally at the beginning of each interview. At the start of the interviews, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw during and up to three weeks following the interview.

2.4.2. Confidentiality

Any potentially identifiable features within the interviews were removed during the transcription phase. Anonymity was then achieved by assigning each participant an identification number.

2.4.3. Data Storage

Transcribed interviews were stored securely on a password protected laptop. Participant demographic details were held on a password-protected document separate to the data. Data was collected and stored in line with UEL data protection guidelines and regulations.

2.5. **Reviewing the Quality of the Research**

2.5.1. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness describes the ‘value’ of the data in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is a parallel to the quantitative criteria of validity and reliability, which are rooted in a positivist tradition (Golafshani, 2003). Nowell et al. (2017) provided a framework to ensure ‘trustworthiness’ was present during each phase of TA. Whilst outlined below these will be considered in the context of the current research in *Critical Review and Reflections- Quality of the Research*.

Credibility: This refers to the plausibility of the research findings and addresses the fit between participants’ views and the researcher’s representation of these (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability: This refers to the generalisability of enquiry (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher is responsible for providing richly contextualised descriptions throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), enabling others to judge the transferability of findings to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability: This refers to the consistency of the data over similar conditions (Cope, 2014) and requires the research process to be logical, traceable and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004) To achieve dependability, the research process should be described in sufficient detail.

Confirmability: This refers to the data representing the participant responses and not the researcher's bias or viewpoints (Cope, 2014). This criterion is concerned with ensuring that the findings are reflective of the information gathered and, to ensure this, throughout the research process, the researcher should practice reflexivity (Barrett et al., 2020). Confirmability can be further established when credibility, transferability and dependability are achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2021b) propose a number of areas to further guide the assessment of reflexive TA quality. These centre on ensuring a rigorous, systematic and reflexive analytic process, where quality depends on immersing thoughtfully and insightfully with the data.

2.5.2. Reflexivity: The Researcher's Position

Reflexivity involves understanding the way we influence and inform our research. It acknowledges the impossibility of remaining 'outside' of the subject and acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity (Clarke & Braun, 2013). It is considered an essential part of a critical realist approach, rejecting the pretence of neutrality (Olsen, 2004) and is central to the process of reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

During the research I engaged in self-reflection both in my role as a researcher and regarding my shared identity as a CL (who had also attended HE). Whilst research suggests that shared experiences can be influential in building rapport and facilitating openness (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), I did not explicitly identify myself as a CL prior to the interviews. Whilst I was aware that this could highlight a shared aspect of identity, I also took the time to recognise my position as a researcher, the potential aspects of difference given the heterogeneity in care experiences (Berkovic et al., 2020; Chavez-Reyes, 2008), as well as my intersecting positions of power and privilege (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). When considering aspects of a shared identity or when completing qualitative research more generally, self-reflection is encouraged. It can ensure participants voices remain at the forefront of analysis and when reporting the findings (Berger, 2015). To actively practice

self-reflection, I continually contributed to a reflexive journal during the research process.

Prior to starting the research, I was conscious of the complexity and multiple levels of disadvantage surrounding experiences of homelessness (particularly among CLs) and the nuanced conceptualisation of what constitutes a home and, therefore, homelessness. Throughout my training, I became further cognisant of the damaging impact of social inequalities and discrimination upon the lives of individuals. CLs epitomise the ways in which numerous system failures and multiple levels of disadvantage can significantly exacerbate the impact of social inequalities, such as experiences of homelessness. This is also the reality for those who have 'defied the odds' to access HE and, in some spheres, would be considered to have 'successfully' transitioned from care and, therefore, whose voices are not heard. It is my strong belief that CPs have an ethical duty to advocate for those whose voices have been silenced or marginalised.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

The analysis of the interviews revealed three main themes: *'Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation'*, *'Self-Reliance'*, and *'Higher Education Can Offer Some Protection and a Better Future'*. Within these three themes, a further nine subthemes were constructed (a summary can be found in in Table 2). Themes and subthemes will be described and illustrated by selected quotes from the interviews.

Table 2

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation	1. Lack of Stability and Frequent Moves 2. Feeling Unsafe 3. Under a Roof but No Home 4. No Options and No Choices
2. Self-Reliance	1. Needing to be Independent 2. No One Cares or Wants to Help 3. Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation
3. Higher Education Can Offer Protection and a Better Future	1. HE Leading to a Better Future 2. HE Offers Some Protection

3.1. Theme One: Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation

The first theme reflects CLs' accounts of homelessness, which were marked by experiences of inappropriate and unstable accommodation. This included a lack of stability and frequent moves, participants feeling unsafe and descriptions of having a roof over their head but not a home, which spoke to the many facets of hidden homelessness. Central to these accounts were participants feeling they had no options or choices.

3.1.1. Subtheme One: Lack of Stability and Frequent Moves

The majority of participants described numerous and frequent moves whilst in HE. For a number of participants, this was due to living in temporary and, therefore, insecure accommodation, which was deemed unsuitable. This included living in hostels, homeless shelters and bedsits which were rarely in the borough of the University and impacted how settled participants felt.

I've moved to a different place because the temporary accommodations were all unsuitable for me and my daughter. I've been in three temporary accommodations so far, I'm still in temporary accommodation, but it's temporary and we will have to move and start again.

Participant 2

The accommodation was meant to be temporary; I was there for just over a year, then I moved, and then I moved again, and I was there for under a year, and then I went into emergency accommodation.

Participant 3

Participants spoke about experiencing a lack of stability as a result of moving frequently and contextualised this in terms of their care experience. They suggested that accommodation instability is something they have come to expect. Participants accounts detailed multiple moves and instability in HE but also in the preceding years.

I don't think I've ever really had stability like in my lifetime, I'm not lying, I have lived in over 30 houses that I know off the top of my head, since I've been at uni, my sister's house, two different hostels, my partners house and here, 5 actually 6.

Participant 7

You have everything telling you that you, oh, you know, I might be here one year, one month or might be here for half year or might be here only for my first year. When you're a care leaver you don't stay in the same place so in all fairness you learn not to even feel stable, you expect to keep moving around so yeah, I'm kind of used to moving.

Participant 5

This lack of stability experienced by CL impacted on their ability to engage fully in HE. This was partly because their priority and focus needed to be on housing, but also because, quite practically, they did not have accommodation that was secure and conducive to studying.

They know how important stability is because it's so much pressure and hard work at university, that's all your brain should really be focused on, just getting that work done. You shouldn't be thinking about anything else, like where am I going to sleep?

Participant 8

It limits people that don't have stability, you never get to reach your full potential cause you've got this big cloud over your head innit, where am I gonna go now? where am I gonna go tonight? you can't think about uni.

Participant 6

Like I wanna be one of them kids that have my own bedroom walls, where I can stick stuff up on it and put my notes on there, but I can't I have to take my stuff and move every night.

Participant 7

3.1.2. Subtheme Two: Feeling Unsafe

Throughout their accounts of homelessness, all participants described feeling unsafe and some identified themselves as vulnerable in the situations in which they were placed. Safety was compromised by having to reside in inappropriate accommodation, which was either dangerous or threatening. For the majority of participants, 'feeling unsafe' was due to the other people residing in their accommodation. Participants did not feel their circumstances or personal histories were considered and they were placed in risky situations.

There were drug abusers in that flat, alcoholics in that flat and they would bang on my door at night-time, they could see that I was a single mum as well, so they would kind of like try to intimidate me I felt so scared.

Participant 2

I'm scared all the time, like they're going to smash my window, which is right next to the front door, come in rape, murder and rob me.

Participant 3

There was males on top of us, it was just the worst, usually they don't they don't put women and men together, yeah, but there were men upstairs and I felt very uncomfortable anything could have happened to me.

Participant 1

In some cases, and as illustrated above, participants described situations which were abusive, threatening and harmful, which contributed to them feeling unsafe. Other participants spoke more specifically about the harm caused.

It was literally hell, like it was abusive, there was a lot of trauma, there was a lot of sexual assaults.

Participant 4

A considerable part of feeling unsafe was attributable to a complete lack of physical and structural safety where, for example, participants were without a roof or living in a physically dangerous environment. One participant described feeling fearful for her life whilst rough sleeping.

I was homeless, yeah, I was like sleeping on swings, benches, washing my hair in McDonald sinks, my life should not have been at risk from me sleeping in parks and being, you know, at risk of rape and murder and so many other things and in the freezing cold in the dead of winter.

Participant 3

3.1.3. Subtheme Three: Under a Roof but No Home

All participants' accounts of being homeless in HE included periods of time where they had a roof over their head but did not have a 'home'. This speaks to their experiences of hidden homelessness and their attempts to prevent and avoid rooflessness. For the majority of participants, this included spending time sofa-surfing or residing with friends.

Right now it's just sofa surfing almost in between friends and siblings, like yeah, this is my sister's room.

Participant 7

I was really lucky because I made a lot of good friends, one of my friends I spoke with, and I said this is this the situation, and then they said OK come live here.

Participant 5

So at that time, I stayed with my friend because the University said I couldn't stay at the halls. Staying with her for I think a month because, um I couldn't get through to my social worker, they didn't have an option, they didn't have a house for me at that time.

Participant 1

This frequently did not offer protection longer term and was often unstable.

You have those random friends' houses for that for one or two nights you can quickly shower and stuff and get some food in you and then other times your sofa surfing with people you don't even know but other people have said, OK, you can stay here or whatever.

Participant 3

At first, I was like I have so many friends, I will be fine and stayed on friends' couches, but the number of days you think you should be able stay on different friends couches really get reduced, all of a sudden you think oh yeah within two months I'll sort this, then it turns into having to within 10/11 days.

Participant 10

Two participants spoke about how, in an attempt to prevent and avoid rooflessness, they slept in the University library.

3.1.4. Subtheme Four: No Options and No Choices

In many of their accounts, participants described having no options, no choices and no solutions, as a significant contributing factor to their experiences of homelessness in HE. This was either in relation to having limited and unsuitable options or simply having no options at all, both of which culminated in homelessness.

All of a sudden all my stuff is in the black bag, there's no more friends' houses that I can stay at and I go to the homeless hostel, I have nowhere else to go.

Participant 10

They said that I can get something today but it will be a hostel and it might even be out of London which wasn't convenient for me because my uni is in London and my daughter school in London.

Participant 2

In terms of participants who felt they did not have suitable options and then felt they had no further options, two participants brought attention to how they were then considered 'intentionally homeless,' which rendered them choiceless.

The surrounding it was just the worst thing with drugs, alcohol, violence, just things that you just don't want to experience. I refused that offer and people may say that oh well, you chose to be homeless, but in terms of a solution, I didn't have solutions, it wasn't a solution.

Participant 1

The care leaver system was like, well, if you do that, we will remove all support to you because you are in essence intentionally making yourself homeless.

Participant 8

Some participants described this experience of having no options or choices as being reflective of their wider experience of being a CL, describing a sense of powerlessness with their situation.

Being a care leaver your options are taken from you, every little part of your option is taken, It's like whatever is there, you just have to accept it and take it and deal with it and figure it out, even if it drives you insane.

Participant 3

I felt hopeless and powerless and a lot of anxiety, I was like what's going to happen? Are they gonna give me a hostel? Are they gonna make me live in a homeless shelter?

Participant 6

So yeah, at that point, I was just about to give up, I was just concerned for the rest of my life, like shall I just pack my bags and sofa surf for the rest of my life, that's what I was thinking.

Participant 2

Having no options and choices led to CLs feeling that they were stuck in a cycle, where experiences of homelessness felt unavoidable. This exacerbated their sense of isolation as they did not have reliable support systems.

They said you need to have a better job or you need to have 3-4 months' rent or you need to have a guarantor that has 15K or mortgage, I don't even know any of these people 'cause I'm from care, I'm estranged from everyone, so it's kind of hilarious, what am I meant to do?

Participant 10

It's like pass the parcel, I asked her what information she's asking the housing and the housing doesn't know. It has just basically been a cycle, that was pretty much my experience.

Participant 9

3.2. Theme Two: Self-Reliance

The theme of self-reliance captures a core idea expressed across all the interviews: that participants felt they had to rely on themselves. One aspect of this theme was participants' sense of individual responsibility and having no choice but to be independent. Participants also described feeling that no one cared or wanted to help and, as such, feeling unable to rely on others. Additionally, participants described feeling uncomfortable and ashamed with sharing their situation with others, either in relation to their experiences of homelessness or being a CL.

3.2.1. Subtheme One: Needing to be Independent

All CLs reported needing to be independent in order to survive. This sense of independence was described as something that developed throughout their experiences in the care system. It was also motivated by not wanting to rely

on others and being autonomous, feeling that they are resilient enough to rely on themselves.

I just feel very awkward relying on other people because I've been on my own for a long time, I've lived on my own for a long time, I'm very resilient, very independent and I've really struggled to be reliant on other people because I'm an older sister as well.

Participant 11

I think I have this thing where I just wannabe kind of trying to do things on my own, 'cause throughout the whole time I was in care, decisions were made for me and now I want to make that decision on my own.

Participant 6

I had to fight to get to where I am currently, I didn't get here by people feeling sympathy for me. I got here by standing up and being on my own. I'm just fighting for my future but just by myself and I don't know if other care leavers are the same but one thing that I definitely know they would relate to is being independent. I'm throwing the term around independent a lot, but I don't necessarily build relationships with people.

Participant 4

If I was in stranded, I would never call them, I would rather sort it out myself.

Participant 1

3.2.2. Subtheme Two: No One Cares or Wants to Help

All CLs described feeling that, among those with corporate parenting responsibilities, no one cared for them or wanted to help with their situation. This led to CLs feeling they were fighting for themselves, resulting in subsequent self-reliance. Within this, CLs spoke of feeling unsupported, where their attempts to seek help from statutory services were unsuccessful.

I just felt they didn't care, they didn't want to help me, they wanted less paperwork, they wanted me off the grid basically.

Participant 11

You feel very targeted, that's the way you do, you feel like a target, you feel like no one wants to help you, It's so frustrating, I felt like banging my head across the wall... I genuinely needed them.

Participant 7

They should've helped me, they could've helped me. I don't know why they were refusing to help me. I feel like nothing was avoided, they could have avoided a lot for me and nothing was avoided, I endured pure homelessness.

Participant 3

Within this subtheme, participants discussed their previous experiences of being let down by those who had a duty to support them. Only two of the participants spoke about having contact and support from their PA. More generally, participants described feeling isolated, and feeling that people did not care for, or about them, or have their back.

I didn't even expect them to help me that's how bad it is, what the heck is actually there for me, they've never supported me never. No one in the system or my social worker was on my side. She wasn't even fighting for me with me, she was fighting against me and that's how it felt, they're always fighting against me, I've been failed so many times to the point where it's like even if I'd ask for the support, the supports going to be useless.

Participant 1

Wait... I am meant to go to you for support? there's no way, you weren't even supportive when you had to be.

Participant 8

Within this subtheme other people spoke about how their care experience impacted upon the availability of supportive individuals in their lives.

Being a care leaver obviously you lose all the people around you who will support you, the duty of care is just not there.

Participant 11

People who come out of care will experience some form of abandonment, like normally your foster parents making you become estranged and then completely abandoning you and then it's like I had no family in first place, and then you have no support.

Participant 10

3.2.3. Subtheme Three: Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation

Within this subtheme CLs spoke about feeling uncomfortable sharing information about their situation, specifically in relation to their experiences of homelessness or about being a CL. Participants described not wanting to disclose their CL status due to a lack of understanding, fear of judgement or having to provide context when they felt uncomfortable doing so. A third of participants did not recall actively sharing they were a CL with the University and some spoke about this research being the first time they had spoken to anyone about their experiences being a CL.

I didn't tell anyone that I was a care leaver because I feel like if I was to tell them that I'm a care leaver they're going to want to know why I went into care, and if I can't explain what the real reason is, then it feels like I'm at fault.

Participant 2

The whole reason why I don't want or don't openly disclose I've been in care, is because a lot of people they feel sympathetic for you, and that's not what I want because I know what the expense that I've been through, I'm not necessarily gonna say there's like a shame which

comes through being a care leaver, I can't describe it, I just feel ashamed to openly disclose, I'm a care leaver.

Participant 4

In terms of feeling uncomfortable sharing their situation, another participant described wanting to distance themselves from the care system and the identity of being a CL.

I get all the time, you don't like you've been in care and then it's like what's the look, and I don't want to be the look... I don't want that on me, like you look like you have been in care, you look like, you know, you suffered.

Participant 1

Within the subtheme of feeling uncomfortable sharing their situation, participants described this as barrier to seeking support which contributed to their self-reliance. Participants described repeating their story or anticipating that repeating their story would be difficult, which prevented them from reaching out for support.

I didn't want to be in a position where I have to keep telling someone else and then telling someone else and I just didn't want that, so I didn't say anything.

Participant 5

I don't wanna kind of have to go into like my story or anything, that feels too personal with people that I don't feel comfortable with.

Participant 9

For others, feeling uncomfortable with sharing their situation of homelessness resulted in sense of failure and hopelessness.

To ask for help is it shows that I'm incapable and that means everyone around me is incapable, and in my brain it's not fine, what

am I gonna do? and so, um, I just don't have the whole courage to tell someone I'm in this situation.

Participant 1

3.3. Theme Three: Higher Education Can Offer Protection and a Better Future

The final theme encompassed how HE can offer some protection and a better future. This highlighted a courageous motivation to remain in HE, despite the challenges that they had experienced, by viewing HE as leading to a better future. HE was also seen to offer some protection through financial means such as LA subsidising rent, student finance and the CL bursary, but these were inconsistent and didn't go far enough to protect against homelessness.

3.3.1. Subtheme One: Higher Education Leading to a Better Future

Within this subtheme, all CLs described viewing education as leading them towards a better future. CLs described seeing the value in education and that this acted as their motivation to persevere with HE despite the challenges they had experienced with homelessness. CLs showed a capability to think longer term and into the future, viewing education as preventing future homelessness and hardship.

Definitely a huge motivation behind getting the degree is, I don't want to do to ever be in a situation where I could be homeless or near homeless again, like I know, the only way to ensure my future is to get a good education, get a good degree, work hard now and then, then reap the benefits later.

Participant 4

I had this very, very strong mindedness regarding higher education, I was always saying OK, I have to have to go through higher education

to get a good job because I know the difficulties you face if you don't get a good education.

Participant 5

It's something personal that drives you, I'm so grateful that I've just kept pushing myself those days and nights, I've been crying to myself every day, you know, it's finally going to be worth it very soon.

Participant 2

CLs described a sense of determination to succeed. Some spoke about wanting to prove others wrong, with others viewing HE as a form of legitimisation and achievement.

When I was younger, people say you'd never amount to anything, so I have to amount to something, just to prove them wrong. If you tell me I can't, I'm gonna make sure I show you I can. I've done really well, like I'm at uni like I was so happy to get in, that's an accomplishment in itself.

Participant 11

We're literally graduating in 2023 and I remember I used the words I have finally accomplished something, that's my words that I said, I was like wow 'cause when I start something, I have that habit of not finishing it and then it's like wow, I'm almost done with this.

Participant 6

When I do pass my degree, I'm going to hold it like it's Gold. Yeah, I will flaunt that around because it is very difficult, I don't think anyone gets it.

Participant 7

3.3.2. Subtheme Two: Higher Education Offers Some Protection

Within this subtheme, CLs explained that being in HE offered some protection against homelessness. This motivated participants to remain in

HE in order to have somewhere to live and some security. Some participants also described this security as being a motivator to pursue HE, but that there was fear of future homelessness if they were to withdraw from University.

So when you're in education they pay your rent but if I wasn't in education, they would not pay my rent, they would expect me to pay it by myself, but due to being education until you're 25, they pay, so yeah that's why I went into education. I hate education, I'm not academic person. I force that upon myself, so I have somewhere to live.

Participant 1

If you fail the course, you lose your student finance, if you lose your student finance, you lose your maintenance, your maintenance is what's paying your rent.

Participant 10

Some of my accommodation expenses are paid and then they have the care leaver grant and all of those help me and also my maintenance loan you know, so this is stuff helped me stay in my course.

Participant 5

Despite HE offering CLs some level of protection, this appeared insufficient and inconsistent. Some CLs hadn't known about what support was available to them, either because the information was not there or because the HEI or LA were not open about it. CLs noted confusion regarding their eligibility for financial support, such as the CL bursary. Confusion appeared to be in relation to definitional issues, arbitrary cut offs and circumstance.

So care leavers get a bursary, for the first year the student team said I wasn't eligible, but I don't know why when I was in second year, and third year I was eligible, which made no sense.

Participant 2

They don't help you with that which I thought was a bit ridiculous, my sister's in the same position as me, just a few years younger, she started during the pandemic, same time as me, a different course, but she got support with her housing because she was under 25.

Participant 11

You don't tick this box, you can't actually get the support, where because you're working so many hours, you almost need that additional support.

Participant 10

My local authority paid for nine months not for 12 months. You know, so it's for the academic period, now after this, for three months until September, I'm not sure where I should go, you know?

Participant 5

I didn't apply or call anyone or ask questions, I just read it and it said not eligible, so I gave up.

Participant 9

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

It is widely acknowledged that CLs are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness in comparison to those without care experience (Wade & Dixon, 2006). Gill and Daw (2017) highlighted that CLs are at particular risk of homelessness owing to multiple and interacting reasons such as a lack of suitable accommodation, poor transitional support and transitions coinciding with critical moments in education. Furthermore, the review of the literature highlighted that experiences of homelessness do not dissipate for CLs once in HE (e.g. O'Neill et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2020). Despite these being recognised, there is an absence of research that attempts to understand CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE. Consequently, there has been limited investigation into what contributed to or prevented CLs experiences of homelessness and also how, despite such challenges, they have been able to remain in HE. This chapter will discuss the key findings of the current research in relation to the theoretical and empirical literature and answer the research questions as outlined in the *Introduction*. A critical appraisal of the research will be presented, including steps taken to ensure the quality of the research. Finally, the chapter will explore the implications of the findings and suggest directions for future research.

4.1. Research Questions: The Findings in the Context of the Literature

4.1.1. What are CLs' Accounts of Homelessness in HE?

The majority of the CLs who participated in this research met the legal definition of a CL as outlined in the CLCA (2000) and were therefore considered to be a 'Former Relevant Child'. Being in HE, these participants should have been entitled to provision from their LA, as well as a commitment from those with wider corporate parent responsibilities. In terms of the LA, this should have included the allocation of a PA and support in the transition from care up to the age of 25, guided by a regularly reviewed PP.

This should also include safe, suitable and stable housing to enable HE participation. In terms of those with wider corporate parenting responsibilities (including private, public and voluntary sectors signed up to the CL Covenant), this should include a commitment to support CLs to live independently, have financial and accommodation stability, and feel safe and secure in their lives.

Previous research has indicated that those who meet the definition of being a 'Former Relevant Child' are less likely to have experiences of homelessness in HE (Stevenson et al., 2020). Despite the intended level of protection in policy and provision, the CLs in this research described various and numerous experiences of homelessness during their time in HE. As previously highlighted in the *Introduction*, there is no official data capturing the number of CLs who experience homelessness in HE. Whilst highlighting this area is a hidden problem, the current research suggests homelessness could be more prevalent than previously considered.

The study outlined in this thesis is the first known qualitative research that amplifies the voice of and gives understanding to CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE. The subthemes reflecting CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE are discussed below with reference to previous literature and relevant theory.

4.1.1.1. Lack of Stability and Frequent Moves

Under the first theme '*Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation*' CLs spoke of '*Lack of Stability and Frequent Moves*' which encompassed accounts of living in temporary accommodation such as hostels, homeless shelters and 'bed and breakfasts' whilst in HE. This is despite clear recommendations that this type of accommodation is not considered suitable for YP or CLs under 25 (DfE, 2020). However, it is consistent with previous research, which suggests that it is not uncommon for CLs to be residing in temporary emergency accommodation (St Basils, 2021). Although such accommodation may be used in an emergency to prevent rough sleeping (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2018), this research found that temporary accommodation was being used for much

longer periods of time and CLs were frequently moving between unsuitable temporary accommodations.

The temporary nature of accommodation meant the CLs in this research moved frequently and suddenly. Indeed, four CLs described moving five or more times during their time in HE, owing to their accommodation being inappropriate. This partially speaks to the lack of suitable accommodations for CLs on a structural level, which has been echoed in other research (e.g. Gill & Daw, 2017). However, this finding has not been previously considered specifically in relation to CLs in HE. Whilst it could be assumed that CLs entering HE would be residing in halls of residence (e.g. Ellis & Johnstone, 2019), for many of the CLs in this research, the costs of halls of residence were onerous in comparison to other options or not suitable due to their personal circumstances (e.g. due to having children). Participants spoke of having to leave their accommodation unexpectedly, which parallels previous research where 26% of CLs in HE reported being forced to move accommodation suddenly (O'Neill et al., 2019). However, the current research adds context to why sudden moves are occurring, which was described as primarily due to the temporary and inappropriate nature of the accommodation.

The first identified sub-theme also reflected a perpetual lack of stability for CLs, where frequent moves were reflective of their time in care. This suggests that housing instability is something that the CLs in this research have come to expect. Consistent with this research, Barker (2016) suggests for YP who have experienced homelessness, that a habitus of instability may emerge and become normalised. This is likely to be exacerbated for CLs who have experienced frequent care placement moves and the disruption of attachments prior to their experiences of homelessness (Stein, 2005). Supporting this further, O'Neill et al. (2019) found that the emotional impact of frequent moves for CLs in HE compounds the trauma of care placement moves, which could be considered to contribute to a habitus of instability.

This lack of stability appeared to impact CLs' ability to engage in HE, due to balancing the multiple demands of HE alongside navigating homelessness

and housing instability. This is consistent with previous research which brings attention to the challenges of navigating the period of emerging adulthood for CLs (Hollingworth & Jackson, 2016). During the period of emerging adulthood, YP develop human, social and identity capital to support their navigation through this developmental stage (Singer & Berzin, 2015). Focal theory can be considered in terms of the challenges CLs experience during this period, in light of their navigation and balance of multiple demands (Coleman, 1989). The CLs in this research appeared to be navigating multiple disruptions and marked uncertainty, which included inappropriate and unstable accommodation, the transition from care, and engaging in HE. This is drastically different to those without care experience, as they are able to focus on transitions or changes both in succession, and more gradually (Collins, 2001). Understandably, for the CLs in this research, accommodation needed to be prioritised above engaging in HE. However, having to focus on such crucial basic needs has been found to create 'roadblocks' for navigating HE (Huang et al., 2018). This can be conceptualised by considering a hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs explains various levels of needs, where safety and physical needs, such as feeling secure (which included the presence of housing), need to be established before higher needs like education and achievement can be met. Consequently if CLs don't have their basic needs met it can be challenging for them to successfully engage with their academic pursuits (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017).

4.1.1.2. Under a Roof but No Home

Under the theme '*Inappropriate and Unsuitable Accommodation*', participants described their accounts of being '*Under a Roof but No Home*'. This subtheme spoke to CLs' accounts of homelessness being hidden. CLs spoke of sofa surfing (either with friends or acquaintances) or sleeping in the library in an attempt to avoid rough sleeping. This is consistent with previous research that CLs experiences of homelessness are more likely to be hidden (Action for Children, 2015). Clarke (2016) highlighted that having a care history as had the greatest correlation with hidden homelessness in young people aged 16-25. More generally, wider research highlights that hidden homelessness is 13 times more prevalent than rough sleeping (London

Assembly Housing Committee, 2017). Some of the CLs in this research were able to avoid rough sleeping by staying with friends or 'sofa surfing'. However others described this as a more precarious time, forcing them to stay with acquaintances or people they didn't know, sometimes with negative consequences. This is reflective of accounts of YP who were found to be at risk of danger when navigating hidden homelessness (Centrepoin, 2015). Concerningly, this aspect of hidden homelessness it is not being recorded or recognised, which obscures the true extent of homelessness for CLs in HE.

4.1.1.3. *Feeling Unsafe*

The theme, '*Inappropriate and Unsuitable Accommodation*', included participant accounts of '*Feeling Unsafe*' due to the situations and environments they had to reside in whilst in HE. Outside of HE, there is consistent research that suggests it is not uncommon for CLs feel unsafe in their accommodation after leaving care (e.g. Fortune & Smith, 2021; Gill & Daw, 2017). This differs from Government figures stating that 85% of CLs reside in safe accommodation (DfE, 2020). In this research, CLs described how various factors including rooflessness contributed to '*Feeling Unsafe*'. Experiences and periods of rough sleeping have not been previously considered as an experience of CLs in HE, but were highlighted in the current research by two participants. CLs also described '*Feeling Unsafe*' in interpersonal situations and did not feel their trauma histories or safety were considered in terms of the accommodation in which they were placed. In some cases, this led to remaining in exploitative situations for fear of subsequent homelessness. Neglecting to consider the impact of CLs' trauma histories on accommodation choices has been previously highlighted for CLs in HE (Stevenson et al., 2020), but not considered in terms of subsequent impact on safety and accounts of homelessness.

The CLs Accommodation and Support Framework (St Basils & Barnardo's, 2019) for preventing homelessness among CLs, specifically highlights that, given their vulnerability, CLs should not be placed in accommodation with, for example, older adults. Here, risk is acknowledged in the context of CLs vulnerability, but wider thought on any potential for re-traumatisation in these settings does not appear to have been considered. This current research

highlights that CLs are continuing to be placed in situations which are objectively and subjectively unsafe. This occurs either where there is an absence of structural safety or where they are being housed alongside people from a variety of ages and backgrounds, activating previous trauma or contributing to further trauma.

4.1.2. What do CLs view as Contributing to and/or Preventing their Experiences of Homelessness?

In terms of considering what has contributed to and/or prevented experiences of homelessness for CLs in HE, this research highlighted various interrelated contributing factors to homelessness. Specifically, it identified structural factors, system failures, relational and individual factors, and the interaction of these factors has been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Stephens & Fitzpatrick, 2007). Few preventative factors were highlighted, which aligns with CLs accounts of experiencing homelessness as commonplace, rather than homelessness being feared and prevented.

4.1.2.1. *No Options and No Choices*

Under the first theme '*Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation*' participants spoke of having '*No Options and No Choices*'. They reported this led to feeling stuck in a cycle which contributed to, and perpetuated, their experiences of homelessness. This included either having no options or feeling that the options that were offered were not suitable (thereby giving them 'no choice'), both of which resulted in homelessness.

Here, the concept of intentionality was highlighted. If CLs refused a particular accommodation, they were considered to be intentionally homeless which rendered them choiceless. There have been recommendations that the intentionality clause should be removed for CLs under the age of 25, as well as wider links made between intentionality and resultant homelessness (Gill & Daw, 2017). This research highlights that, in some cases, CLs in HE can be considered intentionally homeless, which has not been highlighted in research of CLs in HE previously.

The subtheme '*No Options and No Choices*' also spoke to CLs being stuck in a cycle where experiences of homelessness felt unavoidable, leaving CLs feeling 'powerless'. A number of structural factors were highlighted as contributing to homelessness. These included the availability and affordability of appropriate accommodation and deposit to secure appropriate accommodation, which could have prevented homelessness. The absence of these forced CLs into or having to remain in '*Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation*'. Unsurprisingly, the lack of choice and scarcity of suitable accommodation has been highlighted in previous research exploring CLs' experiences of leaving the care system (Fortune & Smith, 2021). With increasing numbers of YP entering care and therefore becoming CLs, there is an increased demand for LA services, meaning LAs have fewer resources to provide support to an increasing number of CLs (DfE, 2020). This is also coupled with a challenging housing market (Gill & Daw, 2017), indicating that the factors that contribute to homelessness in HE may not be unique to CLs in HE. Indeed, Mulrenan et al. (2018) concluded that homelessness could be a significant problem among HE students in the UK and is likely to be exacerbated by HE widening participation initiatives.

4.1.2.2. HE Offers Some Protection

CLs described that '*HE Offers Some Protection*' from homelessness. However, despite the additional policy and provision in place for this group, we have to ask ourselves, why HE is not offering complete protection from homelessness? The theme speaks to some of the institutional and structural aspects alongside system failures which contribute to homelessness. In this research CLs were offered varying levels of support depending on their LA local offer. Concerningly this discrepancy was also highlighted by Jackson et al. (2005). Despite this research being conducted 15 years ago and subsequent recommendations and policy changes, CLs are continuing to experience homelessness in HE and the variation and insufficiency in the local offer is continuing to contribute to this.

Financial support for accommodation in HE differed between each CLs' local offer and didn't go far enough or offer protection from homelessness for all

CLs. For example, for some CLs, their accommodation was subsidised during the academic term time. Some received a bursary from their LA (although this amount varied) and for others there was a complete lack of corporate parent support and responsibility. This then resulted in *'Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation'* or lack of accommodation entirely. Attempts have been made in legislation to outline a minimum level of support, for example, LAs have a duty under the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) to provide CLs who enter HE with a bursary. However, although this is set out in legislation, LAs have discretion over the financial and practical support they provide to CLs. When this is insufficient and inconsistent, it can contribute to experiences of homelessness.

Within the theme of *'HE Offers Some Protection'* CLs spoke of 'protection' in terms of specific financial support which can offer protection from homelessness (e.g. student maintenance bursary/loan and the CL bursary) whilst being in HE. Financial support can enhance retention in low-income students (Harrison & Hatt, 2011) and financial difficulties have been highlighted as a risk factor for withdrawal from HE (Cotton et al., 2017; Harrison, 2017). However, despite this intended and highlighted level of protection, there were inconsistencies in this on a HE level. In part this appeared to be due to definitional issues which have been highlighted in previous research (Stevenson et al., 2020). However, in the current research, it was not clear why some CLs, were eligible one year and not another, despite their circumstances remaining unchanged, highlighting inconsistencies beyond definitions. Furthermore, several CLs in this research were over 25 years old and therefore not entitled to the CL bursary or LA support. Arbitrary age cut offs for CL support have been disputed in previous research (e.g. O'Neill et al., 2019) and are not reflective of the longer trajectory into HE for CLs (Harrison, 2017). CLs further reported a lack of awareness of the dedicated contact or support provisions, with some participants having easily accessed bursaries and others not being aware specific support for CLs existed.

HE offered some protection due to participants' fears of homelessness if they were to withdraw. It was recognised that, despite financial support being

insufficient, it would be removed entirely if they were to withdraw from HE. For some, this element of protection motivated them to persevere with HE.

4.1.2.3. *Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation*

The protection that HE offers almost always relies on CLs disclosing their CL status, alongside this, other forms of intended structural support in policy and legislation rely on contact being maintained by the LA. CLs described feeling '*Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation*' which contributed to a position of '*Self-Reliance*'. Specifically, CLs described feeling uncomfortable sharing their CL status due to an anticipated lack of understanding from others. This is reflective of previous research where CLs have described a reluctance to disclose their care status in HE due to perceived stigma (Jackson & Cameron, 2014) and to dissociate themselves from the care system (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017).

As these structural elements of support depend on CLs disclosing their status, CLs remain unaware of the extent of support which could be available to them upon facing challenges in HE. This then leaves CLs to navigate challenges alone and independently (Hauari et al., 2019) both contributing to and as a result of their '*Self-Reliance*'. Currently, CLs can choose to disclose their CL status on their UCAS application or on arrival in HE. This aims to make CLs aware of the support available. However, it is not always clear to CLs the importance of disclosing, or how this information will be shared (Hauari et al., 2019). This was highlighted in the current research, as a third of those who partook in the interviews described not proactively disclosing that they were a CL to the HEI.

Feeling uncomfortable sharing their situation was also described in relation to sharing their experiences of homelessness. Other research has found that the stigma associated with homelessness results in students not disclosing their experiences unless trust is gained (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). In fact, Centrepont (2015) found that only one in five YP experiencing homelessness present to their LA. This reluctance to share their circumstances is likely compounded by negative stereotypes of homelessness.

4.1.2.4. *No One Cares or Wants to Help*

Related to '*Feeling Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation*' was the feeling that '*No One Cares or Wants to Help*'. This subtheme drew attention to a strong relational aspect, whereby CLs attributed the lack of support to prevent them becoming homelessness as indicating a lack of care. Whilst a few informal exceptions were noted, when discussing those with corporate parenting responsibilities, the CLs in this research described feeling that '*No One Cares or Wants To Help*'. Attempts to seek support were unsuccessful, which contributed to CLs having little trust in services ability to help, which impacted their motivation to reach out. This is echoed in previous research which also detailed CLs being critical of available support as it implied there was a duty of care which was not felt (Glynn & Mayock, 2021). In the current research, this sense of abandonment forced CLs into a position of '*Self-Reliance*' and isolation in their accounts of navigating homelessness. From an attachment perspective, Parry and Weatherhead (2014) describe the attachment response of being 'insecure yet self-reliant', and how it can result in difficulties in asking for help and lead to detachment from services and people. Given CLs' disrupted attachments, it is more likely they will have an insecure style of attachment (Bifulco et al., 2017).

The importance of having others to rely on has been consistently highlighted as a useful asset for CLs navigating challenges in HE, and a lack of supportive others is a risk factor for withdrawal from HE (Cotton et al., 2017). Furthermore, the availability of 'supportive others' and social support networks has been highlighted as a key protective factor to prevent homelessness among those who are at risk (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018). The CLs in this research reported limited or no access to consistent forms of support from those with corporate parenting responsibilities, such as their PA. Although research has highlighted that in some LAs, up to 93% of CLs had regular contact and support from their PA, there are recognised disparities across LAs. For example, in one LA, 16% of CLs were not aware of who their PA was and if they even had one (Briheim-Crookall et al., 2020).

Alongside this lack of support from those with corporate parenting responsibilities, many CLs spoke about lacking the safety net of a family or how their care experience impacted the availability of supportive individuals in their lives. This is not uncommon and, previous research suggests that CLs can lack support networks which are sufficient to support them through the demanding challenges of the transition to independent adulthood (Hiles et al., 2013; Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2018). For many CLs, consistent support may therefore come from professionals (Driscoll, 2013) like the CLs' advisor in HE settings (Cotton et al., 2014). In this research, some CLs turned to HE services in the absence of PA support. This speaks to the importance of supportive professional relationships in HEI for navigating challenges (Simpson & Murphy, 2020). CLs in HE have been shown to benefit from support that is relational and characterised by warmth and knowledge of the individual (Pinkney & Walker, 2020) and support that is more generally understanding of the needs of CLs (Stevenson et al., 2020). However, CLs in this research described feeling that '*No one Cares or Wants to Help*' suggesting these aspects were not felt from formal sources of support. CLs' accounts that '*No one Cares or Wants to Help*' were compounded by previous experiences of being let down by those with a duty to support them, meaning CLs were less likely to reach out and develop trust. This is important, as it has been demonstrated that CLs are better able to accept support from professionals where a relationship of trust has been established (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Driscoll, 2013).

The CLs in this research described frequent changes of their PA, and this was in addition to the change from a social worker to a PA (which occurred prior to the transition to HE). CLs described contacting the CLs' advisor in HE purely in relation to the bursary rather than for wider support, with many noting struggles with contactability. With there being a singular CLs' advisor, there was little opportunity to build trusting relationships. Gazeley and Hinton-Smith (2018) found that ad hoc support was insufficient, and that systems and practices need to adapt to meet the relational needs of CLs more effectively. Indeed, the role of the CLs advisor in HE is greater than supporting the application of the CL bursary. For example, the Propel website details that the CLs advisor can assist with navigating HE and LA

support, support with finding somewhere to live, as well as providing a dedicated drop-in service.

4.1.2.5. Under a Roof but No Home

There were very few factors which CLs described in their accounts that prevented their experiences of homelessness. However, rooflessness and rough sleeping were, at times, prevented by informal sources of support (e.g. being able to stay with friends and acquaintances). This was highlighted in CLs accounts under the subtheme of '*Under a Roof but No Home*'. Drawing on informal support has been highlighted in previous research; Simpson and Murphy (2020) highlight several non-professional sources of support that CLs draw upon, such as peers and partners, to navigate challenges in HE. However these had not been considered in relation to CLs navigating and preventing rooflessness in HE.

4.1.3. How do CLs Navigate the Challenges of Actual or Potential Homelessness to Remain in HE?

The final research question aimed to consider how CLs were able to navigate actual or potential homelessness to remain in HE. Whilst the other research questions spoke to both structural and relational factors, this research question included factors which CLs considered as individual. As highlighted in the previous research question, homelessness was not perceived as 'prevented', however, despite the challenges faced the participants were able to remain in HE.

4.1.3.1. Needing to be Independent

The CLs in this research described '*Needing to be Independent*', contributing to '*Self-Reliance*'. Within this sub-theme, this was highlighted as a positive attribute to navigate challenges but was as a result of having no choice but to be independent. This is further perpetuated by the culture and structure of HEIs, which expect significant independence regardless of circumstance (Cotton et al., 2017).

Self-reliance can be considered as a 'quest' for individual responsibility, autonomy and self-determination, where CLs have to take on responsibility beyond that of their peers to survive their social environment (Groinig & Sting, 2019). Therefore '*Self-Reliance*' is associated with a sense of independence (Driscoll, 2013) which was described by the CLs in this research. This has been found in previous research unrelated to homelessness, suggesting that those who succeed and overcome challenges in education can be viewed as having a strong sense of self-reliance (e.g. Cameron, 2007). Butterworth et al. (2017) and Samuels and Pryce (2008) have considered this as a strength and positive attribute for navigating challenges. To some extent, this was found in this research with CLs having confidence in their ability to manage their lives, viewing 'relying on themselves' as positive and providing motivation to remain in HE.

In contrast, '*Needing to be Independent*' can also prevent the formation of supportive relationships, owing to CLs feeling they need to be self-sufficient (Cameron, 2007). In the current research, CLs spoke of having no choice but to be independent and relying on their own resources rather than external support. This lack of choice may have been impacted by feeling that '*No One Cares or Wants to Help*' or feeling '*Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation*' therefore protecting themselves from others. This is consistent with previous research, which found CLs rely on their own resources rather than external sources of formal support, regardless of its availability (Cameron, 2007). Upon leaving care, CLs often describe feeling internal and external pressure to attain total independence which has been termed 'survivalist self-reliance' and can be considered an identity for CLs (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). In terms of CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE, this led CLs to feeling they had no choice other than to be independent and, as such, navigated these challenges almost autonomously.

4.1.3.2. *HE Leading to a Better Future*

Previous research has found that CLs are 38% more likely than their peers to withdraw from HE, even when entry qualifications and background variables are taken into consideration (Harrison, 2017). This research found that despite their accounts of homelessness and the resulting challenges faced,

CLs were able to hold a longer-term future focused view of '*HE Leading to a Better Future*' if they persevered. This allowed the CLs in this research to continue with HE despite their experiences of homelessness. The participants expressed the view that completing HE could prevent future homelessness and hardship by relieving poverty. Indeed, Harrison et al. (2020) reported that if CLs complete HE, they have similar graduate outcomes to their non-care experienced peers.

This is reflective of previous research which indicated that it is common for CLs in HE to assert that they can achieve their ambitions, despite challenges, if they work hard enough (Jackson et al., 2005). The CLs in this research described wanting to prove people wrong, viewing HE as a form of legitimisation and achievement which allowed for perseverance. Pinkney and Walker (2020) similarly described a self-determination to succeed, which was a result of CLs wanting to escape their background and prove others wrong. It is of note that this desire to prove others wrong may be perpetuated by the negative stereotypes and the low expectations of CLs by those around them (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

Theoretically, this internal drive to succeed and intrinsic motivation to remain in HE can be factors which contribute to resilience (Cotton et al., 2014), but may also be the result of resilience (Stein, 2005). However, caution needs to be taken in considering the concept of resilience as purely individual, particularly in the context of accounts of homelessness and remaining in HE. Doing so would situate solutions for such complex social problems in the personal agency of the individual (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Resilience should therefore be viewed as a multi-level process (Van Breda, 2018) evolving from the interaction between the individual and the environment (Cotton et al., 2017), in fact, some participants described that when they were afforded safe, stable and appropriate accommodation, and succeeded in HE their capacity for resilience increased. Rutter (1993, 2012) found resilience was positively associated with the possibility of achieving a turning point in life, which is reflective of the CLs in this research viewing '*HE Leading to a Better Future*'. Therefore, whilst resilience is not a preventative

factor for homelessness, it does speak to the motivation of the CLs in this research to remain persevering with HE for hope of a better future.

4.2. Critical Review and Reflections

4.2.1. Quality of the Research

As highlighted in the *Methodology*, the concept of trustworthiness was utilised to assess the quality of the current research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), with reference to the specific criteria developed for TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2021b; Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness reflects the quality and value of the research in relations to the criteria of: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

4.2.1.1. *Credibility*

Credibility refers to whether there is an accurate 'fit' between the participants views and the representation of these by the researcher (Tobin & Begley, 2004). A prolonged period of time was spent actively engaging with the data and the analysis and themes identified were discussed, reviewed and shaped with the thesis supervisor and peers. This allowed for the minimisation of common errors, such as confusing codes for themes and/or confusing themes for topic summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

Credibility was also increased through member reflection. Whilst this is usually conducted with research participants, it can also involve others who were not involved in the original data collection process, which can further increase credibility and the meaningfulness of the research (Davis et al., 2017). During this process, anonymous findings were shared with two CLs who had originally consulted on the design of the research, to elicit their feedback and reflections on the theme and subtheme development and implications (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Additionally, attention and thought were given to the breadth of quotes presented by each participant to inform the interpretations made. Findings

were then offered in the context of existing literature and built upon what is known about CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE.

4.2.1.2. Dependability

Dependability requires the research process to be logical, traceable and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004), referring to the consistency of the data over similar conditions (Cope, 2014). All stages of the research were clearly documented to support dependability. To further support dependability, a reflexive log was maintained. This aimed to keep track of decisions and rationales, as well as reflections from the process and the interviews.

4.2.1.3. Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalisability of the findings and the degree to which they can be transferred to other contexts (Nowell et al., 2017). This was aided by providing a detailed description of the study, the findings and its context. This gave the reader the ability to draw conclusions about the transferability of the research.

Additionally, when considering transferability evidence should be provided that the quality and quantity of the data gathered is sufficient (Williams & Morrow, 2009). This is beyond just the number of participants. Data should reflect a range of perspectives, facilitated by sample diversity. The current research aimed to achieve this by applying minimal exclusion criteria, as well as broad definitions of a CL and homelessness, alongside rich contextualised descriptions.

4.2.1.4. Confirmability

The confirmability of the research refers to the findings being derived from the data, rather than the researcher's assumptions or biases. This was ensured by meeting the above standards of credibility, dependability and transferability and engaging in further reflexivity.

4.2.2. Reflexivity

Reflexivity describes the continual process of reviewing our position in the context of the research, acknowledging the social and cultural influences and dynamics that may affect this context (Barrett et al., 2020). The importance of owning one's perspective has been highlighted when considering the quality of reflexive TA, emphasising how the researchers values and experiences may influence and shape the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2021b).

4.2.2.1. *Epistemological Reflexivity*

Epistemological reflexivity considers the factors and assumptions that have influenced the development of and guided the outcomes of the research.

As outlined in the *Method*, the research adopted a critical realist epistemological position. This position assumes that despite there being an 'objective reality', there can be (and are) multiple perspectives to reality which are influenced by the context (Healy & Perry, 2000). Therefore, the research reflects the convergence of multiple realities to give an answer to the specified research questions. I was aware that the data collected may not be an accurate representation of 'reality'. It was likely to be interpreted and filtered by the structures impacting conceptualisations and understandings of homelessness and care experience, as well as the intersecting relationship between these in HE (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2018). A critique of this epistemological position is that it can rely on interpretations of the researcher (Edwards et al., 1995). It was, therefore, imperative to remain continually aware of the influence of my own personal position and role as researcher.

4.2.2.2. *Personal Reflexivity*

Personal reflexivity embraces the need for researchers to accept their active role in the research and ensure they remain aware of their assumptions and positions. I was attuned to the potential risk my own experiences being projected onto participants responses. I was conscious that my familiarity with being a CL may have resulted in increased sensitivity towards certain aspects of the resultant data. Indeed, there were certain aspects which felt somewhat familiar, such as feeling a sense of pride in accessing HE. I noted

through discussions with the CLs who consulted on the research, that these were areas they had also connected with because they wanted to challenge the negative stereotypes surrounding CLs.

Throughout my training I have been immersed in discussions of social inequalities and discrimination and approached this research through a lens critical of current social structures e.g. structural racism in housing inequalities (Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), 2021). All of the CLs who participated in this research were from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. I reflected on whether participants would have felt able to share experiences of racism within their accounts given my ethnic background is white British. I also wondered whether I would have been sufficiently attuned to experiences of racism and structural racism during the resultant data analysis due to my ethnic background. To ensure I remained attuned to and kept participants' accounts at the centre of analysis, I kept a reflexive journal, had conversations with my supervisor and peers and also held in mind and reflected upon my personal experiences and values. This was further aided by taking a genuinely curious stance towards fostering CLs accounts (Cecchin, 1987) by allowing CLs to describe their accounts with minimal prompts and by then adopting an inductive analysis style.

4.2.3. Limitations of the Research

4.2.3.1. *Sample and Recruitment*

This research included those who had identified themselves as a CL and were known as a CL in the HEI. Given the findings from this research in relation to participants feeling reluctant to share their CL status, it is likely that there were many other CLs who had not shared their CL status and would therefore not have been invited to participate and share their accounts. Despite applying a broad inclusion criterion, the recruitment method may have limited the sample. Furthermore, given the high rates of withdrawal of CLs from HE (Harrison, 2017), there might have been many CLs who had already withdrawn from HE, potentially due to homelessness. In comparison, the CLs included in this study had all been able to remain in

HE. This is important to acknowledge as since the start of this research project, the number of CLs accessing or enrolled at the University had fallen considerably (see 2.2.4.), perhaps suggesting not all CLs were able to overcome the challenges to access or remain in HE.

An additional consideration is that the CLs were recruited from a singular London University, which is situated in an area of high deprivation and poverty. A large proportion of students, including CLs are considered local students. This is in contrast to other universities where a larger proportion are not local and potentially more likely to live in halls of residence (HESA, 2021), which may impact their housing experiences and homelessness.

4.2.3.2. Context of COVID-19 Pandemic

Whilst CLs described their accounts of homelessness during the pandemic, many experiences also occurred prior to the pandemic, where the pandemic was not described as a significant theme that contributed to or prevented their experiences of homelessness in HE. As a result of the pandemic and consequent restrictions, the interviews took place remotely via video, which was temperamental. This may have reduced the sensitivity to various aspects and nuances which are clearer when interviewing in person (Seitz, 2016).

4.2.4. Strengths of the Research

4.2.4.1. Addresses a Gap in the Literature

To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first UK study to explore and understand CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE. CLs described various and numerous experiences of homelessness in HE, which were not prevented or alleviated. This research suggests that the additional policy and provision in place for CLs in HE does not prevent homelessness, and the absence (or insufficiency) in LA support, partly contributes to accounts of homelessness. CLs described accounts of repeated homelessness throughout the year, suggesting homelessness is more prevalent than previously considered. The summer period was less of a risk factor than highlighted in previous research (e.g. Jackson et al., 2005), particularly as

CLs did not have safe, suitable or stable accommodation to be vacated from. CLs described accounts of '*Inappropriate and Unstable Accommodation*', which also included periods of hidden homelessness and rough sleeping. CLs care histories, trauma or individual circumstances were not considered in the accommodation they were placed. CLs described '*Feeling Unsafe*', which led to further harm and/or resultant homelessness.

Adopting a qualitative design for this research, in comparison to previous research allowed for in-depth accounts and novel insights to be captured. This research went beyond descriptive accounts of homelessness and highlighted several interrelated contributory factors across various levels. Few preventative factors were described, owing to CLs experiencing, rather than fearing homelessness. This research also explored how CLs were able to remain in HE despite their accounts of homelessness. This captured factors that CLs felt were individual, such as seeing value in HE providing a better future and their position (albeit not always through choice) of needing to be independent. Many of the participants shared that the research was the first time they had spoken to someone about being a CL and had been asked about the challenges they experienced facing homelessness in HE. They shared a motivation to change the landscape for future CLs entering HE.

4.2.4.2. Heterogeneity of Sample

The research included 11 CLs between the ages of 18-33. Diversity was represented across many domains within the sample such as gender, length of time in care and course choice. Diversity was also represented in terms of ethnicity; however it is important to note that all CLs were from ethnic minority backgrounds. There are several potential explanations for this. Firstly, this was reflective of the profile of the HEI, with over 70% of the students enrolled at the HEI coming from an ethnic minority background (OfS, 2021). Further and as previously noted, a large number of students were considered local students and the HEI is situated within one of the most ethnically diverse districts in England and Wales (ONS, 2011).

In terms of CLs outcomes, it is more likely for CLs from an ethnic minority background to have more positive outcomes and enter HE in comparison to CLs from a white background (Harrison, 2017). Barn et al. (2005) also reported CLs from an ethnic minority background tend to have more positive outcomes. In their research, CLs from an ethnic minority background were more likely to enter further education and less likely to experience homelessness in comparison to CLs from a white background. However, it should be noted that those from an ethnic minority background who did experience homelessness, were more likely to experience homelessness for a longer period of time.

All of the participants in this exploratory research experienced homelessness and this was not prevented or relieved. The demographics of all the CLs enrolled at the HEI were not known and therefore it was not possible to compare the demographics of the CLs who participated, to the demographics of the CLs who were enrolled. However, whilst it is important to understand CLs accounts, it is also important that findings are viewed through the lens of intersectionality, considering multiple aspects of identity and the intersecting forms of disadvantage faced by CLs (Crenshaw, 1989). Indeed race can intersect to amplify experiences of disadvantage such as experiences of homelessness in HE (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2018) and homelessness more generally (MHCLG, 2020). It is not clear whether there were CLs from white backgrounds who did not participate because they didn't experience or fear homelessness, were not enrolled in HE or because CLs in HE from an ethnic minority background are disproportionately more likely experience homelessness.

4.2.4.3. Broad Definitions

Previous literature can be criticised for having narrow definitions that only looking at the 'tip of the iceberg' in terms of CLs' experiences of homelessness. Adopting a broad definition of homelessness added depth to CLs accounts in this area. This research also adopted a broad definition of a CL, by including all those with care experience. This research excluded those without care experience (such as estranged students) who were included in previous research but made it problematic to deduce CL-specific

accounts (e.g. Stevenson et al., 2020). Despite this broad definition, the majority of participants met the legal definition of a 'Former Relevant Child'.

4.2.4.4. *Involvement of CLs in the Research*

The research was consulted on by two CLs with experiences of homelessness in HE. Initially consultations took place at two time points, initially this was during the planning phase, which enabled consideration of the comprehensibility of aspects of the research (See 2.3.1.). Consultation was also sought during the theme development phase which enabled meaningful consideration of the research themes, applicability and implications.

4.3. Implications of the Research

CLs who enter HE can be considered to defy the odds (DfE, 2020), however, this research indicates that an increased risk of homelessness remains for CLs in HE and this is not being adequately understood, prevented or relieved. The following section will explore the implications of this research across various levels. Adopting a multi-layered approach is important as the challenges faced are not solely a result of relational, structural or institutional factors, but also of wider inequalities and system failures. The relevance for clinical psychology will then be discussed as well as areas for future research.

4.3.1. Policy Level

The CLCA (2000) and Children and Social Work Act (2017) detail that YP leaving care and entering HE before the age of 25 should be allocated a PA, and be sufficiently supported by their LA until they have completed HE. As discussed in the *Introduction*, a PA is responsible for providing and/or coordinating the support and provision that has been identified within a CLs' PP. This includes securing accommodation, that is appropriate, safe and stable, as well as the prevention of, and relief of homelessness. Concerningly, only two CLs in this research had regular contact with their PA and a large number of CLs reported being unaware if they had a PA or who

this was. Firstly, the implications from this research highlight the need for LAs to fully provide their statutory obligations to CLs in HE. Worryingly, this has also been highlighted in previous research (Stevenson et al., 2020). The current research suggests if existing policies are implemented sufficiently, CLs may be less likely to fall through the gaps and experience homelessness.

Another area where the implications of this research should be considered on a policy level, is in relation to the equality of the local offer provided by LAs. The CLs in this research were provided with varying levels of support financially, practically and emotionally which, when insufficient or absent, contributed to their accounts of homelessness. Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act (2017) requires LAs to publish information on their local offer. This sets out the legal and discretionary level of support provided to CLs in HE. Fundamentally, the local offer should be sufficient enough to offer protection from homelessness. This should be both financially and, in the sourcing, and securing of safe, appropriate and stable accommodation, where CLs' individual needs have been considered. In an example of best practice, Barking and Dagenham provide CLs settled in HE with a one-bedroom apartment.

The experiences described, to some extent, reflect geographical disparities in the local offer. Local offers and discretionary support should be transparent and published centrally, to allow further research to examine geographical discrepancies. These could then be addressed at policy level. This variation and inconsistency in support provided by LAs is a real cause for concern, which has been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Ayre et al., 2016).

The local offer should be available in a format which is easily accessible to CLs entering HE and service providers. This would support CLs to make informed decisions about the suitability of the provision provided within the geographical area of the HEI. Several participants highlighted that they wouldn't have chosen to attend a HEI in London had they been aware of the liveability of their entitlements prior to commencing in HE. Currently, the local

offer document is lengthy and complex. This has been recognised and recommendation have been made that the local offer is made more accessible and is understandable (DfE, 2018c). The CLs who acted as consultants on this project felt these summary versions lacked crucial information in terms of the provision of safe, appropriate and stable housing. Reflecting on their own experiences, they proposed that the local offer should be communicated in a more accessible way, such as a question-and-answer video with a CL who had been though HE from each LA.

4.3.2. Institutional Level

The active discussion and dissemination of the findings from this research would increase the visibility of these issues. It is widely recognised that adequate data on homelessness for CLs in HE is lacking. Alongside its hidden nature, this is also owing to narrow definitions. This research adopted a broad definition of homelessness and brought to focus to the range of experiences that CLs described in their accounts. This highlights the need for more thoughtful and expansive definitions to be utilised beyond 'rooflessness'. The current research also emphasises the need for data to capture the prevalence of homelessness for CLs in HE using such a definition. Using this research to raise awareness of homelessness and capturing these data, could not only inform targeted support (Wood et al., 2017) but could also be presented to commissioners and stakeholders to influence policy change based on understanding and prevention.

Failings at policy and broader levels bring into focus the idea of 'extended corporate parenting'. This research raises the question as to how far HEI can go towards meeting this role. Provision for CLs in HE is influenced by neoliberal rationalities, an objective list approach is adopted, establishing a set of comparable and standardised services across HEIs for CLs (previously the Buttle Quality Mark and now the CL Covenant). One example is the provision of 365-day accommodation designed to prevent homelessness out of term time. However, this research highlights that this period is less of a risk factor than previously considered, particularly if CLs don't have stable, suitable and safe accommodation to be vacated from. A further example is the CL bursary in HE, the implications of this research highlight the need to

take a more flexible nuanced approach to eligibility. For example, the bursary should be offered to all CLs if needed, regardless of their age starting HE or whether they are a full-time or part-time student. This should also be considered alongside other bursary provisions which should be specifically targeted towards housing and prevention of homelessness, based on this understanding of need (e.g. a substantial bursary for accessing halls of residence). The use of halls of residence could also be utilised to provide emergency accommodation for CLs in housing crisis, to minimise the use of unsafe and multiple emergency provisions. Beyond the bursary provision within HEI, HEIs and LAs should also make CLs routinely aware of external bursaries, such as the Unite Foundation Scholarship, which provides CLs with fully subsidised accommodation during their degree.

Despite this research having implications for the current provisions offered, this does not go far enough to protect against homelessness. It also means that HEIs and their staff do not necessarily have the preparedness or understanding to support CLs in their role as extended corporate parents. Moving towards developing a trauma informed environment within HE (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2018) would see movement beyond an objective list-based approach to provisions. This recognises that CLs are not a homogenous group and that a large number of CLs are likely to have experienced trauma, and that those who then experience homelessness are likely to be exposed to multiple traumas, including loss of stability and fractured relationships (Tierney et al., 2008). More broadly, research has highlighted the high prevalence of ACEs among HE students and how the intersections of discrimination can amplify experiences of disadvantage (Davies et al., 2022).

A trauma informed environment (TIE) incorporates an awareness and understanding of trauma, moving away from assuming CLs are solely responsible for mitigating their personal situation. TIE are applicable to all human services (Sweeney et al., 2016) and assume people who have experienced trauma may find it difficult to feel safe within services and educational settings, and with developing trusting relationships. TIE are being introduced into mental health care settings (Read et al., 2018) and are

also beneficial for bringing understanding to accounts of homelessness in HE (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2018).

TIEs take a student life cycle approach to support, moving beyond access and towards retention, specifically including housing security, stability and safety. A TIE in HE would include staff training (Craig, 2016) which would increase understanding around the challenges faced by CLs in HE, such as homelessness. A TIE would also bring focus and understanding to other factors highlighted in this research such as self-reliance (needing to be independent, feeling uncomfortable sharing their situation and feeling that no one cares or wants to help) to help staff to understand help seeking and barriers. Ongoing training for staff should include challenging stigma and harmful societal beliefs, such as those associated with coming from a care background, and the sense of failure associated with homelessness. This is important given that the CLs in this research felt uncomfortable identifying themselves as a CL or sharing their experiences of homelessness, partly due to stigma and fear of judgement.

A TIE would also bring focus and appreciation to strengths (Wilson et al., 2013), such as recognition of CLs overcoming the odds to enter and remain in HE. To support this, HEIs should promote the success of CL graduates to CLs considering and entering HE which the CLs consulting on this research thought would be imperative.

4.3.3. Relational Level

A core principle of TIEs is trusting relationships (Scottish Government, 2021). The importance of relationships with support staff and CL services has been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Cotton et al., 2014). This research highlights that given the inconsistencies with corporate parenting from LA, having supportive relationships with HE staff and CL services may be imperative to relieve and prevent experiences of homelessness. The findings from this research have implications for the relationships with HEI staff, as barriers to support services were noted in terms of CLs feeling *'Uncomfortable Sharing their Situation'*. This was compounded and contributed to by CLs' feeling that *'No One Cares or Wants to Help'*. The

importance of relational practice, where relationships are characterised by a sense of care and understanding, has been noted as an integral part for working with CLs (Kelly et al., 2021).

The role of supporting CLs in HE generally falls to one CLs' advisor. Whilst it is positive to have a consistent named contact, the number of CLs in HE can make the development of a supportive and trusting relationship challenging. This is further exacerbated by the limited availability and lack of choice in terms of who to contact. Furthermore, in the current context of austerity and increasing pressures, Watson (2018) highlights that professional relationships can be characterised by conditionality and disconnection, which does not align with a relational approach. Having one point of support for CLs can compound this, alongside alleviating the responsibility of other staff. All staff should have an awareness of likely or potential homelessness and challenges experienced in seeking support for CLs.

It is important to hold the balance between CLs '*Needing to be Independent*', with feeling that '*No One Cares or Wants to Help*'. However this research reported that some CLs felt they had no choice but to be self-reliant and independent, with an attachment perspective indicating the potential threat experienced in seeking support (Hart et al., 2008; Parry & Weatherhead, 2014). Participants talked about the need for professionals to be understanding, approachable and available, highlighting the importance of interpersonal connectedness. This research suggests that CL services in HE need to be broader than one person and better resourced, particularly where there are a large number of CLs within the HEI. The CLs in this research described how important personal introductions to CL services would be prior to and during the early weeks of starting in HE, and how HEIs should be proactive with personal contact rather than placing the onus on the CL. This suggests that keeping in touch could build trust and a relationship, which may make seeking support less challenging. This should include reviewing housing situations and challenges, both of which are changeable.

Given the challenges identified, an implication of this research is that some CLs may not feel comfortable actively seeking support by contacting CL

services. So, the importance of considering various avenues to prevent and alleviate homelessness is imperative. HEIs should actively promote information to CLs and key stakeholders which may prevent or alleviate feared or actual homelessness. A basic search on the University's website did not reveal specific resources for CLs experiencing or threatened with homelessness. Having such information would provide CLs with potential options and choices, which were lacking in CLs' accounts. This research also highlighted that for two CLs, the library offered a roof when they didn't have a home. Therefore, information to support CLs in HE and with preventing and alleviating homelessness should also be situated physically around the HEI campus.

4.3.4. Implications for Clinical Psychology

Firstly, it is crucial that Clinical Psychologists (CPs) take an active role in policy development and utilise the power and position they hold to address inequalities maintained by wider systems to promote social justice (Marshall-Lee et al., 2020). CPs are well placed to provide a psychological perspective on complex issues such as homelessness. As homelessness rarely occurs in isolation, CPs can use their knowledge of societal and systemic processes which negatively impact people who have been marginalised (such as CLs) to bring greater understanding to experiences of homelessness. Marshall-Lee et al. (2020) posit that psychologists have a moral responsibility to amplify the voices of and advocate for individuals who are less able to protect themselves. Through this advocacy, CPs can ensure CLs' needs are included in meaningful policy development and provision to influence homelessness prevention (Harper, 2016).

This research also has implications for CPs working in LAC services and supporting CLs transitioning from care. The current research highlights the challenging and precarious nature of the period of 'emerging adulthood' for CLs. Research also demonstrates that the psychological wellbeing of CLs deteriorates after leaving care (Cashmore et al., 2007) and CLs entering HE are more likely to experience mental health difficulties in comparison to their non-care experienced peers (OfS, 2021). Furthermore, homelessness and housing instability have a negative influence on psychological wellbeing

(Dixon et al., 2006). In LAC services, CPs could advocate for CLs entering HE by bringing awareness to the challenges of this time period, particularly in relation to accounts of homelessness, hidden homelessness and the position of self-reliance. Awareness can lead to service development and CPs should use their power and position to develop services to meet the needs of marginalised individuals like CLs. This would aim to ensure that CLs are adequately supported prior to and during their transition from care, with contingency plans in place to prevent resultant homelessness.

CPs bring an understanding of the impact of trauma and therefore the development of TIEs including within HEIs. CPs can provide training and consultation to promote this knowledge of the needs of vulnerable YP and CLs, and the impact of trauma and adversities. This could also include increasing understanding of specific challenges faced by CLs in HE, such as the role of care history, attachment and self-reliance in detaching from services and individuals, and how to work in a trauma informed way.

4.3.5. Implications for Future Research

Continued research is needed to further inform an understanding of homelessness and its prevention for CLs in HE. Future research should explore the experiences of CLs across multiple levels, for example including the perspective of HEIs and the LA. This would add depth to the accounts of homelessness for CLs in HE and highlight further avenues for prevention across levels. Additionally, it would be imperative for such research to understand how and why so many CLs are leaving care without legislated support.

A further avenue for research would be to explore CLs' accounts of homelessness across different LAs and HEIs. Within this, variations in the local offers for CLs in HE could be explored in terms of liveability and resultant homelessness. Completing research across HEIs in a variety of geographical locations would allow for a range of CLs accounts to be captured to further inform prevention. The current research reflects accounts of CLs from a singular HEI and notably all participants were from an ethnic minority background. An intersectional lens should be adopted to further

research in this area, considering the multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage faced by CLs. It would be important to understand whether CLs from ethnic minority backgrounds are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness in HE and experience additional barriers in accessing support compared to CLs from other backgrounds, beyond being more likely to participate in HE (Harrison, 2017).

The current research detailed accounts of CLs who were able to remain in HE. Future research should explore the accounts of CLs who have withdrawn from HE of which the percentage is large (Harrison, 2017). This is a gap in the literature and would allow for exploration as to whether homelessness was a contributing factor which could inform retention in HE. In terms of further gaps, research should explore the accounts of CLs in HE who are over 25 years old. It is notable that the vast majority of support for CLs is for those under 25 years old, which does not consider the longer trajectory into HE for CLs (Harrison, 2017). This research highlights that CLs who are over 25 years old may be an increasingly marginalised group and their support needs are not recognised by current service provision.

In terms of considering the development of TIE in HE, the Beyond Adversity Project involves the development of a HEI strategy to recognise and reduce the impact of the multiple adversities experienced by students (Davies et al., 2022). Care experience or experiences of homelessness are not considered 'adversities' within this research, which despite including additional questions about violence, is guided by the ACEs scale (Felitti et al. 1998). This research brings to focus the challenges for CLs in HE and suggests the prevalence of homelessness in HE could be greater than previously considered. Therefore, care experience and homelessness should be considered in future research informing the development of this provision in HE.

A final area for further research and to inform the development of TIEs in HE would include research around the nature of the degree being undertaken by CLs. As noted, the majority of participants cited their experience of the care system in informing their course choice, either in terms of altruistic

motivations, or enrolling on a course which would directly lead to a job or profession following graduation. Previous research has noted the negative narratives and stereotypes experienced by CLs enrolled on social work programmes particularly surrounding content such as attachment theory and early development (Mayall et al., 2015), however this is an area which is under researched. Further research could be completed to explore the nature of the degree undertaken by CLs and their motivation to inform the development of TIEs in HE and to contribute a strengths-based perspective to the CL research literature.

4.4. Conclusions

No previous UK studies have been conducted exploring and understanding CLs' accounts of homelessness in HE. This research brings an awareness to the hidden issue of their homelessness in HE and suggests such experiences are more prevalent than previously considered (and occur throughout the year). This research has identified that existing policy, provision and supposed protection against homelessness for CLs in HE does not adequately prevent homelessness. CLs described accounts which were marked by inappropriate and insecure accommodation. CLs described having no choices and no options, experiencing multiple and frequent moves, residing in settings which were unsafe and periods of rough sleeping. Their accounts also described episodes of hidden homelessness which included staying with friends, acquaintances and in public buildings such as the library. Despite the challenges experienced, to reach HE was a significant achievement, and all CLs described seeing value in HE as providing hope for a better future, which acted as a motivation to persevere. Whilst being in HE offered some protection against homelessness this was inconsistent and insufficient. This highlighted the variation in support offerings from LAs and the arbitrary definitions and eligibility criteria applied by those with extended corporate parenting responsibilities. Self-reliance was highlighted where CLs described a need to be independent, expressing feelings that those with corporate and extended corporate responsibilities didn't care or want to help and therefore could not be relied upon.

Participants described feeling uncomfortable sharing their situation either in relation to their experiences of homelessness or being a CL. This research suggested that consideration across multiple levels could bring awareness to and also prevent CLs experiences of homelessness in HE, by bringing focus to extended corporate parent responsibilities and benefits of HEI taking a trauma informed approach.

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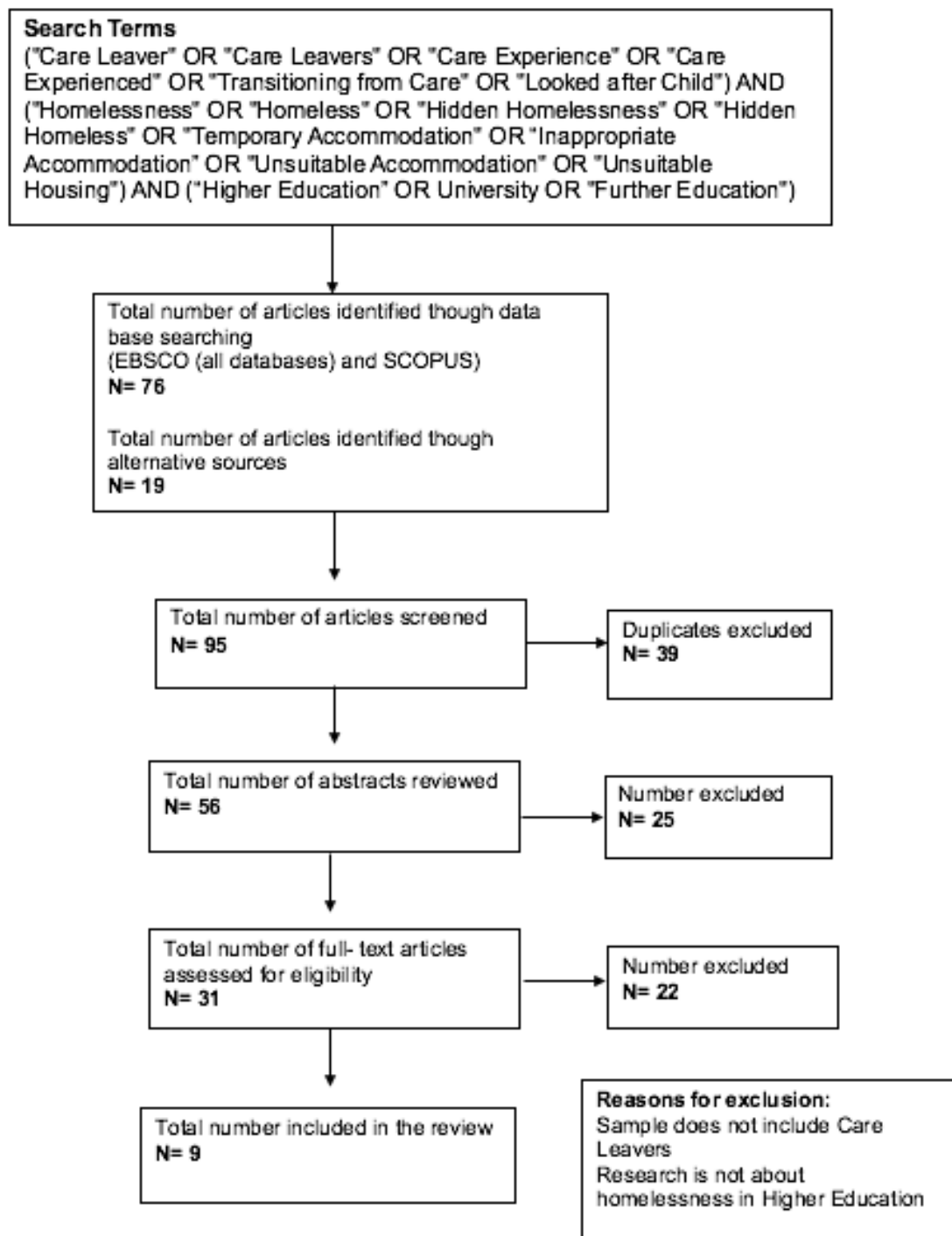
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Appendix A: Summary of the Legal Framework for supporting CLs as outlined in the Children Act (1989) and Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000)

Definition	Criteria	Entitlement
Eligible Child	Aged 16 or 17 Looked after by their LA for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 Remains 'looked after' and still in care	Undertake a needs assessment Appoint a Personal Advisor Develop a Pathway Plan All the care and support they would normally receive until they leave care
Relevant Child	Aged 16 or 17 Looked after by their LA for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and ending after the age of 16 Has left care and no longer 'looked after'	Take reasonable steps to keep in touch Undertake a needs assessment Continue appointment of Personal Advisor Develop a Pathway Plan and keep under review Maintain in or provide accommodation Financial support and assistance for education, training and employment needs
Former Relevant Child	Aged between 18-21 (or 18-25 if they are still in full time education) Previously either an eligible or relevant child	Take reasonable steps to keep in touch Continue appointment of Personal Advisor Keep Pathway Plan under regular review

		Financial assistance with accommodation/living expenses Financial assistance to enable participation in education or training
Qualifying Care Leaver	Aged between 16-21 (or 16-25 if they are still in full time education) Was looked after by their LA on or after their 16 th birthday and no longer looked after Does not fulfil the criteria for eligible or relevant child by being in care for 13 weeks since the age of 14	If they are in Higher Education support with securing vacation accommodation Advice from their LA including in the areas of housing, and homelessness prevention

Appendix B: Literature Search



Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Demographic Questions

How old are you?

How would you describe your ethnicity?

(Prompt: Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, White or White British, Other)

How would you describe your gender?

How old were you when you started HE?

What course are you studying?

What year of your course are you in?

What is your local authority and what support was/is provided by your local authority in relation to HE and accommodation?

On average how many weeks/months or years have you spent in care?

What age did you leave care?

What is your current housing situation and what was your housing situation on leaving care?

Did being a care leaver impact where you applied to HE?

Care leavers accounts of homelessness in higher education

1. Can you tell me about your experiences of homelessness or concerns about housing whilst in higher education?

Contributing to and/or preventing homelessness in higher education

2. What do you think were the factors which contributed to experiences of homelessness/hidden homelessness or concerns about housing in higher education?
3. What do you think were the factors which acted to prevent homelessness/ hidden homelessness or concerns about housing in higher education?
4. What types of support did you receive?
Prompt: Were you clear about the support available and how to access this? Do you feel the support you have received has been sufficient?/ What support would have been helpful?
5. Did you experience any barriers when seeking support, can you tell me about these?
6. How do you think these barriers could be overcome?

Remaining in Higher Education

7. How have your experiences of homelessness or concerns about housing impacted your experience of higher education?
8. How do you think you have been able to remain in higher education despite the challenges you have experienced?
9. What impact (if any) has Covid-19 had on your housing situation whilst in higher education?

Closing Questions

10. Is there anything else that you would like to add or feel is important for me to know in terms of capturing care leavers experiences of homelessness in higher education?

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Understanding homelessness in higher education: Care leavers' accounts

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

I am a Doctoral student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London, and I am studying for a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

I am conducting research into experiences of homelessness with care leavers or those with care experience whilst in higher education.

I will be looking at homelessness broadly where an individual may have been considered homeless if they did not have accommodation, or the accommodation they did have was not reasonable, stable or appropriate. This broad definition includes hidden homelessness where people may be living in temporary or insecure accommodation or staying with friends and family. Examples of temporary and insecure accommodation could include residing in a bed and breakfast, a hostel or 'sofa surfing'. Within this definition it is recognised that experiences of housing stability may differ throughout the year, where during University holiday periods such as the summer break housing experiences may differ.

I am interested in hearing about what care leavers view as the factors contributing to and/ or preventing homelessness and how care leavers have been able to navigate the challenges of actual or threatened homelessness to remain in higher education.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

This invitation is to all those who self-identify as a care leaver or have care experience, are currently enrolled on a course at [Named University] and identify with experiencing a period/s of homelessness or hidden homeless or been threatened with, or fearful of homelessness during your time in higher education.

You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will meet with the researcher on Microsoft Teams to partake in an interview which is anticipated to last up to one hour. The discussions had within the interview will be recorded using the Microsoft Teams recording facility, to allow the researcher to transcribe discussions for analysis purposes.

Interviews will take place at a time convenient to yourself. Using the online platform means you will be able to participate in the interview from an environment you feel comfortable.

The interview will be like having an informal chat, it will involve me asking some questions about your experiences of homelessness or hidden homelessness during your time in higher education. The interview will focus on your account, what you feel has contributed to this and/or prevented this, and how you have navigated the challenges of actual or threatened homelessness to remain in higher education.

As a reflection of the time commitment I will be able to provide all those who participate with a £10 Amazon voucher.

I hope that this study will bring greater awareness to the challenges faced by care leavers and that this study will be able to support universities to provide help before people feel they are reaching crisis point.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

To ensure that your anonymity is protected, I will remove your name and any identifiable information from the write up.

Taking part is confidential, the only instance, I will need to break this confidentiality is If I think that there is a risk to you, or someone else and therefore your confidentiality may need to be compromised in order to ensure yours or others safety. If I need to do this, I will try to discuss this with you in the first instance.

If you do not feel comfortable answering a question you can choose to pass any of the questions during the interview, you can also end the interview at any time without having to provide a reason or any explanation.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

The interview will be recorded using Microsoft Teams and stored securely on a password protected computer. I will then transcribe the interview in a secure and private location, removing your name and identifying information to ensure that it is anonymous. After I have transcribed your interview the recording of your interview will be deleted.

Your anonymised data may be seen by my supervisor and those who mark my thesis. Extracts of the anonymised transcripts will be included in the thesis write up. The thesis write up and therefore your data will be disseminated via the UEL repository and possibly in a journal. No one will be able to identify you from the data included in the write up.

In keeping with UELs data management procedures, I will keep the transcript of your interview for 3 years following completion of the research. I will have sole access to these, and they will be stored securely in a password protected file on a password protected computer.

What if you want to withdraw from the study?

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. You can request to withdraw your data completely from the wider study within three weeks of the interview, after which you will no longer be able to withdraw as I will have begun the write up.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Millie Evans, Trainee Clinical Psychologist
University of East London
Email: u1945451@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Lorna Farquharson
School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15
4LZ,
Email: L.Farquharson@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim
Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane,
London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix E: Consent Form



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

Understanding homelessness in higher education: Care leavers' accounts

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

Please tick box ☐

I understand that my involvement in this study, and data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

Please tick box ☐

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.

Please tick box ☐

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Please tick box ☐

Only by ticking all the above boxes this be taken as consent to participant in the research study

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix F: Debrief Letter



PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER

Understanding homelessness in higher education: Care leavers' accounts

Thank you for participating in this doctoral research study exploring care leavers accounts of homelessness in higher education, your contribution and time are greatly appreciated.

This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The interview has been recorded using Microsoft teams. I then will transcribe this in a secure and private location, making sure any identifying information is removed to ensure your anonymity. After I have transcribed your interview, I will delete the recorded version, until this point your interview will be stored securely within Microsoft Teams Steams on a password protected computer.

Your anonymised data may be seen by my supervisor and those who mark my thesis.

The data will be written up as part of my thesis and then potentially published in a journal. You will not be able to be identified from the included data.

The transcript of the interview will be kept for 3 years following the completion of the research and in line with UEL data management procedures. The transcript will be stored in a password protected file on a password protected computer to which I will have sole access. After 3 years, it will then be deleted.

If for any reason you would like to withdraw your data from the study, you can within 3 weeks of the interview. After this, it will not be possible to remove your data as the analysis will have begun.

What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

If you need help and support with your mental health, please speak to your GP.

Samaritans

Website: www.samaritans.org

Telephone Number: 116123

Email Address: jo@samaritans.org

[Named University] Care Experienced and Estranged Students Advisor

Website: Removed to ensure anonymity

Telephone Number: Removed to ensure anonymity

Email Address: Removed to ensure anonymity

Centre Point- Support for Homeless Young People

Website: www.centrepoin.org.uk

Telephone Number: 08088000661 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)

Online 'chat' available on the website

Unite- Support for Care Leavers at University

Website: www.unitefoundation.co.uk

Telephone Number: 01173027073

Email: info@unitefoundation.co.uk

You are also very welcome to contact me or my supervisor if you have specific questions or concerns.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Millie Evans, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, University of East London
Email: U1945451@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact the research supervisor Lorna Farquharson.
School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
(Email: L.Farquharson@uel.ac.uk)

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: T.Lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix G: Transcription Conventions

Informed by Banister et al. (1994)

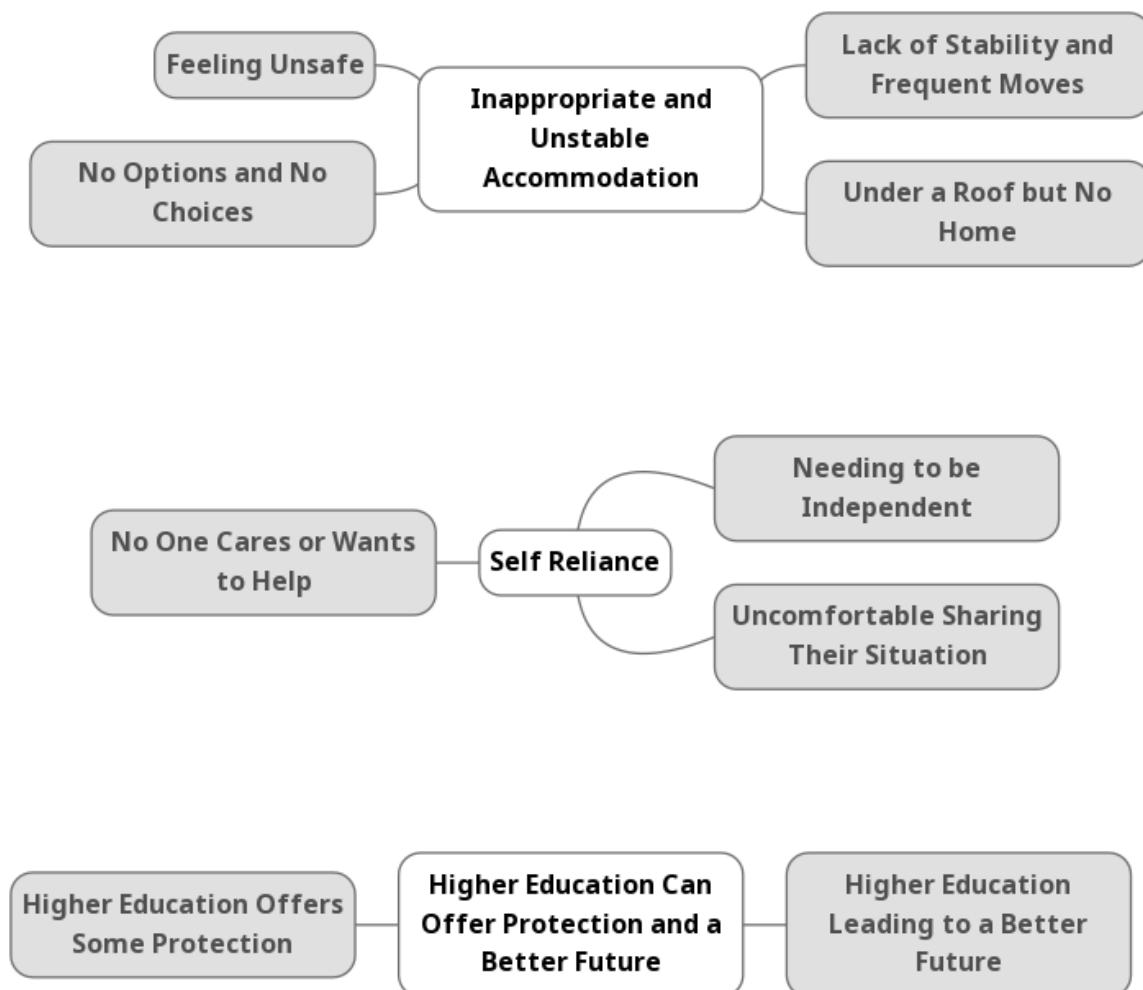
Symbol	Used to Denote
...	Pause
[Inaudible]	Inaudible part of transcript
[Laughs]	Denotes non-verbal action
[X]	Replace identifiable information to preserve anonymity
[Text]	Addition of content to provide clarity
(...)	Some speech removed (no more than 40 words)

Appendix H: Example Transcription Extract

Transcript Extract (Participant 1)	Initial Codes
<p>Participant 1: One minute they'd be like there's a place then the next minute, they don't...I didn't know what to do. I was so scared because I was like all my stuff was there and I didn't know what to do about it. I think at the time my social worker was on leave, she took leave at the worst time ever and I was just like what do I do? because I don't know who to, I don't know who to call. I don't know who to message. Like [University] is useless because they're clueless about the issue... so it was just a bit I didn't want to be in a position where I have to keep telling someone else and then telling someone else and I just didn't want that, but, um, at that time, I did go to [CL Advisor] and I said to [X], I said to [X] the issue like I have been in this predicament, that if I can't stay in the halls, I'm going to be homeless. The [CL Advisor] told me to pack my stuff and go to hotel and I said to her 'With what money?'...sorry I know just have to laugh about it, but at that time, I was so like how dare she be so like...she wasn't even trying to help the issue. So at that time, I stayed with my friend because the University said I couldn't stay in halls. Staying with her for I think a month because, um I couldn't get I couldn't get through to my social worker, they didn't have an option, they didn't have a house for me at the time, they still didn't have anywhere for me to go at that time period. So at that time I was chasing up my my</p>	<p>Uncertainty and lack of containment around housing Feeling scared Not knowing what to do</p> <p>Professionals absent Not having anyone to seek support from Lack of understanding of homelessness from Uni</p> <p>Not wanting to repeat story</p> <p>Attempting to seek support from HE</p> <p>Unable to stay in halls Fearing homelessness HE not preventing homelessness Lack of understanding Inappropriate option Staying with friend to avoid rooflessness</p> <p>Professionals absent/uncontactable No options Nowhere to go Chasing professionals</p>

<p>social worker, what's happening, what is happening with the housing situation? Who's letting me know? no one's informing me, to the point the woman ignored my emails, I was like, why does it have to be like this. Like, why do I have to go to the extra mile to get what I am entitled to to receive? Like, I didn't ask for a leaving care house, it's already mentioned that I am entitled to get it, so even with [LA], they didn't do anything. I was contacting them; they didn't do anything. It has just basically been a cycle like that.</p>	<p>Being ignored by professionals</p> <p>Feeling hopeless</p> <p>Having to fight</p> <p>Disparity between local offer and reality</p> <p>Attempting to contact services</p> <p>Cycle</p>
<p>Interviewer: Yeah, it feels like how you're describing it that it's been a cycle, I'm so sorry</p>	
<p>Participant 1: Yeah, I didn't know what I needed to do at the time. I was like I need to do my uni work, I don't even know how I did [Laughs]. I don't know where I'm gonna be because I don't know where my head is going to rest, my University didn't care, they told me to stay in a hotel. So they failed me too, they didn't care about my safety and then social workers where there supposed to be some of my guardians legally cause my parents failed to do their job, they failed me as well. So I feel like in terms of the system, I have been failed they don't care, I look at this opportunity that you've given me as a blessing, I've been so mute for years about this. I just kept it in for years, to the point I thought I forgot, I made my brain forget, because of the the that trauma around them failing me left right and Z, they just been failing me throughout from the start.</p>	<p>Needing to focus on University work</p> <p>Lack of stability</p> <p>University doesn't care</p> <p>Failed by those with corporate parenting responsibilities</p> <p>Failed by system</p> <p>System doesn't care</p> <p>Mute about failings</p> <p>First time talking about experiences</p> <p>Blocking out experiences</p> <p>Failed at multiple points</p>

Appendix I: Thematic Map



Appendix J: Application for Research Ethics

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON School of Psychology

APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (Updated October 2019)

FOR BSc RESEARCH FOR MSc/MA RESEARCH FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL, COUNSELLING & EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Completing the application

- 1.1 Before completing this application please familiarise yourself with the British Psychological Society's [Code of Ethics and Conduct \(2018\)](#) and the [UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics \(2015-16\)](#). Please tick to confirm that you have read and understood these codes: ☒
- 1.2 Email your supervisor the completed application and all attachments as ONE WORD DOCUMENT. Your supervisor will then look over your application.
- 1.3 When your application demonstrates sound ethical protocol, your supervisor will submit it for review. By submitting the application, the supervisor is confirming that they have reviewed all parts of this application, and consider it of sufficient quality for submission to the SREC committee for review. It is the responsibility of students to check that the supervisor has checked the application and sent it for review.
- 1.4 Your supervisor will let you know the outcome of your application. Recruitment and data collection must NOT commence until your ethics application has been approved, along with other research ethics approvals that may be necessary (see section 8).
- 1.5 Please tick to confirm that the following appendices have been completed. Note: templates for these are included at the end of the form.
- The participant invitation letter ☒
 - The participant consent form ☒
 - The participant debrief letter ☒

1.6 The following attachments should be included if appropriate. In each case, please tick to either confirm that you have included the relevant attachment, or confirm that it is not required for this application.

- A participant advert, i.e., any text (e.g., email) or document (e.g., poster) designed to recruit potential participants.

Included ☒ or

Not required (because no participation adverts will be used)

☐

- A general risk assessment form for research conducted off campus (see section 6).

Included ☐ or

Not required (because the research takes place solely on campus or online)

☒

- A country-specific risk assessment form for research conducted abroad (see section 6).

Included ☐ or

Not required (because the researcher will be based solely in the UK).

☒

- A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate (see section 7).

Included ☐ or

Not required (because the research does not involve children aged 16 or under or vulnerable adults)

☒

- Ethical clearance or permission from an external organisation (see section 8).

Included ☐ or

Not required (because no external organisations are involved in the research)

☒

- Original and/or pre-existing questionnaire(s) and test(s) you intend to use.

Included ☐ or

Not required (because you are not using pre-existing questionnaires or tests)

☒

- Interview questions for qualitative studies.

Included ☒ or

Not required (because you are not conducting qualitative interviews)

☐

- Visual material(s) you intend showing participants.

Included ☐ or

Not required (because you are not using any visual materials)



Your details

1.7 Your name: Melissa (Millie) Evans

1.8 Your supervisor's name: Lorna Farquharson

1.9 Title of your programme: Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

1.10 UEL assignment submission date (stating both the initial date and the resit date): May 2022

Your research

Please give as much detail as necessary for a reviewer to be able to fully understand the nature and details of your proposed research.

1.11 The title of your study:
Understanding Homelessness in Higher Education: Care leavers' Accounts

1.12 Your research question:

- What are care leavers accounts of homelessness in higher education?
- What do care leavers view as contributing to and/or preventing homelessness in higher education?
- How have care leavers navigated the challenges of actual or potential homelessness to remain in higher education?

1.13 Design of the research:

The proposed research will adopt a qualitative design consisting of twelve individual interviews. The interviews will be guided by a semi structured interview schedule asking questions in relation to the research questions. The interview schedule has been informed by the literature and developed in collaboration with two students [from Named University] with care experience and experiences of housing instability. Interviews will be around one hour in duration and will commence after the consent form has been signed. Prior to the interviews commencing, participants will be advised of their right to withdraw from the research study at any time, without being obliged to provide a reason. Interviews will be conducted using Microsoft Teams and recorded using this medium and will therefore take place from wherever the participant wishes to join. Following the interviews, a debrief sheet will be shared with participants, this will contain contact details for appropriate support services as well as the researchers UEL email address to facilitate any questions or queries. The

recorded interviews will be transcribed by the researcher and then analysed using thematic analysis.

1.14 Participants:

12 participants will be recruited. A purposive sample will be recruited through the 'Young Independent Team' [at Named University]. As of July 2020, there were 124 individuals who self-identified as care leavers who were enrolled [at Named University]

Inclusion Criteria

- Current student [at Named University] who self-identifies as a care leaver or having care experience.
- Experienced a period of homelessness, hidden homeless or risk of potential homelessness during their time in higher education.
- Able to provide written informed consent.

1.15 Recruitment:

For reasons of data protection and anonymity, the advisor for vulnerable groups within 'The Young Independent Team' has agreed to facilitate recruitment by contacting care leavers via email with the information about the research and the participant information sheet. Potential participants will be invited to contact the researcher directly if they are interested in participating or if they have any questions. The consent form will then be disseminated to participants via email once they have made contact.

1.16 Measures, materials or equipment:

To guide the interviews, a semi- structured interview schedule will be used. The researcher and participants will require access to a device which supports Microsoft Teams as well as a Microsoft Teams account.

1.17 Data collection:

Interviews will be conducted using Microsoft Teams. Interviews will be recorded using Microsoft Teams, recordings will be in .mp4 format. Personal data will be collected on consent forms (names) and prior the interview (Participant [Named University] email addresses for the purpose of arranging the interview, via the researchers UEL email address).

Data analysis:

The interviews will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher following completion in a secure and confidential location. Transcriptions will be in Microsoft Word format. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data. No further data will be created in the process of analysing the transcripts.

Confidentiality and security

It is vital that data are handled carefully, particularly the details about participants. For information in this area, please see the [UEL guidance on data protection](#), and also the [UK government guide to data protection regulations](#).

1.18 Will participants data be gathered anonymously?

No

1.19 If not (e.g., in qualitative interviews), what steps will you take to ensure their anonymity in the subsequent steps (e.g., data analysis and dissemination)?

Recordings will be transcribed verbatim and anonymised at this point, with names and any identifiable information being removed. Each participant will be given a participant number (in interview chronological order) and transcripts will be saved using this format. Following transcription, recordings will then be deleted. Transcription will take place in a secure and confidential space. No identifiable information will be included in the write up.

1.20 How will you ensure participants details will be kept confidential?

Transcription will take place in a secure and confidential location; any identifiable information will be removed, and transcripts anonymised. Participants will not be able to be identified from any information included in the analysis or write up.

Participants will be informed via the information sheet that confidentiality may need to be compromised. This would be if during the interview the participant discloses something that puts themselves or others at risk. The participation information sheet will be used to inform participants of this, highlighting that I will try to discuss with them in the first instance if confidentiality needs to be compromised.

1.21 How will the data be securely stored?

Recordings will be stored securely within the Microsoft Teams stream. Following transcription, recordings will be deleted due to the large file size. Transcripts will be stored securely on a password protected computer within password protected files. The laptop is a personal, non-networked, laptop with a password only known to the researcher.

Upon transcription each participant will be attributed a participant number, in chronological interview order. Transcription files will be named e.g. "Participant 1". No list will be kept of participant numbers

linked to any personal identifying information. For purposes of back up, anonymised transcripts will be uploaded to UEL's One Drive which can only be accessed by the researcher using the researcher's password.

Consent forms will be returned to the researchers UEL email address. The email attachment will then be saved directly onto UEL's One Drive which can only be accessed by the researcher using the researcher's password.

1.22 Who will have access to the data?

DoS and examiners will have access to anonymised transcripts up to study completion, submission and marking. Transcripts will be retained for 3 years following study completion, where only the DoS and I will have access. Transcripts will then be deleted after 3 years.

1.23 How long will data be retained for?

The recordings of the interviews will be deleted following the transcription.

The anonymised transcripts will be stored for three years in line with the UEL data management procedures, after this point they will be deleted. During this time, they will be stored securely in a password protected file on a password protected computer, of which the researcher will have sole access. The back-up copies on the UEL One Drive will be erased following the thesis being examined.

Electronic copies of consent forms will be kept until the thesis has been examined and passed. They will then be erased from UEL One Drive.

Informing participants

Please confirm that your information letter includes the following details:

- 1.24 Your research title: ☒
- 1.25 Your research question: ☒
- 1.26 The purpose of the research: ☒
- 1.27 The exact nature of their participation. This includes location, duration, and the tasks etc. involved: ☒
- 1.28 That participation is strictly voluntary: ☒
- 1.29 What are the potential risks to taking part: ☒
- 1.30 What are the potential advantages to taking part: ☒

- 1.31 Their right to withdraw participation (i.e., to withdraw involvement at any point, no questions asked): ☒
- 1.32 Their right to withdraw data (usually within a three-week window from the time of their participation): ☒
- 1.33 How long their data will be retained for: ☒
- 1.34 How their information will be kept confidential: ☒
- 1.35 How their data will be securely stored: ☒
- 1.36 What will happen to the results/analysis: ☒
- 1.37 Your UEL contact details: ☒
- 1.38 The UEL contact details of your supervisor: ☒

Please also confirm whether:

- 1.39 Are you engaging in deception? If so, what will participants be told about the nature of the research, and how will you inform them about its real nature.

The proposed research involves no deception.

- 1.40 Will the data be gathered anonymously? If NO what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?

See 1.19

- 1.41 Will participants be paid or reimbursed? If so, this must be in the form of redeemable vouchers, not cash. If yes, why is it necessary and how much will it be worth?

Participants will receive a £10 Amazon voucher to be reimbursed for their time. The decision to reimburse participants individually rather than as part of a prize draw was made following consultation with those with care experience.

Risk Assessment

Please note: If you have serious concerns about the safety of a participant, or others, during the course of your research please see your supervisor as soon as possible. If there is any unexpected occurrence while you are collecting your data (e.g. a participant or the researcher injures themselves), please report this to your supervisor as soon as possible.

- 1.42 Are there any potential physical or psychological risks to participants related to taking part? If so, what are these, and how can they be minimised?

Potential risk of participant becoming upset during the interview, given the nature of the topic. The interview questions are devised to minimise risk of upsetting participants (e.g. specifically not asking details about care history) and have been developed in collaboration with 2 students [at Named University] who have care experience. Participants will be informed in advance regarding the content of the interviews via the information sheet. Participants will be informed in the information sheet and at the start of the interview that they can skip any questions they don't feel comfortable answering. Support information will be provided in debrief form.

- 1.43 Are there any potential physical or psychological risks to you as a researcher? If so, what are these, and how can they be minimised?

No risks identified

- 1.44 Have appropriate support services been identified in the debrief letter? If so, what are these, and why are they relevant?

Yes, below are the support services that have been included in the debrief letter. Samaritans has been included for general mental health support regarding anything difficult that has arisen in the interviews. The contact details for the [Named University] 'Care Experienced and Estranged Students Advisor' has been included regarding support specific to care leavers at [X] and the contact details for Centre Point and Unite have been included regarding support for care leavers experiencing or at threat of experiencing homelessness.

Samaritans

Website: www.samaritans.org

Telephone Number: 116123

Email Address: jo@samaritans.org

[Named Contact] Care Experienced and Estranged Students Advisor

Website: Removed to ensure anonymity

Telephone Number: Removed to ensure anonymity

Email Address Removed for anonymity

Centre Point- support for homeless young people

Website: www.centrepoin.org.uk

Telephone Number: 08088000661 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)

Online 'chat' available on the website

Unite- Support for Care Leavers at University

Website: www.unitefoundation.co.uk

Telephone Number: 01173027073

Email: info@unitefoundation.co.uk

1.45 Does the research take place outside the UEL campus? If so, where?

Online using Microsoft Teams

If so, a 'general risk assessment form' must be completed. This is included below as appendix D. Note: if the research is on campus, or is online only (e.g., a Qualtrix survey), then a risk assessment form is not needed, and this appendix can be deleted. If a general risk assessment form is required for this research, please tick to confirm that this has been completed:

1.46 Does the research take place outside the UK? If so, where?
No

If so, in addition to the 'general risk assessment form', a 'country-specific risk assessment form' must be also completed (available in the [Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard](#)), and included as an appendix. [Please note: a country-specific risk assessment form is not needed if the research is online only (e.g., a Qualtrix survey), regardless of the location of the researcher or the participants.] If a 'country-specific risk assessment form' *is* needed, please tick to confirm that this has been included:

However, please also note:

- For assistance in completing the risk assessment, please use the [AIG Travel Guard](#) website to ascertain risk levels. Click on 'sign in' and then 'register here' using policy # 0015865161. Please also consult the [Foreign Office travel advice website](#) for further guidance.
- For *on campus* students, once the ethics application has been approved by a reviewer, all risk assessments for research abroad must then be signed by the Head of School (who may escalate it up to the Vice Chancellor).
- For *distance learning* students conducting research abroad in the country where they currently reside, a risk assessment must be also carried out. To minimise risk, it is recommended that such students only conduct data collection on-line. If the project is deemed low risk, then it is not necessary for the risk assessments to be signed by the Head of School. However, if not deemed low risk, it must be signed by the Head of School (or potentially the Vice Chancellor).
- Undergraduate and M-level students are not explicitly prohibited from conducting research abroad. However, it is discouraged because of the inexperience of the students and the time constraints they have to complete their degree.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates

1.47 Does your research involve working with children (aged 16 or under) or vulnerable adults (*see below for definition)?

No

1.48 If so, you will need a current DBS certificate (i.e., not older than six months), and to include this as an appendix. Please tick to confirm that you have included this: ☐

Alternatively, if necessary for reasons of confidentiality, you may email a copy directly to the Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee. Please tick if you have done this instead: ☐

Also alternatively, if you have an Enhanced DBS clearance (one you pay a monthly fee to maintain) then the number of your Enhanced DBS clearance will suffice. Please tick if you have included this instead: ☐

1.49 If participants are under 16, you need 2 separate information letters, consent form, and debrief form (one for the participant, and one for their parent/guardian). Please tick to confirm that you have included these: ☐

1.50 If participants are under 16, their information letters consent form, and debrief form need to be written in age-appropriate language. Please tick to confirm that you have done this ☐

* You are required to have DBS clearance if your participant group involves (1) children and young people who are 16 years of age or under, and (2) 'vulnerable' people aged 16 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, and people living in institutions and sheltered accommodation, and people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability of vulnerable people to give consent should be used whenever possible. For more information about ethical research involving children [click here](#).

Other permissions

2. Is HRA approval (through IRAS) for research involving the NHS required? Note: HRA/IRAS approval is required for research that involves patients or Service Users of the NHS, their relatives or carers as well as those in receipt of services provided under contract to the NHS.

No If yes, please note:

- You DO NOT need to apply to the School of Psychology for ethical clearance if ethical approval is sought via HRA/IRAS (please see [further details here](#)).
- However, the school *strongly discourages* BSc and MSc/MA students from designing research that requires HRA approval for research involving the NHS, as this can be a very demanding and lengthy process.
- If you work for an NHS Trust and plan to recruit colleagues from the Trust, permission from an appropriate manager at the Trust must be sought, and HRA approval will probably be needed (and hence is likewise strongly discouraged). If the manager happens to not require HRA approval, their written letter of approval must be included as an appendix.
- IRAS approval is not required for NHS staff even if they are recruited via the NHS (UEL ethical approval is acceptable). However, an application will still need to be submitted to the HRA in order to obtain R&D approval. This is in addition to a separate approval via the R&D department of the NHS Trust involved in the research.
- IRAS approval is not required for research involving NHS employees when data collection will take place off NHS premises, and when NHS employees are not recruited directly through NHS lines of communication. This means that NHS staff can participate in research without HRA approval when a student recruits via their own social or professional networks or through a professional body like the BPS, for example.

2.1 Will the research involve NHS employees who will not be directly recruited through the NHS, and where data from NHS employees will not be collected on NHS premises?

NO

2.2 If you work for an NHS Trust and plan to recruit colleagues from the Trust, will permission from an appropriate member of staff at the Trust be sought, and will HRA be sought, and a copy of this permission (e.g., an email from the Trust) attached to this application?

NO

2.3 Does the research involve other organisations (e.g. a school, charity, workplace, local authority, care home etc.)? If so, please give their details here.

NO

Furthermore, written permission is needed from such organisations if they are helping you with recruitment and/or data collection, if you are collecting data on their premises, or if you are using any material owned by the institution/organisation. If that is the case, please tick here to confirm that you have included this written permission as an appendix:

☐

In addition, before the research commences, once your ethics application has been approved, please ensure that you provide the organisation with a copy of the final, approved ethics application. Please then prepare a version of the consent form for the organisation themselves to sign. You can adapt it by replacing words such as 'my' or 'I' with 'our organisation,' or with the title of the organisation. This organisational consent form must be signed before the research can commence.

Finally, please note that even if the organisation has their own ethics committee and review process, a School of Psychology SREC application and approval is still required. Ethics approval from SREC can be gained before approval from another research ethics committee is obtained. However, recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your research has been approved by the School and other ethics committee/s as may be necessary.

Declarations

Declaration by student: I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor.

Student's name (typed name acts as a signature): Millie Evans

Student's number: U1945451

Date: 02/01/2021

As a supervisor, by submitting this application, I confirm that I have reviewed all parts of this application, and I consider it of sufficient quality for submission to the SREC committee.

**Appendix K: School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Approval**

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational
Psychology

REVIEWER: Paula Corredor Lopez

SUPERVISOR: Lorna Farquharson

STUDENT: Melissa Evans

Course: Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

Title of proposed study: Understanding homelessness in higher education: Care
leavers' accounts

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance,

a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

Approved

Minor amendments required (for reviewer):

No changes: but just checking submitted pages 25-28 (the final three pages) were blank on the version that I have checked through: wondered if this would be a risk assessment perhaps?

Agreed and Approved on the info submitted, please do get back in touch if Pages 25-28 were supposed to have been populated on the submission but because missing on my version I have not reviewed these. Please then forward for review.

Major amendments required (for reviewer):

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature)*:

Student number:

Date:

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐

HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐

MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☐

xxLOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature):* Paula Corredor Lopez

Date: 29/01/2021

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard