



**EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN:  
ACCESS AND EQUALITY IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES**



**Education for refugee and asylum seeking children:  
Access and quality in England, Scotland and Wales**

**Refugee Support Network, July 2018**

**This report was written for UNICEF UK by Catherine Gladwell and Georgina Chetwynd from Refugee Support Network (RSN).**

**With thanks to RSN research assistants Saliha Majeed, Carolyn Burke and Torie Stubbs, who carried out focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and assisted with data coding alongside their regular direct work with children and young people.**

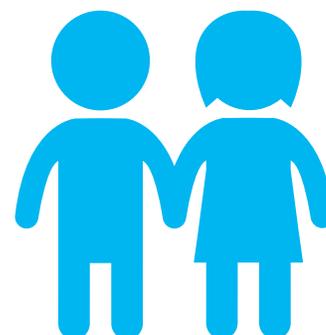
## FOREWORD FROM UNICEF UK

Education is a right for every child and a critical opportunity. For children and adolescents worldwide, it holds the key to a life with less poverty, better health and an increased ability to take the future into their own hands. For nations, it holds the key to prosperity, economic growth, and poverty reduction.

In 2016, UNICEF issued An Agenda for Action on Children, Migration and Displacement. The six-point agenda calls on governments and world leaders to place children at the centre of policy decisions about migration. The fourth ask focuses on education and other services, calling for decision-makers to: Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services.

UNICEF UK's mission is that we are here for every child, particularly the most vulnerable. All over the world, including the UK, we uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child and work with partners and supporters to promote children's voices, unlock resources for programmes for children, and advocate for and create change.

For children on the move who come to the UK, education is one of the first and most critical services they need access to. In 2017, UNICEF UK commissioned research to understand how far refugee and asylum-seeking children are currently accessing their right to education in the UK. This report provides an up-to-date overview of the scale and impact of the difficulties facing child refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK, highlights barriers they face in accessing, remaining and thriving in education, and proposes recommendations for national and local decision-makers and service-providers.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines refugee and asylum seeking children's access to and experiences of education at the primary, secondary and further education levels. The report draws on three new data sources: quantitative data compiled through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales – the first such effort of which we are aware; in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with refugee children and parents across three regions; and key informant interviews with relevant experts from across the three countries. The report reflects the reported experiences of 86 refugee and asylum seeking children - relayed directly or, in the case of younger children, via their parents.

### Access

#### Speed of access to education

No one region of the UK has met the 20 school-day target for accessing education for all of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in their care. The most significant delays occur at the secondary and further education levels, where up to a quarter of children have had to wait over 3 months for a school or college place. Resettled Syrian children obtain school places faster than any other group, with the exception of those with Special Educational Needs (SEN). In the face of said delays accessing education, several UK Local Authorities have developed innovative interim education provision for UASC and resettled children awaiting a school place.

#### Barriers to access

At the systemic level, refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education is delayed by long waiting lists (particularly for ESOL /English for Speakers of Other Languages/ places in Scotland); complex online applications processes that family members are unable to navigate; and in year arrivals. Alongside this, a number of Local Authorities are experiencing a diminishing of in-house expertise as a result of the reduction in the number of specialist UASC teams across the UK.

At the individual institution level, refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education is delayed primarily by three key factors. First, a lack of readily available places for children with SEN. Second, a reluctance of schools to admit students at the upper-secondary level (due to fear of negatively influencing results profiles). Third, the need, in England, to undertake a lengthy process of applying for the Secretary of State for Education to direct an academy to take a child (in comparison to a Local Authority being able to direct a school themselves).

Contextual barriers delaying refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education include challenges resulting from being placed in temporary initial accommodation (for children in asylum seeking families); participation (for UASC) in the National Transfer Scheme, when delays occur; mental health difficulties and ongoing age assessments.

## **Improving access**

At the systemic level, refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education is facilitated by clear admissions policies, particularly on in-year arrivals at the upper secondary level, and innovative use of Pupil Premium Plus, Pupil Equity Fund and Pupil Development Grant when providing interim solutions. The commitment of particular Local Authority and school or college-based staff was found to make a significant difference for individual children, and this is often facilitated by the inclusion of dedicated content on meeting the educational needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children in school, college and Local Authority staff training.

At the individual institution level, the development of a school-wide ethos of welcome to refugee and asylum seeking children has a positive impact on admissions, and substantial liaison with voluntary sector advocates and support workers can help overcome a variety of barriers to access.

## **Remaining and thriving in education**

### **Barriers to remaining and thriving**

At the systemic level, refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education is negatively affected by being placed in college when school is more appropriate, or in school when college is more appropriate and limited access to full-time 16-18 ESOL.

At the individual institution level, refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education is negatively affected by insufficient EAL support in some schools; challenges diagnosing and addressing SEN when combined with EAL needs; bullying and social issues; and a lack of awareness of issues affecting refugee and asylum seeking children amongst some teachers and other school/college based staff.

Several contextual factors negatively affect refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education. These include mental health difficulties, particularly associated with past experiences and present asylum claim anxieties and leading to increased absences and exclusions; poverty, particularly linked to ability to afford educational resources, participate in school trips and travel to and from school; and living in unstable accommodation.

### **Improving remaining and thriving**

Refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education is facilitated by six key factors. First, the presence of a committed, caring adult, who will support them over an extended period of time (this appears to be particularly important for UASC). Second, the opportunity to participate in education programmes where content and curriculum have been appropriately adapted to meet their needs. Third, high levels of pastoral care and mental health support within the school setting. Fourth, partnerships between schools or colleges and specialist voluntary sector organisations that can facilitate the provision of on-site advice, guidance and support for refugee and asylum seeking learners. Fifth, creative approaches to peer support with the school or college, including buddy schemes and school-wide awareness raising about forced migration. Sixth, the provision of training on meeting the educational needs of refugee and asylum seeking children for all teachers and other school or college staff as part of continuing professional development.

## Summary Recommendations

Detailed and further recommendations can be found in the full report.

### Access to Education

- Central government policy makers should recognise that all children, including asylum seeking children in temporary initial accommodation should be in receipt of an education
- Central government policy makers should encourage OFSTED to consider and reference work done by schools to accommodate the needs of refugee and asylum seeking children in their inspections.
- Central government policy makers should review, and consider simplifying the process by which the Secretary of State can require an academy to accept a pupil.
- Central government policy makers should provide better and clearer information to schools on new EAL arrivals in Years 10 and 11 - including ensuring that schools in their locality are aware of provisions enabling them to exclude these children from their results profiles
- Local Authorities should develop initial guidance on appropriate curriculum and good practice for interim provision

### Remaining and Thriving in Education

- Central government policy makers should increase the number of available funded ESOL hours for 16-18 year olds
- Central government policy makers should ensure training for the planned senior designated mental health leads in schools (as per the Government's mental health in schools strategy) includes specific content on supporting refugee and asylum seeking children
- Central government policy makers and Local Authorities should seek to capitalise on and raise awareness of existing good practice across England, Scotland and Wales by creating improved networking and information sharing opportunities for professionals working in education for refugee and asylum seeking children
- Local Authorities should provide specialist training on education needs of UASC for Social Workers, Key Workers, Leaving Care Personal Advisors in Local Authorities where expert UASC teams have been disbanded.
- Schools and colleges should ensure training in the educational support needs of refugee and asylum seeking children for teachers at all educational levels is included as standard in continuing professional development
- Schools and colleges should consider a variety of interventions including peer-support schemes and expert partnerships with external refugee youth charities

## ACRONYMS

<b>ADCS</b>	<b>Association of Directors of Children’s Services</b>
<b>BASW</b>	<b>British Association of Social Workers</b>
<b>DCLG</b>	<b>Department for Communities and Local Government</b>
<b>DFE</b>	<b>Department for Education</b>
<b>DFID</b>	<b>Department for International Development</b>
<b>DSG</b>	<b>Dedicated Schools Grant</b>
<b>EAL</b>	<b>English as an Additional Language</b>
<b>EMAG</b>	<b>Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant</b>
<b>ESOL</b>	<b>English for Speakers of Other Languages</b>
<b>FE</b>	<b>Further Education</b>
<b>GCSE</b>	<b>General Certificate of Secondary Education</b>
<b>LGA</b>	<b>Local Government Association</b>
<b>NALDIC</b>	<b>National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum</b>
<b>NTS</b>	<b>National Transfer Scheme</b>
<b>PEP</b>	<b>Personal Education Plan</b>
<b>PPP</b>	<b>Pupil Premium Plus</b>
<b>PRU</b>	<b>Pupil Referral Unit</b>
<b>RCC</b>	<b>Refugee Children’s Consortium</b>
<b>SEN</b>	<b>Special Educational Needs</b>
<b>UASC</b>	<b>Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children</b>
<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</b>
<b>UNICEF</b>	<b>United Nations Children’s Fund</b>
<b>VPRS</b>	<b>Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme</b>
<b>VSH</b>	<b>Virtual School Head(s)</b>



## 1. Introduction

A priority ask of the UNICEF Uprooted campaign is to “help uprooted children stay in school and stay healthy.” Refugee and asylum seeking children are entitled (and indeed required) to access formal, mainstream education once in the UK, and yet there are significant gaps in knowledge around the speed with which they are able to do so, and their experience of school once enrolled. This research aims to quantify the scale of the problem facing children, and to build a qualitative and quantitative evidence base to uncover existing barriers, both to accessing education and to remaining and thriving there once enrolled. The findings aim to enable UNICEF UK to define measures that the UK and devolved governments can take to better support asylum-seeking and refugee children in their education. The research will identify the key challenges faced by refugee and asylum-seeking children in accessing quality education, and provide examples of best practice that will contribute to the formulation of policy recommendations for a national approach to improving education for these children.

This research builds on UNICEF’s 2010 report *Levelling the Playing Field*, 2016 report *The Legal Entitlements of Refugee and Migrant Children in 33 European Countries* and internal literature review commissioned in early 2017. The purpose of this research is to provide robust information and messaging that will inform future work by Unicef UK to support the rights of refugee children, and addresses the four broad questions below.

- 1. Are refugee and asylum-seeking children accessing education in the UK? To what extent is their entitlement to education not being fulfilled?**
- 2. What are the barriers to accessing education, including: finding a school placement; sustaining a school placement; accessing support to remain in school?**
- 3. To what extent does the situation vary between the three countries (England, Scotland and Wales)?**
- 4. What solutions are proposed or in place at a local and national level to reduce or overcome these barriers and how far are these effective in increasing access to education?**

The report speaks to these questions with new data on the educational experiences of refugee and asylum seeking children in the UK. First, we provide an overview of existing research and current policy around refugee and asylum-seeking children’s education in the UK, highlighting the contribution of this study. Second, we discuss the data and methods used in this paper. Third, we analyse the new education data gathered through three distinct sources specifically for this study. In conclusion, we explore several implications of this analysis for future research, policy and campaigns.

## 2. REVIEW OF CURRENT POLICY, LITERATURE AND STATUTORY GUIDANCE

There have been significant changes in the policy environment across all three countries in recent years, with the introduction of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC); the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS); renewed financial pressures on Local Authorities in relation to children's social care services (Local Government Association, 2017); and the issuing of new government strategies and statutory guidance. Policy changes have taken place amidst the broader context of the refugee crisis and an increase in the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK. The year April 2016 to March 2017 saw a 6% increase (on the previous year) in the number of looked after UASC in England, with 4,560 looked after by Local Authorities in March 2017 (DfE 2017). In Scotland, COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) estimates that there are roughly 150 UASC, 85% of whom are 16-17 years old, and 71% of whom are male (COSLA 2018). Scottish NGOs report that the number of UASC in the country is increasing - with the Scottish Guardianship Service, which provides advice, support and advocacy for UASCs and victims of trafficking, experiencing a 200% increase in referrals from 2015-2017 (Scottish Refugee Council, 2017). In Wales, the government estimates that there are circa 45 UASC, the majority of whom, as in Scotland, are male and aged 15 - 17 (Welsh Government, 2017). As in Scotland, the Local Government Association expects that numbers of UASC will continue to increase due to Welsh participation in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) (WLGA, 2016).

This section provides an overview of these recent policy and guidance changes, with particular reference to the manner in which they have affected, have the potential to affect, or provide specific guidance on, education.

### **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and education: statutory guidance**

In 2016 the ADCS published a special thematic report outlining the needs and characteristics of UASC, as well as the services provided by Local Authorities to meet these needs (ACDS 2016). It gives a useful overview of the current situation in England, and provides some insights on access to education. Data from 66 Local Authorities showed that 32% of UASC attended a Further Education (FE) college and 26% attended a secondary school. Provision was not stated for over a third of children, and 9% were recorded as being in 'other provision', which included being in receipt of private tuition, waiting for a college or school place, or being 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) (ADCS, 2016).

Statutory guidance for England (DfE 2014, updated 2018), states that an education placement should be secured for all looked after children within 20 school days of coming into care; that looked after children should not be placed in a school rated inadequate or below from Ofsted; that looked after children should have the highest priority in school admission arrangements; and that a Personal Education Plan (PEP) should be initiated for looked after children within 10 days of a child coming into the care of the Local Authority (DfE 2014). In Wales too, the corporate parenting role includes a duty to promote the child's educational achievement; to create a PEP; and to prioritise UASC in school admissions (Luh 2017).

The Welsh Government also funds Minority Ethnic Achievement Service teams in Local Authorities, which provide additional educational support for UASC in schools (AWCPPRG 2015), and Local Authorities are required to make counselling services available for children aged 11-18 regardless of immigration status (Trevena and MacLaughlan 2017). In Scotland, The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 - 2022 (Scottish Government 2018) explicitly states that it is the right of every child of school age, including refugees and asylum seekers, to be provided with a school education. It is presumed that all looked-after children in Scotland will need additional support in school, and a duty on the Local Authority to make adequate tailored provision for each child is enshrined in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (Scottish Government 2004), with EAL an explicitly recognised additional support need. The establishment of the Scottish Guardianship Service (funded by the Scottish Government and provided by the charity Aberlour), enables UASC to access individualised support, including around access to education, from the point of arrival. The role of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) was incorporated into law under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015, placing a duty on Local Authorities to make referrals to the service (Scottish Government 2015).

While these expectations should indeed facilitate access to a quality education for UASC (and all looked-after children) there remain notable gaps in understanding around the extent to which Local Authorities have complied, or been able to comply, with the guidance in all three countries. In one brief examination, Oxfordshire County Council found that in order to meet the 20 school days target, enabling factors including social workers applying for school places within a few days of the child coming into care; paperwork and risk assessments being shared; and quick responses from the school were all needed (Oxfordshire County Council undated).

The DfE's recent safeguarding strategy for UASC (DfE and Home Office 2017) is also pertinent to education in England, in two key ways. First, it highlights concerns that Local Authorities have reported around the availability of foster care placements. The presence of a pro-active and supportive foster carer has long been established as a key determiner of educational success for looked-after children (inter alia Sebba et al 2015; UNICEF 2010), yet the ADCS (2016) report that 75% of Local Authorities raised concerns around the difficulty of finding appropriate foster placements. UASC who arrive in England over the age of 15 are rarely placed in foster care, but rather in semi-independent accommodation, which may also impact on access to education. Second, the strategy commits the government to supporting other professionals in their work with UASC, including education professionals. A government consultation exercise on the implementation of the strategy has recently been carried out, and provided an opportunity for the Refugee Children's Consortium to respond calling for Virtual School Heads (VSH) and designated teachers to receive specific training on the needs and vulnerabilities of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (RCC unpublished).

Specific statutory guidance for Local Authorities on the care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery in England has also been recently published (DfE 2017). With regards to education, it includes the expectation that key professionals (social workers, VSH, Independent Reviewing Officers, school admissions officers and Special Educational Needs (SEN) departments) work together to find appropriate education provision at the same time as an accommodation placement is found. Whilst asserting that these children may need a period of time to acclimatise to formal education, and, during this time, may benefit from cultural orientation and life skills guidance, it maintains the need for clear pathways into high quality mainstream provision. The guidance also notes the (well-recognised) importance of mother-tongue literacy in improving educational and wellbeing outcomes for those whose first language is not English (see also COSLA 2017 and Fu and Matoush 2015).

The guidance also covers age assessments and the psychological, physical and emotional impact of distressing experiences in countries of origin or on journeys to the UK. Whilst the guidance does not specifically link these issues to education, it is recognised that age-disputed children face considerable difficulties both accessing education and being placed at the correct level (Crawley 2007).

Regarding mental health, Fazel and Betancourt (2017) found that rates of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression are high amongst refugee children (particularly unaccompanied minors) when compared to the general population, and Iversen et al (2012) find that this in turn impacts upon their ability to adapt and learn in school. School-based mental health interventions for refugee and asylum-seeking children are argued to be of significant value, yet to date, few effective examples have been recorded (Fazel and Betancourt 2017).

## **Unaccompanied minors: The National Transfer Scheme**

In July 2016 the Department for Education launched the National Transfer Scheme<sup>1</sup>, and by 1 October 2017 555 UASC had been transferred away from Local Authorities with particularly dense populations of UASC. The scheme's safeguarding strategy (DfE and Home Office 2017) states that a purpose of the scheme is to ensure that UASC can access the services they need, including education provision. However, the Association of Directors of Children's Services recently found that the funds Local Authorities receive from the Home Office currently only cover 50% of the real costs of caring for UASC (ADCS 2016), and The Local Government Association continues to emphasize the need for adequate funding to enable proper care for UASC, whether Local Authorities have large numbers or small (LGA undated). Local Authorities in Scotland began participating in the NTS on a voluntary basis in January 2018, taking only 16 and 17 year olds, but COSLA shares the English concern that funding rates to support UASC are insufficient (COSLA 2018). In Wales, where Local Authorities also participate on a voluntary basis, concerns centre around the capacity of Welsh Local Authorities to ensure children's entitlement to advocacy and support on arrival can be met (WLGA 2016). The Department for Education has committed to review the financial support provided to Local Authorities for the care of UASC (DfE and Home Office 2017) - the Home Office is leading this review, and responses to the consultation are, at the time of writing, still under consideration.

Proponents of the NTS emphasize that a consideration of the best interests of the child should be central to decision making and transfer. However, various organisations, including the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the Refugee Children's Consortium (RCC) have raised concerns about the practical implementation of the scheme. Both the RCC and BASW consultations noted delays in transfer: while comprehensive statistics are not available, in one Local Authority no transfers took place within the recommended two weeks and the majority took place between two and four months after arrival (RCC 2017). An examination of young people's experience of education in these instances is needed, and this report will explore the extent to which the NTS affects children's ability to access education, and Local Authorities' ability to provide appropriate education support.

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*The NTS is a voluntary arrangement whereby Local Authorities with a disproportionate number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people can transfer new arrivals to Local Authorities with capacity to take on their care. The scheme was initially restricted to England but now includes Wales and Scotland as well (Parliament 2017).*

## **Children in families - the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)**

The Syrian VPRS was launched in 2014 and then significantly expanded in September 2015 with a view to resettling 20,000 Syrians (and refugees from other countries of origin in the region) to the UK over five years. Latest statistics published on 30 November 2017 show that a total of 9,394 vulnerable people (of which around half were children) have been resettled across various local authorities since the start of the VPRS (Parliament, 2017). All Local Authorities in Scotland and Wales committed to supporting the VPRS, receiving over 1,200 and just under 400 refugees respectively by the end of 2016 (Sargeant 2017). Resettled families receive support from local partners to access education for their children, and there is an expectation that resettled children should be registered in a local school within two weeks of arrival (Home Office, DCLG and DFID, 2017). A recent UNHCR (2017) review of the Syrian VPRS states in general terms that resettled Syrian families view the education their children are receiving in the UK very positively, particularly their academic progress and integration into the school environments. The same review found that whilst teachers have reported valuing the contribution made by Syrian children to their new schools, some schools appear to be unaware of additional funding they can receive for accepting a child.

## **Children in families - asylum seekers**

The situation for asylum seeking families who arrive in the UK independently and apply for asylum is significantly different. Local Authorities in England, Wales and Scotland have a duty to provide a school place for all school aged children resident in their area, whether or not they have legal status in the UK (Coram, 2017; Welsh Government 2016; Scottish Government 2000). There is little information available on how long children who arrive in asylum seeking families wait for a school place. Significant numbers are reported to experience difficulties obtaining school places whilst in initial accommodation provided by the Home Office, as they are not classed as resident in that area (The Guardian, 2016). Other aspects of the asylum process in the UK that have been widely cited as detrimental to children's education include the impact of dispersal (Arnot and Pinson 2005); cuts in EAL provision (Coram 2017); and the limited financial resources available to asylum seekers (BBC 2016).

## **Children in families - those with asylum cases transferred to the UK under Dublin III**

Local Authorities also have certain responsibilities to children transferred to live with families under the Dublin III Regulation. From 2015 - 2017 inclusive, 291 unaccompanied children were brought to the UK under Article 8 of the Dublin III regulation (Refugee Council 2018). This is a new area of practice and the government have agreed to commission external research to improve their understanding of the situation. The above-mentioned safeguarding strategy (DfE and Home Office 2017) recognises the need for clearer guidance on the types of assessments and support provided by Local Authorities to families, and clearer information for families, who are often not aware of support that is available to them. According to the Home Office guidance, Social Services should complete an initial assessment of the receiving family member under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, and make a recommendation as to whether it is in the child's best interests to be transferred. The Local Authorities must be informed that a child will be moving under Dublin III to their area. However, there is no guidance around helping families prepare to care for a previously unaccompanied child, and a recent briefing found families have felt unprepared for and unsupported in the realities of caring for a teenager with often a high level of need (Coram 2017). As they are not 'looked-after' children, they will not be prioritised with regards to school access, and are unlikely to have the support of a social worker when navigating the school enrolment system.

It is, then, clear that statutory documents provide explicit guidance and expectations around access to education for refugee and asylum seeking children, whether they are unaccompanied or with families. However, the anecdotal and case-study level evidence outlined above, and documented in the grey literature of many charities, suggests that implementation of the guidance is at times problematic. This report makes a contribution in this area, examining the extent to which children are accessing education within the 20 day target; the barriers they face in securing school places and thriving in school once enrolled; and the types of intervention that best support their educational progress.



## METHODOLOGY

This report draws on three new data sources: quantitative data compiled through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales – the first such effort of which we are aware; in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with refugee children and parents across 3 regions; and key informant interviews with relevant experts from across the three countries.

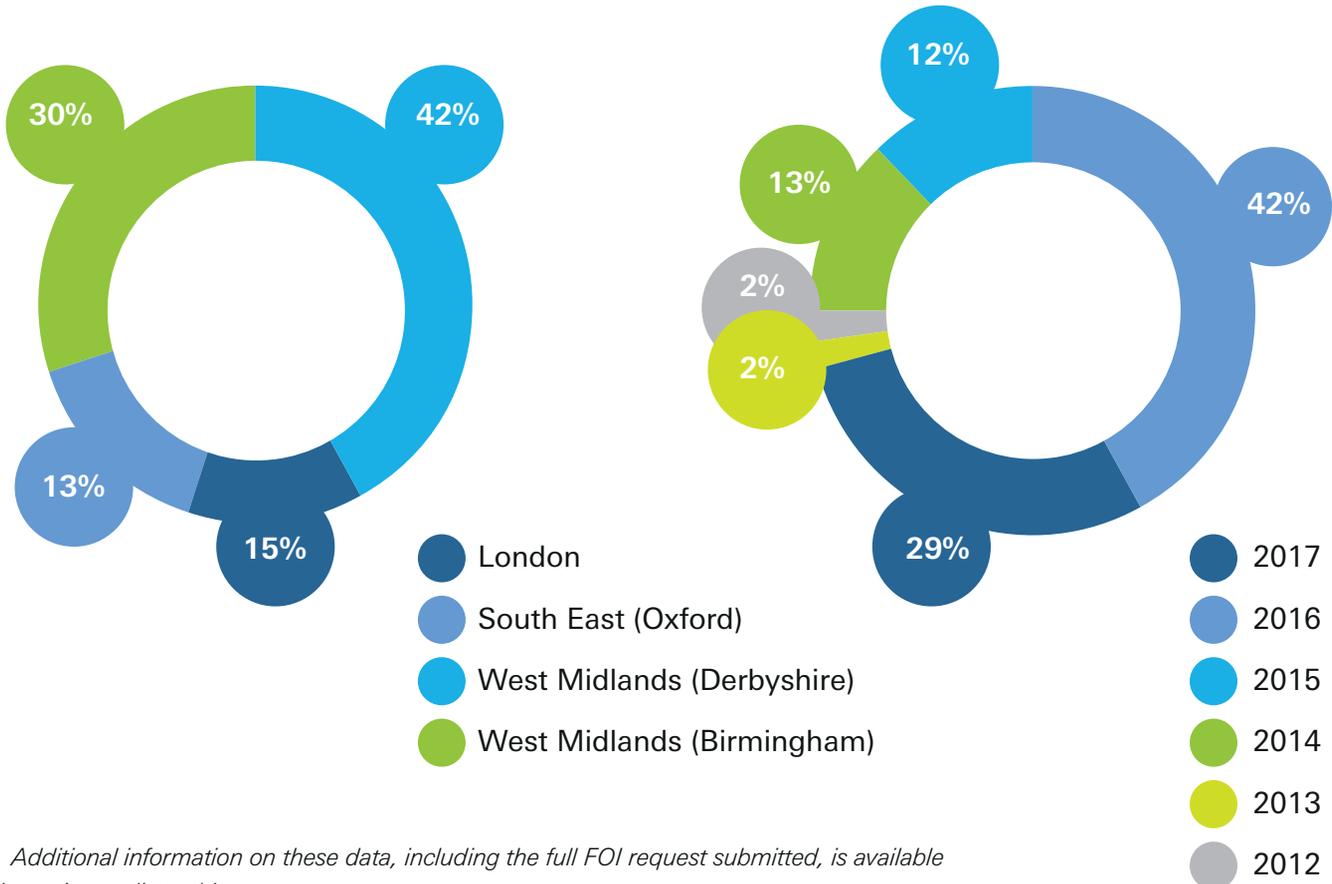
FOI requests were submitted to 205 Local Authorities in England (152), Scotland (31) and Wales (22) in October 2017. Of these Local Authorities, 113 (including 4 in Scotland and 4 in Wales) responded with detailed data to at least one of the questions; 30 (including 5 in Wales and 7 in Scotland) provided the response 'less than five' for all questions; 36 (including 12 in Wales and 18 in Scotland) responded to say that they did not have any unaccompanied minors in their care.<sup>2</sup> Of the remaining 26 Local Authorities, 7 refused to respond due to the cost of gathering the data, 10 refused to respond under data protection legislation, and 9 did not respond and gave no reason for not doing so. Data was requested on the number of UASC entering into care in the academic year 2016-17; the number of UASC entering into education that year; and the number of UASC still in education at the end of the year. The number of UASC entering education within 20 days was also requested, along with data on the number of children waiting more than 3 months for a school place. At a national level, this data is not centrally collected for UASC. The responses suggest the data are not systematically collected at the Local Authority level either, and different Local Authorities record different types of data in different ways. The analysis in this paper is based on data provided by the 77 Local Authorities who reported having 10 or more UASC. Data in this report is provided at the regional level; specific Local Authority data can be found in Appendix 2.

In addition, this report reflects the reported experiences of 86 refugee and asylum seeking children (see Figure 1 below). Focus group discussions were carried out with 24 UASC and the parents of 62 children in families across three regions – London, the South East and the West Midlands. The three regions were selected on the basis of a) numbers of UASC in the region and b) the ability of RSN staff to conduct focus groups or interviews with children and parents there. A broad range of ages were included, and the data captures the experiences of children ranging from 4 - 17 years when waiting for a school/college place. In order to present as up to date a picture as possible, the research focused on newer arrivals, with the vast majority of respondents arriving in the UK in either 2016 or 2017. Respondents represented various categories of children seeking international protection, including UASC, children resettled with their families through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, children brought to the UK under the Dublin III legislation, and children in asylum seeking families. The participants were selected from RSN and partner organisation databases: potential respondents were contacted and focus groups were conducted with those who expressed an interest in participating. All respondents were able to communicate adequately in spoken English, and interpretation was not necessary.

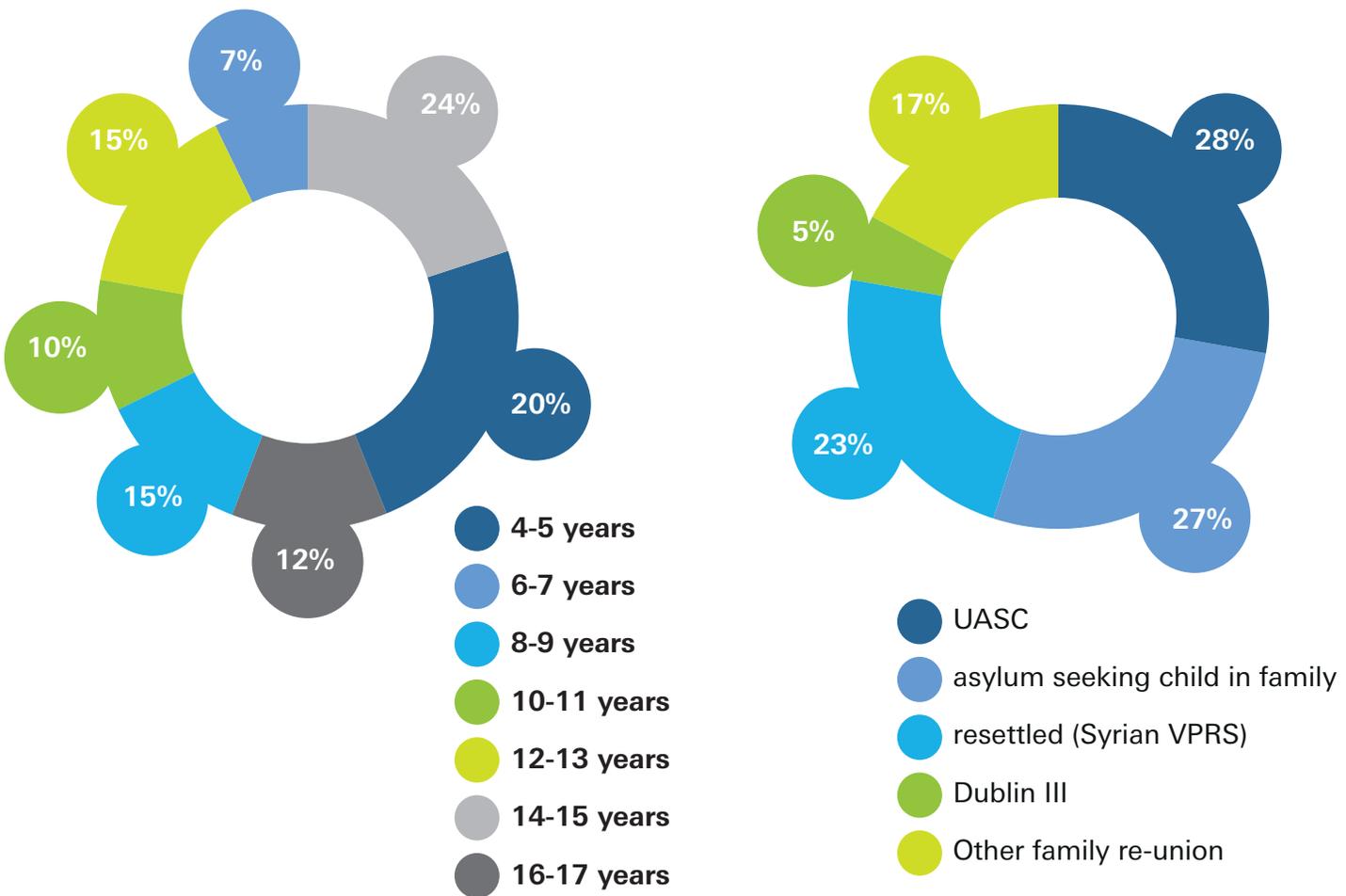
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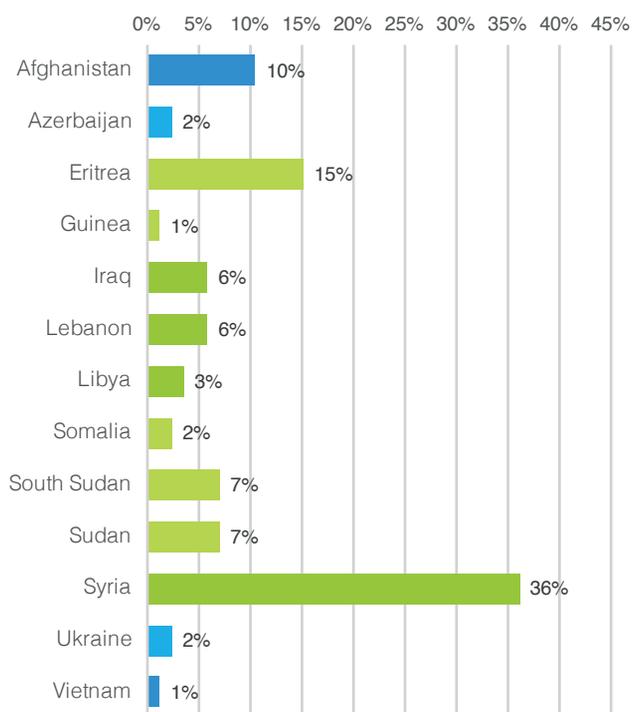
*Local Authorities are entitled to refuse to provide the data requested in a Freedom of Information request if the cost of doing so would exceed £450.*

**Figure 1: Focus group participant data (data on children aged 13 and under obtained via parents)**



*Additional information on these data, including the full FOI request submitted, is available in an Appendix to this paper.*





A further 48 key informant interviews were carried out with experts from across England, Scotland and Wales. These included teachers and other education professionals from primary, secondary and further education establishments, senior social workers from Local Authorities, policy experts, and senior staff from frontline NGOs providing education-related support to refugee and asylum-seeking children.<sup>4</sup>

These data allow for comparison of evidence across multiple sources and exploration of regional variation across the three countries. The qualitative data was analysed using an iterative coding process which allowed the data fragments in each transcript to be examined, and a set of thematic codes to emerge from the data. This set of codes was then added to at routine intervals (following analysis of every additional transcript), and the full data set within each code was analysed for patterns, themes and links to other codes.

Carried out by researchers from the NGO Refugee Support Network (RSN), this report is an example of practice-based analysis and research on refugee issues. RSN provides education-related support to around 450 refugee and asylum-seeking young people in England each year, many of whom are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Strengths of adopting a practice-based approach in this particular instance included the significant benefits of RSN's networks in the setup of interviews; the ability to conduct the entire project through researchers with extensive experience engaging with young refugees and asylum-seekers; and access to institutional learning from the RSN Senior Management Team (SMT) compiled through almost a decade of observing the longer term impacts (both positive and negative) on young refugees of participating in research. Challenges of a practice-based approach in this instance included a potential bias towards education within the networks of professionals and young people available to RSN, and the potential impact of a service-provider – recipient power imbalance influencing young people's responses. In order to mitigate for these risks, the research was carried out in-line with RSN's Research Ethics Framework (developed in response to the above-mentioned SMT observations), Child Protection Policy and policies for safeguarding vulnerable adults, as well as Unicef UK's Safeguarding policies and procedures.

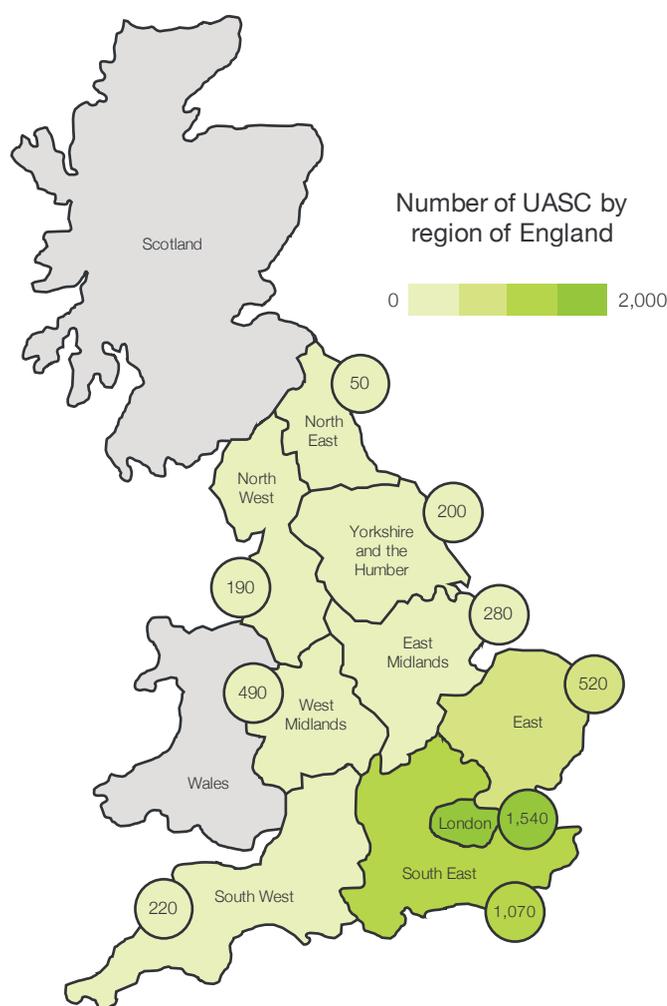
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*A full list of experts who provided key informant interviews is available in the Appendix*

## 4. FINDINGS: ACCESS TO EDUCATION

England’s UASC population is concentrated into London, the South East, the West Midlands and the East of England (see Figure 2). In Scotland, UASC are found predominantly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and in Wales, Cardiff, Conway and Newport (See Appendix 2 for detailed Local Authority Figures).

Figure 2: Number of UASC by region of England, 2017



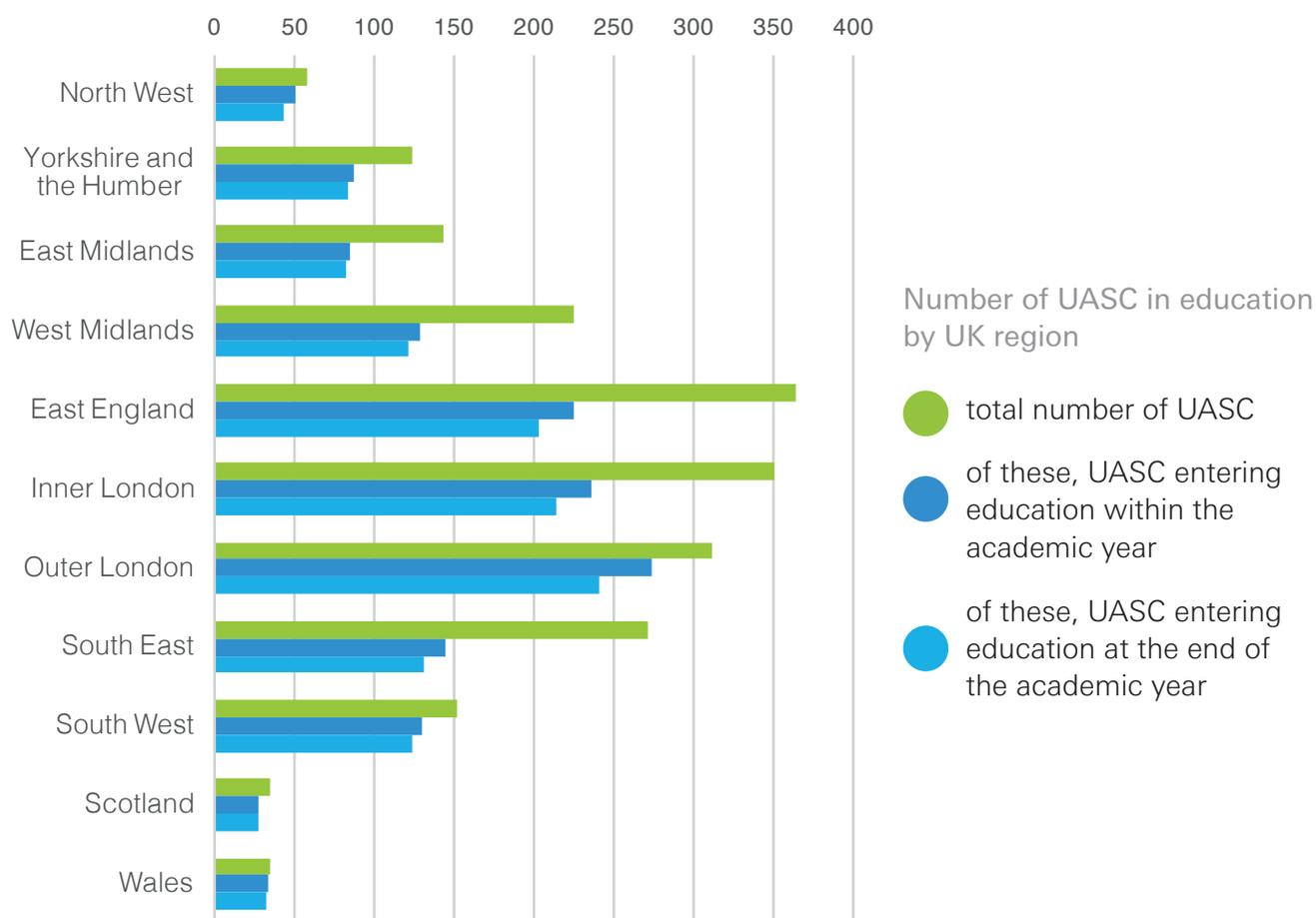
Source: National Statistics, Department of Education, 31 March 2017

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*Details are provided in the Appendix to this report.*

Data provided by Local Authorities on the number of UASC entering into their care in the academic year 2016-17 (Figure 3) differs from the data in Figure 2, in that it details not the total number of UASC in the care of the Local Authority, but the number arriving that year. This data allows for a more accurate assessment of the proportion of new arrivals entering into education (Figure 3). The data shows that no regions are able to secure education placements for all the UASC arriving that year. Where Local Authorities offered (unsolicited) explanations for this, the discrepancy between the number of new arrivals and the number entering education was typically accounted for by reasons including children disappearing from care; children who had arrived into care subsequently being placed with family members; children being aged-assessed as adults and included in the first statistic but not the second; and children arriving towards the end of the academic year, and a place not being secured for them until the start of the 2017-18 school year.

Figure 3: Number of UASC entering into care during academic year 2016-17; of which numbers entering and remaining in education

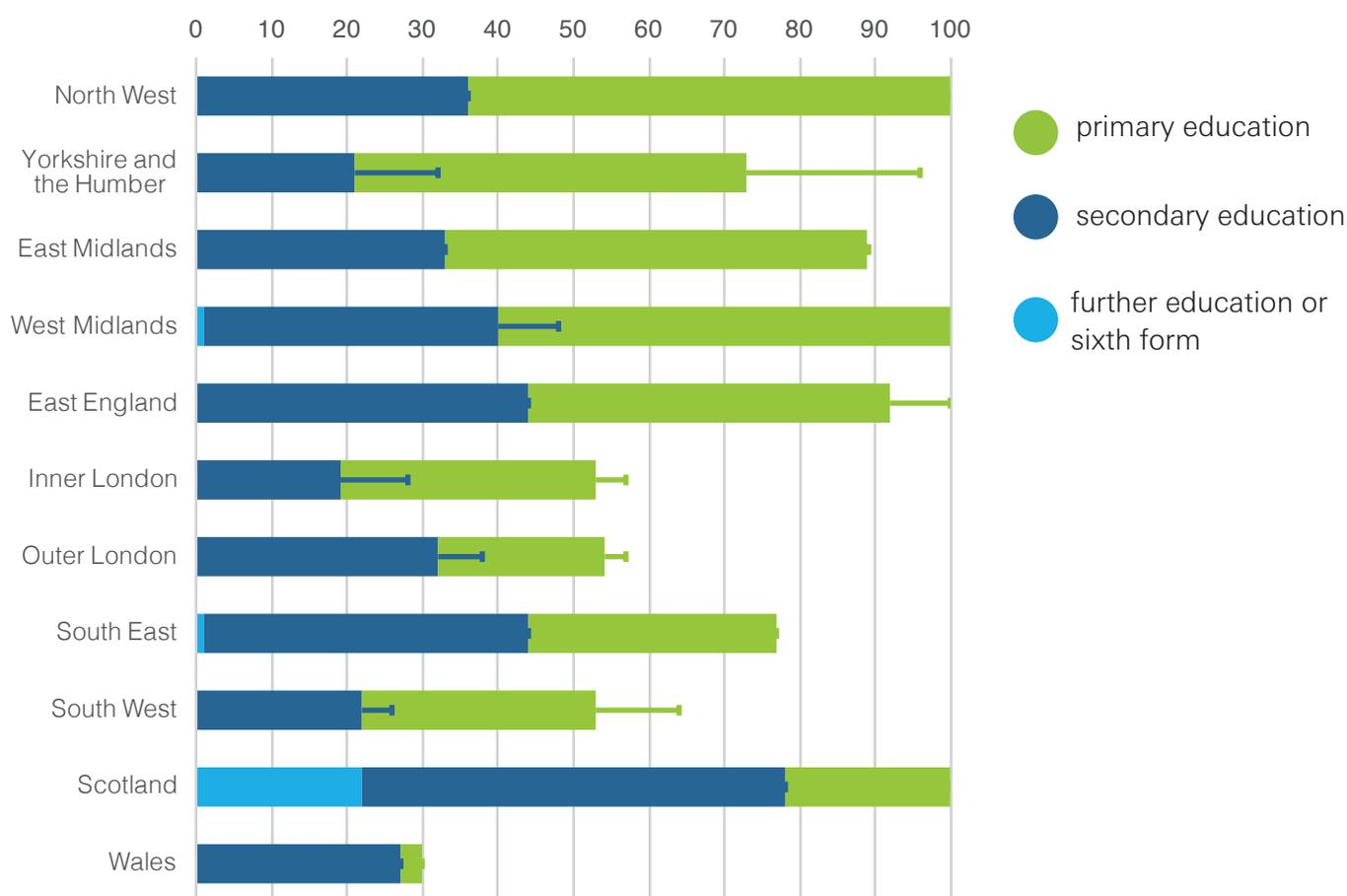


There are almost no unaccompanied minors of primary school age looked after in the UK, with Scotland the only country with any Local Authority reporting more than one primary school aged UASC (Figure 4). Instead, the UK's UASC are engaged in secondary (circa 40% of total) and further education (circa 55% of total), and as a result, the analysis of education for UASC in this report focuses on the secondary and further education levels. All analysis of refugee and asylum-seeking children's experience of primary schools in the UK relates to resettled refugee children, or asylum-seeking children in families.

6  
*Some local authorities have excluded from their data children ultimately transferred to another Local Authority through the NTS (Kent a notable example), and others have excluded children who went missing in the course of the year, and young people who were aged-assessed as adults and did not remain in care.*

Figure 4: Percentages UASC in education by level <sup>7</sup>

**Level of Education:** percent of UASC in education entering level of education in 2017, by UK region



Robust data on the numbers of children in refugee or asylum-seeking families in different levels of education across the UK is not available. Parliamentary Questions were submitted as part of this research process in an attempt to obtain numbers of resettled children in education, but the relevant data was not able to be provided - the response to the submitted written question stated that “the Home Office does not hold data in relation to the number of children resettled through this scheme who are currently accessing education, or the average waiting time for children to start full-time education” (Parliament, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> NB The data in Figure 4 does not tally precisely with that in Figure 3 because a number of Local Authorities provided data on the number of UASC entering education in total, but refused to break it down by level. Figure 4 is accurate for all of the Local Authorities in each region that did provide that data, which is a slightly smaller number than those who provided data for Figure 3.

## 4.1 Speed of access and interim provision

### Speed of access: key learning

- No one region of the UK has met the 20 day target for accessing education for all of the UASC in their care
- The most significant delays occur at the secondary and further education levels, where up to a quarter of children have had to wait over 3 months for a school or college place
- Resettled Syrian children obtain school places faster than any other group, with the exception of those with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Several UK Local Authorities have developed innovative interim education provision for UASC and resettled children awaiting a school place

According to the FOI data obtained for this report, no one region of the UK has been able to meet the 20 day target for accessing education for all of the UASC in their care. The North West has achieved this for the largest proportion of UASC, obtaining places within 20 days for 83% of their 2016-17 cohort. Notably, though, the North West has small numbers of UASC<sup>8</sup>, with only 58 entering care in 2016-17, of which 50 entered education, 83% of which within 20 days. In the regions with larger numbers, particularly London and the East of England, smaller proportions are accessing education within the target time-frame, with significant numbers having to wait more than three months for a school or college place. At the secondary level, the situation is most concerning in the East of England, with 27% of UASC having to wait more than three months for a school place (Figure 5). For those attempting to access further education, of the regions with larger numbers of UASC, particular challenges are faced in the West Midlands (25% of UASC waiting for more than three months) and Outer London (24% of UASC waiting for more than 3 months) (Figure 6).

<sup>8</sup> Only two responding Local Authorities in the North West had requisite minimum number of UASC (10) for inclusion in this study (Manchester and Liverpool).

Figure 5: Percentage of UASC in UK entering secondary education within given timeframes

**Speed of access:** percent of of UASC entering secondary level education within given time frame, by UK region

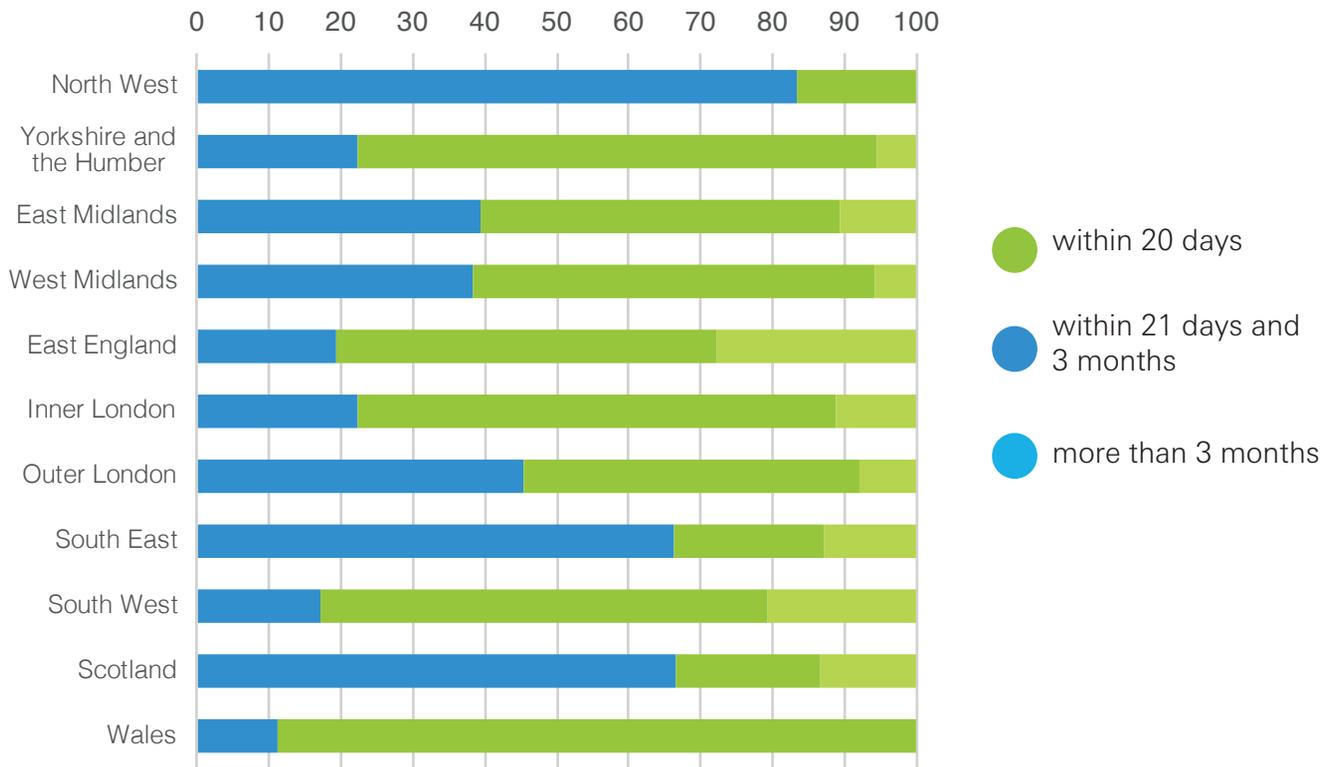
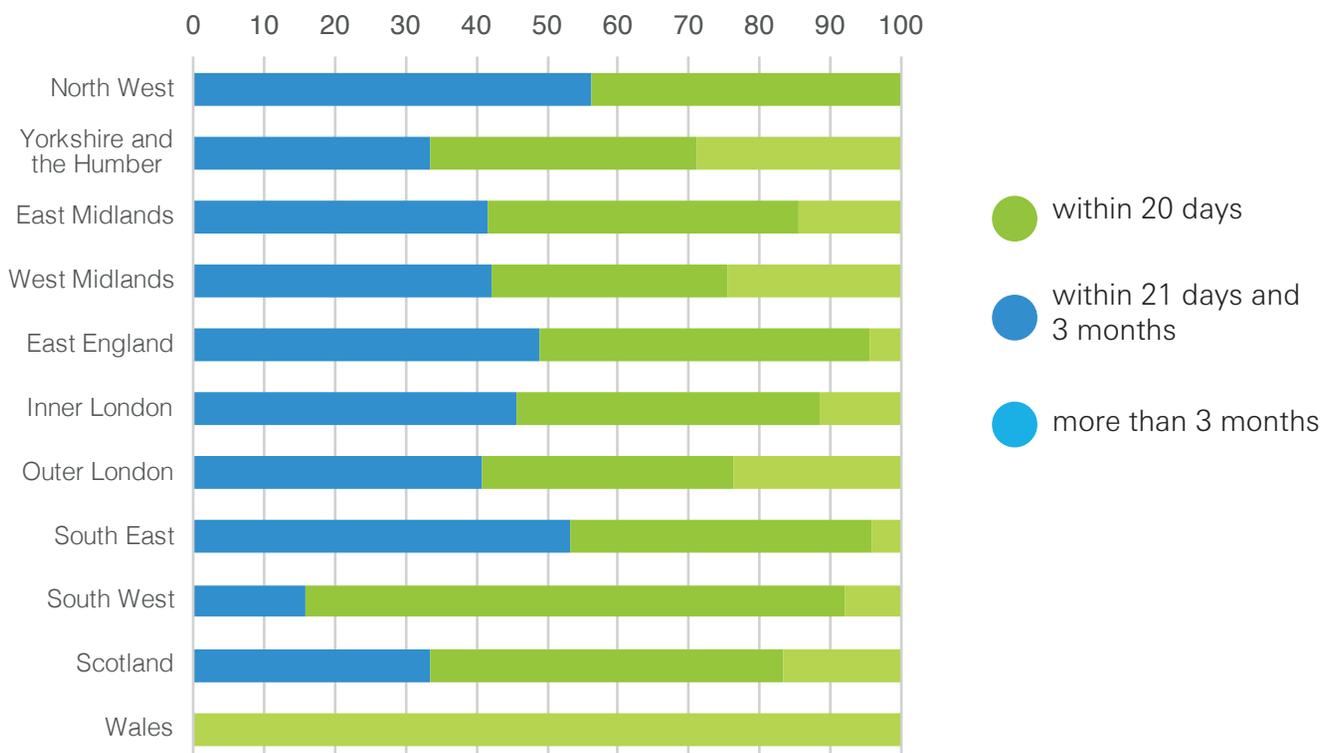


Figure 6: Percentage of UASC in UK entering further education within given timeframes

**Speed of access:** percent of of UASC entering further education within given time frame, by UK region

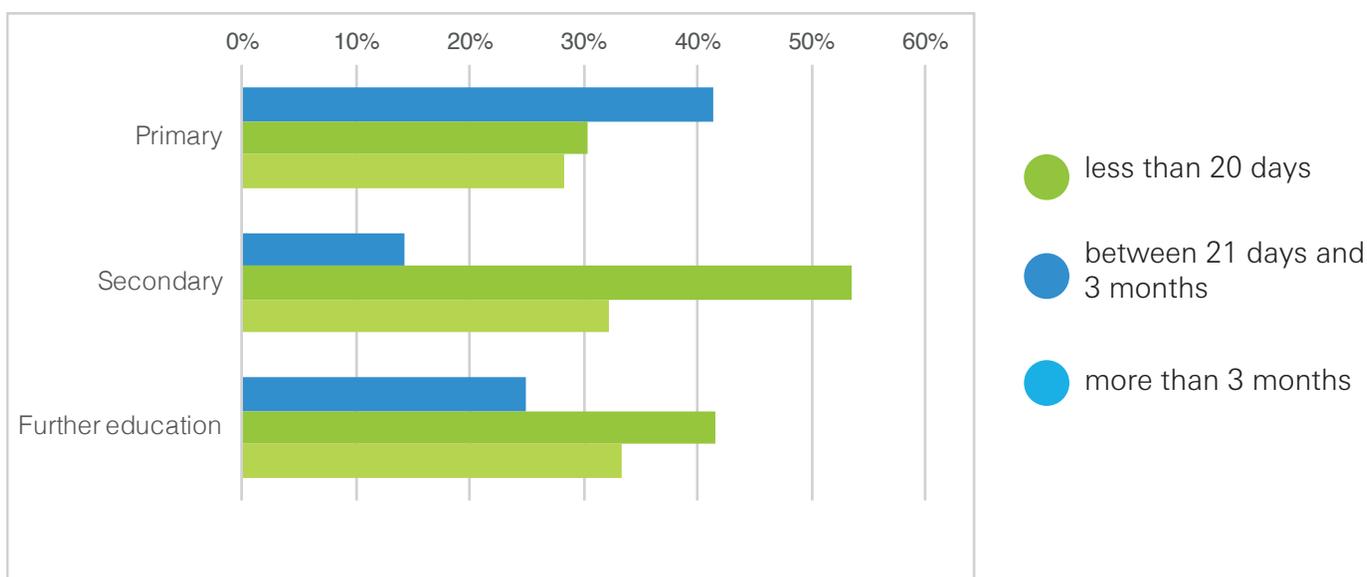


The experiences of the 86 children interviewed (either directly or via their parents) for this study are slightly more negative. The 86 children include UASC (28%), children in asylum-seeking families (27%), resettled refugee children (23%), those on other family reunion visas (17%) and those brought to the UK under the Dublin III regulation (5%) (see Figure 1 above). All groups except resettled Syrians report significant delays accessing education at every level (even when school holidays were accounted for<sup>9</sup>). Whilst delays have occurred at the primary level, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), the most significant delays were reported at the secondary and further education levels (see Figure 7).

At the secondary level, only 14% of respondents entering education at this level started school within 20 days, with 33% waiting over 3 months (one young person waited 9 months for a place and two waited almost 5 months). At the further education level, 25% of new arrivals consulted were able to access a place within 20 days, but 33% waited over 3 months, with 20% waiting between 8 months and 1 year. Amongst our sample, resettled Syrian refugee children are obtaining school places more quickly than any other group, and account for 53% of those starting within 20 days

Figure 7: Percentage of focus group discussion respondents entering education within given time-frames by level

#### Length of time waiting for school place



There is some evidence in the FOI data received to suggest that, in a minority of cases, refugee and asylum seeking children are placed in potentially inappropriate alternative provision when mainstream school places are not available. The practice of placing unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Pupil Referral Units (PRU), designed for 'the most troubled and disruptive of pupils...including those expelled from mainstream schools' (The Independent 2015:1), has long been a concern to practitioners supporting refugee and asylum seeking children. Whilst incidences of this happening have reduced in recent years, seven of the Local Authorities responding to the FOI request reported placing UASC in PRU in the last academic year. Several experts interviewed for this report had experienced UASC being placed in this type of provision, with one Local Authority representative, who preferred to remain anonymous, explaining that... *(next page)*,

<sup>9</sup> The 20 day target applies to school days. So, for example, where a child arrived in July or August and started school at the beginning of September, this is recorded as within 20 days.

*“in the worst scenario, yes, it happens... It’s outrageous, really unacceptable - it happened when [my team] weren’t aware of it. I visited and there were kids kicking off and swearing and kicking and shouting - it happened against all of our advice... But it’s to do with covering your back because at least if they’re in a PRU you can say they’re in education. My experience is that it has a really negative impact on their learning” (KII, anonymous).*

A small number of Local Authorities have developed innovative interim provision for refugee and asylum seeking children who are waiting for mainstream school places. This often constitutes provision designed specifically for new arrivals to the UK, combining intensive English, Maths and IT with life-skills relevant to living in Britain. Particularly notable examples of this include Croydon and Oxford where, in one case (Oxford) a voluntary sector organisation has been contracted to provide this type of interim provision, and the other (Croydon) the Virtual School itself manages the programme. In other areas with significant numbers of UASC (in particular Kent and Glasgow), voluntary sector organisations have devised, and themselves sought funding for, programmes for children and young people still waiting for school places.



## **Box 1: Interim Provision for new arrivals**

### **Oxford Orientation Programme (Oxfordshire County Council and Key 2)**

Oxfordshire County Council have contracted a local supported accommodation provider, Key2, to run a 4-week education Orientation Programme for newly arrived UASC and resettled Syrian children. The programme provides an informal, highly supportive introduction to education for new arrivals, focusing on welcome and wellbeing. Up to 8 students participate in the course at any one time, and admissions to the programme operate on a rolling basis, with young people able to start as soon as the day after arrival in many cases. Participants attend daily from 9:30am - 2:30pm, studying English in the mornings, and life-skills (including wellbeing, the asylum process, first-aid, personal safety, the city of Oxford etc) in the afternoons. The course does not take place in a school, and is run by one teacher (with external guest sessions) with the aim of creating a manageable, warm and nurturing environment for young people on arrival. Partnerships with schools and the local FE college facilitate successful transition to mainstream education, and enable the receiving institution to benefit from detailed advance information about the progress, needs and potential risks of the child they are admitting. In 2017-18, 28 young people benefitted from the programme, and attendance is typically around 90% (aided by the partnership with Key2, who accommodate many of the participants and are able to help wake them up in time for the morning session).

### **Glasgow Chrysalis Programme (British Red Cross)**

The British Red Cross have run an 8 week course for young people out of education since 2008. It runs four afternoons each week, and is for 16-25 year olds struggling to access education at any point in the asylum system, though participants are predominantly new arrivals. Two of the afternoons focus on English language (ESOL), and two focus on a variety of life skills (IT, Music, the city of Glasgow, budgeting, the NHS, sexual health, laws in the UK etc) delivered through interpreters. Like the Oxford Orientation Programme, the Chrysalis Programme aims to provide a smaller, less intimidating environment than a school or college, and partners with a local FE college to help students transition into mainstream education after 8 weeks.

### **Croydon Virtual School Interim Provision (Croydon Virtual School)**

Croydon Virtual School Interim Provision is funded and run by the Local Authority for looked-after children using Pupil Premium (instead of paying for 1:1 tuition for children waiting for a school place). It caters for up to 25 new arrivals up to age 16 (though averages between 8-12 participants at any one time), and runs for 3 school days per week. The provision includes English, Maths, Science, PSHE, Music, Art, PE, RE - giving newly arrived children a taste of mainstream education, and an opportunity to test skills and subjects that they wouldn't get if they entered full time ESOL provision directly at Key Stage 4. Although originally designed as a six week programme, learners can stay in the provision until they obtain a place in mainstream education. Sessions are delivered by Virtual School staff, with outside agencies bought in to cover particular specialisms including PE and PSHE. The programme takes place in a school setting, and many children transition into mainstream education within the same school. The children become accustomed to the school environment, and have breaks and lunchtime at the same times as mainstream pupils. As with the Oxford and Glasgow initiatives, strong links with school staff and the provision of in depth advance information on students both facilitate transition to mainstream programmes.

A minority of experts interviewed expressed concerns about such provision, fearing that part-time, interim provision, of at times unregulated quality, becomes long-term, with entry to mainstream education becoming further delayed (KII London2; KII London7). The majority however, emphasized these programmes as examples of good practice, of significant benefit to the children in their region. The courses were often perceived as providing a positive introduction to the classroom setting for children who had been out of education for substantial periods prior to arrival in the UK (KII Scotland2; KII Scotland6; KII Oxford1), and as an innovative approach to equipping them with the broad spectrum of skills and knowledge they need to navigate a new life in the UK (KII London7;

## 4.2 Barriers to access: what are the challenges?

The experiences of the 86 children represented in this report reveal a number of barriers to accessing education at the systemic, individual institution and contextual levels.

### Barriers to access: key learning

- At the systemic level, refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education is delayed by
  - Long waiting lists (particularly for ESOL in Scotland)
  - Complex, online applications processes (particularly for non-looked after children including those transferred under the Dublin III regulation)
  - In-year arrivals
  - Diminishing expertise at Local Authority level as a result of fewer specialist UASC teams
- At the individual institution level, refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education is delayed by
  - A lack of readily available places for children with SEN
  - A reluctance of schools to admit students at the upper-secondary level (due to fear of negatively influencing results profiles)
  - The need, in England, to undertake a lengthy process of applying for the Secretary of State for Education to direct an academy to take a child (in comparison to a Local Authority directing a school)
- Contextual barriers delaying refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education include
  - Living in initial accommodation for asylum seekers
  - Participation (for a child) in the National Transfer Scheme, when delays occur
  - Mental health difficulties
  - Ongoing age assessments

#### 4.2.1. Systemic barriers

Difficulties encountered as a result of national or local policies or systems have been defined as systemic barriers. The most frequently identified systemic barriers reported concerned school places and admissions policies (particularly access to ESOL in Scotland, management of in-year arrivals and the non-prioritisation of non-looked after refugee or asylum seeking children); admissions systems (particularly the need to navigate online processes, to be literate in English, and to be able to provide documentation that may not be available); and the reducing specialist expertise in working with refugee and asylum seeking children within many Local Authorities.



## Admissions systems

For many children and their families, the barriers to accessing education cited were not the admissions policies per se, but rather the systems surrounding them that must be navigated, at times without support, in order to secure a school place. One third of the parents interviewed reported that they had not been able to navigate the UK school admissions systems without encountering significant difficulties, and that this had contributed to delays in obtaining places.

An increasingly fragmented admissions system was repeatedly described, with increasing numbers of academies, linked to different trusts, meaning that parents “may have to apply to the Local Authority system and also to three or four different academies, in different areas to look for a place, which can be very confusing” (KIINational1). Of particular difficulty was the online nature of the admissions systems. Whilst systems like this are demonstrated to streamline processes and improve accessibility for a notable proportion of school-applying parents, this was not the case for refugee and asylum seeking parents. Over half of the parents interviewed had completed only primary education in their country of origin, and were not computer literate. The majority also did not speak English when they arrived in the UK, and so found navigating a complex school admissions online portal, in English, almost impossible to do without IT or language support. Those participating in the Syrian VPRS spoke highly of the support they received that enabled them to do this, saying “if you come with the project they will do everything for you” (ParentOxfordRS), but asylum-seeking parents reported being left to manage the process on their own. Some had received ad-hoc help from voluntary organisations, or asked a friend who had been in the country longer, but even in these cases, delays in entry to education frequently ensued. Parents explained “we don’t know the system” (ParentOxfordshireAS) and asked “who gives us advice?” (ParentBirminghamAS). Some said that they were afraid to ask social services for help, explaining,

*“we don’t ask social services for help, because we come from a different culture. We are very afraid of social services, we don’t have service in our country, social services were private in Syria. If I have a problem I would go to a private social services and pay. Connections do tell people about social services but they scare people, if you abuse your children you will go to social services, like police... people are afraid of social services.”*  
(ParentOxfordAS)

Whilst the vast majority of UASC did not mention this challenge (due to their social workers applying for school places on their behalf), one young person who had initially been placed with his uncle but subsequently moved into the care of the Local Authority, thought that, in this respect if not others, looked-after children were better off. He explained that, despite repeated attempts to enrol, he waited 10 months to start college when with his uncle and that his situation improved once taken into care, saying “if you are on your own you have full rights, so much better” (ChildBirminghamUASC).

Experts interviewed confirmed this, and just over a quarter identified navigating the system as a particular challenge for children brought to the UK under Dublin III legislation. Once an initial assessment has been conducted to confirm that the child is indeed related to the family member they are to be placed with, that child is then no longer the responsibility of the Local Authority. However, experts interviewed provided numerous examples of cases where the receiving family member did not have the necessary language or knowledge to support the child to access education. Support workers in voluntary sector organisations told of families who “just didn’t have the networks and the means to identify the relevant schools and then apply” (KIILondon1), who “don’t even know where to start in navigating the online council application process” (KIIWestMidlands9), and who “seemed to be finding that process overwhelming, like wading through treacle” (KIILondon5). Significantly, none of the professionals who spoke about supporting Dublin III children and families had funding to do so - all were doing it outside of their project remit, simply because they didn’t know where else to signpost. One support worker explained that these children “just aren’t falling into categories that organisations tend to work with, because they aren’t coming through official resettlement programmes, they aren’t looked after... they’re falling through the cracks of each form of support” (KIILondon1).

Just under a third of the asylum-seeking parents and children placed with other family members consulted faced challenges providing the documentation necessary for enrolment. One young person living with a family member explained that he was prevented from enrolling as a result of not being able to provide a household bill as proof of address - and yet he and his uncle were living in one room in a shared house, with no bills in their name. Others told of the necessary papers having been sent to the Home Office and not yet returned.

### **Local Authority expertise**

Amongst UASC, the quality of support received from the Local Authority was perceived as critical in determining access to school and college places. Though many examples of committed and proactive social workers and key workers were provided (see section 4.3 for more on this), just over half of the UASC interviewed felt that lack of support or inconsistent support from the Local Authority had contributed to the delays in obtaining a place. They were aware that “there are too many children for each social worker to look after, so they are so busy and can’t help you that much” (ChildLondonUASC). Several talked about the challenges of staff turnover within the Local Authority, with one explaining that “I had a social worker but she left after one week, and then I got another one but she stayed for a month only so I only saw her once. Then, after another month I got a new one, and she helped me to start school - but it was a long time waiting because of this I think” (ChildLondonUASC).

In addition to this, professionals interviewed, including over half the Local Authority staff consulted, reported challenges linked to mainstreaming within social services, and the consequent reduction in specialist expertise at the Local Authority level. Several Local Authority staff members described the absorption of specialist UASC teams into generalist teams, with social workers increasingly taking on mixed case-loads and therefore not building specific expertise in working with refugee and asylum seeking children.

#### 4.2.2. Individual institution barriers

Barriers to access encountered at the individual school or college level have been categorised as individual institution barriers. The most frequently identified individual institution level barriers concerned the challenge of finding places for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN); schools delaying entrance for children at the upper secondary level; and certain academies and grammar schools attempting to block the entrance of refugee and asylum seeking students.

##### Lack of places for SEN

In the context of oversubscribed schools across the country, the situation for children arriving in the UK with SEN was found to be particularly concerning amongst our sample. Amongst the Syrian parents consulted who had been resettled to the UK through the VPRS, over one third had children with SEN, notably autism, mobility and hearing difficulties. Almost all of the delays accessing education at primary level experienced by resettled Syrian parents are in relation to children with SEN, who experienced delays of up to 6 months. One parent explained that “they couldn’t find a school that would take a deaf child... so we were just waiting at home” (ParentWestMidlandsRS), and another that “there were no autism placements - it took six months, so his learning just couldn’t start” (ParentWestMidlandsRS). One voluntary sector worker recalled a primary-age child with severe autism where “the school refused to take the little one because they couldn’t meet her needs. It was very disruptive and concerning at the time - though now she’s in [a] special needs school and getting extra support” (KIIWestMidlands4). A primary school head confirmed the more drawn-out process of obtaining school places for children with SEN, explaining,

*“we’ve had some issues with the children that have presented themselves to start school here, who have had very severe special needs, where we’re talking things like breathing tubes and different types of things. What we’ve done is referred them to the LA and our community worker has worked with them to try to secure places for them in alternative provision, but it’s a very difficult process, and very lengthy” (KIIWestMidlands1).*

##### Delayed admissions to upper-secondary

Within our sample, 27% of the children entering education at the secondary level waited for more than three months. Almost all of these cases are children entering school in Year 10 or Year 11 - importantly, the age at which the majority of UASC enter the country. Arriving in the UK at upper-secondary age was cited as a barrier to accessing education by just under three-quarters of the experts interviewed, and three key factors were repeatedly cited as informing or causing these delays.

First, school staff reported concerns that admitting students at this level would have a negative impact on their GCSE or GCSE equivalent results profile. This was also perceived by voluntary sector and Local Authority staff attempting to obtain places for children at this level. One Local Authority representative in Scotland explained that “the difficult age group is 14 and over - after that it’s much more exam-based so it’s more difficult to slot in” (KIIScotland1), and another professional in the West Midlands said,

*“We had a lad here last year who arrived in the UK in April desperate to go to school - and this is off-the-scale unacceptable, he was 16, so should have been in Year 11, and there was no school in Birmingham who wanted a GCSE aged child who didn’t speak a word of English, in April of Year 11” (KIIWestMidlands6).*

The majority of experts from London and the South East had the same concerns, with one Local Authority representative from London saying she had found it difficult to find places for children at this level and believed that schools were “afraid of impact on their results, so will say they don’t have the wherewithal to support them” (KIILondon2).

Second, school staff and education policy experts reported concerns that this in turn would have a negative impact on OFSTED ratings and school performance tables. The issue, suggested several experts, is with the way in which school performance is assessed - at present, schools are not wrong to fear that poor results may influence their positioning on league tables and the like. Instead of assessing the progress made from the point of entry into the school, at whatever level, academic performance is measured against the fixed point of GCSE or equivalent pass rates. As a result, as one policy analyst explained, “one way for schools to get a good rating is to manage the pupils getting into the school, rather than managing the ones in the school” (KIILondon7). The high-stakes accountability system of school assessment in the UK can, the same expert had found “push some schools into unintended strategies of how to manage their perceived performance...ending in inappropriate behaviours around admissions or exclusions” (KIILondon7).

Third, Local Authority staff reported a lack of individual institution level knowledge about measures designed to protect schools admitting newly arrived children in Years 10 and 11 from a negative impact on their published results and position in league tables (i.e. from precisely what school staff claimed and/or are perceived to be most worried about). Each year, a school census is carried out to record which pupils are enrolled in which UK schools. In general, if a child is recorded as being on roll at a particular school in the January of their Year 11 year, they will count in the school’s results. However, if a pupil arrived in England in the last two years, and comes from a country where English is not the official language, they can be omitted from the school’s results (Nye 2017). Knowledge of this provision, however, is extremely limited. Less than a quarter of the professionals interviewed in England were aware of this provision, and, when it was mentioned, it was in the context of lack of knowledge, with one Local Authority representative saying that, in their experience, “lots of schools don’t know [about this]... so lack of awareness in schools of these options is a factor leading to them delaying” (KIILondon2).

## Academies and Grammar Schools

The above-mentioned issues around admissions delays at upper-secondary level were described as particularly problematic in academies and grammar schools in England. The challenge with grammar schools was noted to be particularly difficult in Kent (the only region consulted where the education system is primarily selective). Here, in the region of the UK that has historically looked after the highest numbers of UASC (currently decreasing as a result of the NTS), an education professional explained that “the grammar schools won’t take these young people at all - they won’t look at them, because they can just say they don’t meet the academic criteria, or didn’t pass the entrance exam” (KIISouthEast1).

The challenge with academies is primarily linked to the inability of the Local Authority to direct an academy to accept a child. These schools are essentially able to act as their own admissions authorities - and this, explained multiple professionals, can make it difficult for Local Authority staff to secure places for children. Should an academy decline to offer a child a place, the Local Authority themselves cannot direct them to do so, but instead must request that the Secretary of State direct the school to accept the child. One Local Authority staff member explained that

*“going to the Secretary of State for Education to get them to tell the school to accept the child takes much longer - and there’s a perception that academies know they can refuse and get away with it for a much longer period of time - and that this will put the Virtual School in a very difficult position because they are desperate to get the child into education within a certain time-frame... so schools employ delaying tactics in the hope that you will go elsewhere” (KIILondon2)*

These admissions challenges notwithstanding, it should be noted that there are also notable examples of good practice in certain academies once children are admitted, and these are examined in Section 4 of this report.

### **4.2.3. Contextual barriers**

Barriers to access linked not to the education system or policies, nor to individual school or college level challenges, but rather to the broader situation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK have been classed as contextual barriers. The most frequently identified barriers to accessing education at this level were dispersal and temporary accommodation issues; mental health and age assessments.

#### **National Transfer Scheme, dispersal and temporary accommodation**

No children interviewed had participated in the NTS. However, a quarter of the professionals interviewed noted this as a key issue affecting or likely to affect education for UASC. Two critical concerns emerged: first, whether UASC are enrolled in education prior to moving, able to access education promptly after moving, and whether the process of moving disrupts their education; and second, whether UASC are in fact disadvantaged by being moved to regions with less experience in caring for unaccompanied minors and thus fewer specialist services.

Experiences around whether or not UASC were enrolled in education prior to transfer were mixed, and yet, in the absence of a rapidly and smoothly functioning transfer system, the impact on children was reported as negative in both scenarios. Where children were not enrolled in education prior to transfer, delays in transfer were frequently reported to mean that they remained out of education for several months. One former Virtual School Head, from a Local Authority with high numbers of UASC, said that it was common practice for staff to be told not to look for education placements for newly arrived UASC for the first 21 days, as it was expected that they would be transferred - but that transfer itself was often delayed due to issues within the receiving Local Authority (accommodation not yet secured, forms not completed etc). When children were enrolled prior to transfer, they were then reported as not wanting to move, and experiencing disruption when they did. One London teacher described being told that a student was moving to Manchester the next day, explaining that although the young person had been informed he would be transferred several weeks previously, the college had not been informed. Despite the college teacher asking the Local Authority for "a contact number of the new teacher in Manchester to be able to do an educational handover" they were told that "this wasn't arranged yet" and left with little assurance that the young person would not face another significant gap in education following transfer.

The challenge of UASC being transferred to areas without specialist services must clearly be assessed in the light of overstretched services in areas with large numbers of UASC. Nonetheless, several professionals, particularly in Scotland and Wales, shared concerns that "some of the Local Authorities that are willing to take young people don't actually have the services that are needed" (KIIScotland6). At present, the NTS is too recent a development for robust data on outcomes for young people transferred to regions with small numbers of UASC to be available, but careful monitoring over the next few years may provide useful lessons for the sector.

For asylum seeking children in families, being placed in temporary accommodation prior to dispersal represented one of the most significant barriers to accessing education, with over half of the children in the sample unable to start school whilst in this type of accommodation. Families are supposed to be moved from initial temporary accommodation to their dispersal area accommodation within 19 days, however, several families in the West Midlands reported remaining in initial accommodation for 6 months. One professional supporting families in the West Midlands confirmed these long waits for dispersal, saying,

*“I get that if they are only there for less than three weeks, it’s ok to say wait, because if they are then going to be moved again, you know, three weeks is not very long. But we have become hyper aware of the families that have ended up in that place for far longer than that, and therefore they are not just missing three weeks of education... So I think there is something particular around what educational provision there is for that group of people who are in very temporary accommodation - how are those needs being met, and how are they being catered for?” (KIIWestMidlands6).*

The need to address the specific educational needs of asylum-seeking children waiting for long periods in temporary accommodation was reiterated by experts from across the three countries, with one respondent in Wales identifying this as “one of the biggest” problems faced (KIIWales1), with another seeing families regularly remaining in this accommodation for two months prior to dispersal (KIIWales6).

Even once dispersed, or whilst in the care of a Local Authority, other children reported being placed in schools far away from their home, making travel to school both time-consuming and costly. One parent told of their child being placed in a primary school two hours away from their accommodation, and a small minority of UASC explained that although they would be able to get to school within 30 minutes on public transport, delays issuing travel passes meant they had to walk up to one and a half hours each way to get to school.

## **Mental health**

Issues around mental health frequently present as a barrier to remaining and thriving in education (see Section 5.1), and yet, although to a lesser extent, also emerged as significant in constraining access to education. Just under a quarter of professionals consulted identified this as a barrier to

*“Even accessing education, mental health challenges are still a problem. It’s not unusual that we get referrals for 1:1 education support for young people who just can’t cope in a school environment, can’t cope with being around other people in big groups, can’t yet engage in a routine” (KIILondon1).*

Two UASC shared their experiences of mental health challenges when trying to start school. One told that,

*“I wasn’t feeling well emotionally and I wanted to wait for a while before starting school. I was feeling very sad and lonely when I first arrived to England. I found it hard to integrate with other people. Everything was nice but I didn’t want to go to college because there were lots of people and I didn’t want to share my experiences with anyone.”*

Another, speaking more broadly about the collective experiences of him and his friends, said that “you might not be psychologically ready if you have experienced rape, harassment, torture in the past, this may still be on your mind and so you can’t focus on going to school or you are scared.” (ChildLondonUASC)

## Age assessment

Children undergoing age assessment processes were reported to experience notable barriers accessing appropriate education. Just under a quarter of the UASC interviewed had had to wait for a school or college place, or been told they were not eligible for education as a result of an age-assessment process. In all cases, this was ultimately overturned and the young person was admitted to school or college at the appropriate level - but typically having missed out on several months of relevant education. One shared that "I had a problem about my age. They believed the wrong age and I was waiting 6 months - then they put me to a foster carer in April and three months was still left of the school year, but I was waiting until August". Another UASC and two other professionals shared cases of children being age-assessed with adults and told that their only education options were part time ESOL courses for adults aged 19 and above, that they would have to pay for.

The issue of age assessments is complex - and balancing children's rights with safeguarding in schools was repeatedly reported as a challenge. Practice around this appears to vary between Local Authorities - with some treating children as the age they present at until proved otherwise, and others treating possible adults as adults until proved to be children. One voluntary sector professional described a situation where

*"We did get a referral from a Local Authority of two 17 year olds to try and get them into education, but they withdrew the referral because they said they are likely to be age assessed as adults and moved out of London, so it wasn't worth getting them in college now. It seems unfair to me to assume the outcome of someone's age assessment and deny them education in the meantime." (KII London1) (ChildLondonUASC)*

A Local Authority representative from the South East, though, explained that

*"It is an intentional barrier... if their age is controversial, we will not put young people we are sure are adults in school. A few possible adults have really wanted to go to school but we said 'no we are not doing that'*

However, in contrast to the London Local Authority approach described above, she continued to report that "if they wanted college we would have done that as there is different provision for an older age range", and there was no longer a safeguarding issue (KII SouthEast7).

In a different region, a further Local Authority representative argued that schools should accept young people at the age they present as, regardless of ongoing or planned age assessments, but conceded that,

*"as a borough, in practice, if we actually think a young person is significantly over the age they are presenting, we wouldn't be pushing a school because of the potential safeguarding issues, and we would be prioritising an age assessment... but we have a backlog of age disputes here... all of this area is a bit grey for schools." (KII WML10)*

## 4.3 Improving access: what helps?

### Improving access: key learning

Refugee and asylum seeking children's entry to education is facilitated by

- Clear Local Authority admissions policies, particularly on in-year arrivals at the upper secondary level, and innovative use of Pupil Premium Plus, Pupil Equity Fund and Pupil Development Grant
- The commitment of particular Local Authority and school/college-based staff
- The inclusion of dedicated content on meeting the educational needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children in school/college/Local Authority staff training
- The development of a school-wide ethos of welcome to refugee and asylum seeking children
- The presence of voluntary sector advocates and support workers

### 4.3.1. Local Authority good practice

At the Local Authority Level, clear internal admissions policies, implemented uniformly, appeared to have a positive impact on access to education for UASC. In particular, transparent and clear but flexible processes around in-year arrivals was significant, as was the commitment and expertise of Local Authority staff, and innovative use of Pupil Premium Plus by Virtual Schools.

#### In-year arrivals

As noted above, in-year arrival is a significant barrier to accessing education; in England, several professionals noted that children who arrived just after the In-Year Fair Access Panel had met would face a delay of at least a month until the panel would meet again and consider their case. Practice around in-year admissions was reported to improve when Local Authorities have a published and widely disseminated borough wide policy on in-year admissions that schools are familiar with. A notable example of good practice regarding in-year arrivals was provided by several Local Authorities who had maintained a centralised EAL service, and described a system whereby their English as an Additional Language (EAL) or Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) advisors would meet with newly arrived children individually to conduct an assessment before the panel met. This enabled them to present an informed recommendation to the panel about the type of placement most appropriate for each child.

*"We'd say, this child is really bright and has huge potential, but will need this particular form of support, or, this child isn't suitable for school and would do better in college ESOL - this was really helpful for schools... it unlocked a huge barrier because they could be reassured they were getting children who were suitably placed" (KILondon5).*

Providing this level of detailed information for the head teachers attending the panel was described as helpful by a professional in the North of England, who explained the importance of children “going into schools where the head teachers feel they have the best systems in place to support them” (KIINorthWest1).

Professionals from the majority of regions reported easier experiences enrolling in-year arrivals into further education. Several FE institutions (in London, Oxford and the West Midlands) with specialist ESOL and basic skills provision for 16-18 year olds operate either a rolling enrolment system, or an enrolment system with fixed but regular entry points. Where colleges operated this type of entry system, children were able to enter education much more quickly than in cities or localities where admissions were less flexible.

#### Local Authority staff

The quality of Local Authority support was identified by the professionals consulted as the single most important factor influencing a child’s access to education, and, when high quality was cited, as an enabling factor by two thirds of experts consulted. In particular, the commitment and expertise of individual Local Authority staff (particularly Virtual School Heads, Social Workers and Leaving Care Personal Advisors) was perceived as a key determiner of success in accessing education by just under half the UASC consulted. Where some reported feeling neglected or frustrated with their social workers (see Section 4.2.1), almost as many reported feelings of gratitude for the dedication or effort shown by particular staff members. UASC described social workers or key workers completing forms for them, advocating on their behalf to schools or colleges, helping them access interim or summer school provision and being “kind” (ChildLondonUASC), “good to me” (ChildSouthEastUASC) and “helping with everything they could” (ChildSouthEastUASC).

School staff also repeatedly stated that positive partnerships with the Local Authority, and proactive social workers helped facilitate access to their schools. Several examples of this happening were provided in Oxfordshire, where one secondary school teacher explained that it helped having “a social worker to push things - having the Virtual School get in touch with us saying ‘hurry up, this child needs to be in a mainstream class as soon as possible” (KIISouthEast4). Another secondary school teacher from the same area confirmed that “it works really well where a social worker will flag up a student well in advance when on the Orientation Programme, and say this young person wants to come to school. We can then get the assessment and risk assessment and background information in advance. I get emails from the social worker with a bit of background – e.g. they may have behaviour problems, or be very shy; it is good to have basic information about who to expect when they arrive. If we get this well in advance, we have already met and assessed them, we are prepared when they walk in the door” (KIISouthEast3). Though it was noted that this didn’t happen in all cases, this type of proactive support and engagement from a Local Authority at the point of admissions was considered critical.

Where dedicated UASC teams do still exist, this was also seen as instrumental in facilitating prompt access to education, with local authority staff and their voluntary sector partners in these areas reporting significant benefit to young people. One social worker commented that “it really helps having a dedicated UASC team - I don’t think that is common anymore. At the last Virtual School conference it was clear that [we] were miles ahead in terms of UASC because of this” (KIISouthEast1).

## Innovative use of Pupil Premium Plus

Innovative use of Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) by Virtual Schools with high numbers of UASC was also cited as an example of good practice. The Virtual School Head in Croydon explained that instead of spending their PPP on individual tuition (typically one or two hours per week) for children waiting for places in mainstream schools, they had used this money to establish and cover the costs of their own interim provision (see Section 4.1 Box 1). She explained that when PPP is spent on individual tuition, “you’re not getting the social interaction, you’re not getting the variety of subjects. So this is far more cost effective, and we can see the better outcomes ourselves as well” (KIILondon13).

In the West Midlands, Solihull College run an ESOL summer school programme for international students, and the Local Authority has negotiated with the college to include UASC, using PPP to cover the costs. A Local Authority representative explained that “whatever happens, we don’t like to see our young people left over the summer, especially our very latest arrivals” (KIIMWML10)

### 4.3.2. School and college good practice

At the point of admission to a school or college, the three factors most commonly cited as facilitating access were welcome, dedicated staff, and training.

#### Welcome

A welcoming atmosphere and approach was cited as important from the point of initial admissions meeting. Education professionals repeatedly spoke about the importance of creating a safe and friendly environment even before the child had arrived for their first day. One London school teacher explained that part of her job was to ensure that all refugee and asylum seeking children receive a “warm and generous welcome, to feel that they are the most special people at that moment, from the moment they walk in for an initial meeting” (KIILondon12). When working with refugee or asylum seeking families, she emphasized the importance of building a positive relationship with parents from the outset, saying

*“at the entry point, I engage the family as fully as I can. I try to avoid interpreters, because I want that eye contact, gestures, we make it work. We try to get the mum and or dad into our informal English classes straight away – it’s about assimilation into school and being able to encourage their child’s learning right from the point of enquiring about a place. They also learn themselves about how to navigate the system and become a partner with us in their child’s education”. (KIILondon12)*

This was just as important at the FE level, and one ESOL teacher in Scotland told how

*“we make sure I’m the person to do that initial admissions test with the young people - that initial contact is very informal, a very simple test. They are often very traumatised, scared, so I take the time, make them feel comfortable, make it as simple as possible... not asking them intrusive questions, even around did you study in your own country, for how long etc - sounds obvious, but these are the questions that are asked when young people are going into adult courses.” (KIIScotland4)*

**Box 2: An Ethos of care and welcome: Newman Catholic College (Secondary School), London, in the words of their Refugee Project Coordinator**

“There are about 20 UASC in our school, and around 70 refugee or asylum seeking students in total. My job is to make sure that these children receive what we call a ‘warm and generous welcome’ - to feel that they are the most special people at that moment. We want to pour love and understanding into their lives at a difficult time. It’s about showing humanity and love so that people can start to feel safe and calm - and then able to learn. Sometimes this might involve doing home visits for refugee and asylum seeking families whose children are about to start - I’ve found you can’t just send out a letter because there is so much confusion about school and what it involves here, particularly if the parents haven’t had much education themselves. We are a Catholic school, that accepts children of all religions and none, and our Head’s vision is based on the words of the current Pope. He has said that he wants the Catholic church to live in a hurt, bruised and dirty world. So we want to get out there, and have the people who are hurt and bruised here - and we look for ways we can meet them at their point of need. We don’t have extra money, but it often just requires a different attitude and approach. Our motto is ‘heart speaks unto heart’, and the people who are recruited reflect this. This then affects the children - they are brought up in a school culture where you try to bless and serve others.”

**The school is a Level 2 UNICEF Rights Respecting School, and a Refugee Welcome School. For more detail on the content of their academic provision for refugee and asylum seeking children see Box 4.**

**Dedicated staff**

Building on this, having particular named staff responsible for admissions of refugee and asylum seeking children also increased the likelihood of them getting a place - particularly as a result of increased understanding of the issues these children have faced and the support needs they often present with. One Local Authority representative explained that “having a named person within the school - so the admissions officer and a designated teacher for looked-after children” (KIIWML10) that they are able to contact about new arrivals facilitates admissions. A national education expert also noted that the ability of designated staff at the point of admissions to conduct robust needs assessments, both academic and social, also increased the likelihood of a successful and appropriate placement for the child. Interestingly, and in contrast to the challenges of academy admissions discussed above, it was noted that in some cases, designated staff within these institutions may in fact have “a bit more leeway because they are in charge of their own admissions” (KIIWML4). The same professional provided the example of a “brilliant” academy in the West Midlands where dedicated staff had seemingly created places against the odds for significant numbers of refugee and asylum seeking children.

## Training

Professionals across the three countries reported that the more school-based staff were able to build an understanding of the issues facing refugee and asylum seeking children, and to increase expertise in their educational and support needs, the more likely they were to provide places. One London support worker described a situation where she accompanied a refugee child to an admissions meeting at a secondary school, and at the start of the meeting was told he would be on a waiting list. However, as the meeting progressed and their knowledge of his situation increased, they “bumped him up the list” (KIILondon1). Although support workers are not able to be in every admissions meeting to provide the requisite knowledge about refugee and asylum seeking children, professionals who had delivered or participated in training for school staff felt that this was of great benefit, and enabled school staff to make better and more informed decisions about admissions.

### 4.3.3. Voluntary sector good practice

Within the voluntary sector, the provision of advocates, and support with navigating admissions systems were the two key examples of good practice identified.

#### Advocates

For those entering the UK via a resettlement programme, the education support they received from the voluntary sector organisations contracted by the Local Authority to support them was, without exception, described as outstanding. One parent explained that “they welcomed us, they guided and showed us, they enrolled the children in school... it was very quick, we were surprised by how quick it was... the process was very fast because [support worker] helped us so much, he went with us to the schools, did the paperwork, he was very helpful” (ParentSouthEastRS). Professionals confirmed this sentiment, saying that “if you come on a resettlement programme, it’s all done for you - it’s all ready when they are on the plane, school meetings are already lined up” (KIIWales2).

#### **Box 3: Resettlement support for education**

##### **Displaced People in Action, Wales**

Displaced People in Action delivers orientation and support services to Syrian families resettled in several Welsh Borough Councils. Their education support to families includes the provision of interpreters and support workers to assist with school applications and enrolment. These same support workers and interpreters take children and their parents to visit schools, and help negotiate cultural issues including arranging the provision of halal food. They also complete all school forms, assist with buying uniforms and translate all letters coming from the new school as necessary. They are provided with the ages of the children arriving in advance, and so in many cases are able to arrange potential school places before families arrive.

##### **Upbeat Communities, Derbyshire**

Upbeat Communities provide support to Syrian refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. They have supported 48 refugees in 11 families in the 12 months leading up to November 2017, and will support another 50 refugees before April 2019. They aim to empower resettled refugees to thrive in their new environment, and have helped families find school places for their children by explaining the UK education system; arranging school visits; completing online application forms and attending admissions interviews with children and their parents; and assisting with the practical and logistical elements of starting school, including buying school uniforms and materials.

For those not part of a resettlement programme, the role of a voluntary sector advocate<sup>10</sup>, where available, had proved critical. When children or parents were asked what voluntary sector organisations had done to help them get a school or college place, the name of an individual person who had assisted them or argued on their behalf featured in almost all of the responses. The presence of an adult who would “explain the education system” (KII SouthEast4), “persist in the face of unreturned calls (KII Scotland5), “accompany children to admissions appointments and get paperwork done” (KII London1), and ensure “follow-up actions are arranged and completed” (KII London1) was often described as the key factor in obtaining a school or college place. Without this type of support, navigating enrolment days in particular was described as “unmanageable for new arrivals with low levels of English” (KII London1). Advocates also frequently needed to correct institutional understanding of eligibility, as in a case where

“the front desk people didn’t seem to know that the waiting 6 month rule didn’t apply to under 18s. So we were saying, no, you’re under 18 you can go for free; but they were coming back and saying ‘no, I’ve not been here six months, they told me I couldn’t register’. So there was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing, but eventually we managed to get them in” (KII WML6).

Several professionals described this type of support navigating admissions systems as particularly important for those children not in the care of the Local Authority, and therefore not automatically prioritised by schools. “Having the language to demonstrate someone’s vulnerability, even if they aren’t looked after, and knowing what to say to highlight that - it all helps”, told one education support worker (KII London1), and another confirmed that this was particularly the case for Dublin III young people (KII WML3).

Nonetheless, several professionals noted that, unlike with statutory services, there is no ‘entitlement’ to this type of voluntary sector support. Whether or not a child or family is assisted will depend on whether or not a support service exists in their locality, and on funding, capacity and particular project criteria if it does. A child or family will be taken on by a voluntary sector organisation “if they are lucky” (KII WML4), noted one professional, with another adding that “it shouldn’t be left that much to chance - that you have to meet the right person in the right place on the right day to get help” (KII WML6).

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*The term ‘advocate’ here includes any voluntary sector worker with a remit for supporting refugee and or asylum seeking children to access education. This encompasses support workers, case workers and trained volunteers, as well as those whose job title may include the term ‘advocate’.*

## 5: REMAINING AND THRIVING IN EDUCATION

It has long been understood that improving access to education for children affected by conflict and displacement is only a first step, albeit an important one. The quality of the education received, and children's ability not just to enrol, but to remain and thrive in education merit equal attention. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this report to examine academic outcomes for refugee and asylum seeking children, this section explores the barriers to remaining and thriving in education once enrolled, and the factors which enable this.

### 5.1 Barriers to remaining and thriving: what are the challenges?

#### Barriers to remaining and thriving in education: key learning

- At the systemic level, refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education is negatively affected by
  - Being placed in college when school is more appropriate, or in school when college is more appropriate
  - Limited access to full-time 16-18 ESOL
- At the individual institution level, refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education is negatively affected by
  - Insufficient EAL support in some schools
  - Challenges diagnosing and addressing SEN when combined with EAL needs
  - A lack of awareness of issues affecting refugee and asylum seeking children amongst some teachers and other school/college based staff
- Contextual factors negatively affecting refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education include
  - Mental health, particularly associated with past experiences and present asylum claim anxieties and leading to increased absences and exclusions
  - Poverty, particularly linked to ability to afford educational resources, participate in school trips and travel to and from school
  - Living in unstable accommodation

#### 5.1.1 Systemic barriers

The most frequently identified systemic barriers included inappropriate placement decisions and insufficiency of ESOL entitlement, each of which was cited as a challenge by just under a third of respondents. Although clearly linked to multiple individual institutions, these two issues have been categorised as systemic barriers because of the key role of Local Authority decision making (in the case of placement choice), and the links to national policies (in the case of ESOL entitlement).

## Suitability of placement

The majority of UASC arrive in the UK at an age where they would typically enter education at Year 10 or Year 11. As outlined above, this can prove challenging in terms of admissions. However, there is also substantial debate around whether school or college is the best place educationally for children arriving at this age. An unsuccessful placement will have a detrimental impact on a child, and yet the data collected for this report suggests that there is no generic correct answer as to where newly arrived 15 and 16 year olds should be placed. Amongst respondents, both children and professionals were split equally between those favouring school and those favouring college - with strongly held opinions on each side.

Where school was favoured it was due to perceptions of a smaller, more welcoming and pastoral environment, the opportunity to take GCSEs, and the presence of designated teachers who are obliged to communicate with the Local Authority. One support worker in Scotland had found that “the young people who get to go to school, they really benefit from it, so I’m not sure that the practice of sending everyone who is 16 to college necessarily works” (KIIScotland6). A Social Worker who preferred the school environment had found that “in college they hear no good English other than from the tutor, they make no friends outside of other ESOL students and they only use English in the classroom. Whereas, in the school, they are immersed with peers, learn about British culture and traditions, get pushed...” (KIILondon2). Several other professionals shared stories of academically able children who, because of their age, had been placed in part-time ESOL provision, when they could potentially have passed GCSEs in Maths or Science if given the opportunity and right support.

However, others had experienced children entering school in Year 10 or 11, but failing their GCSEs and achieving nothing until later moving to college. One FE manager explained,

*“we don’t think that the school provision is suitable for them because of the age at which they’ve entered school - e.g. if at 16 they’ve been put in for GCSEs as a token gesture, but don’t achieve anything... they come to us when they aren’t allowed to progress to A-Levels and find themselves in Entry 1, starting two years later than they could have. The problem is that there is so much messaging around the importance of GCSEs, and schools say we can give you GCSEs - but don’t say you’re going to get an F and it will be worthless to you.” (KIILondon4) .*

Several Local Authorities had noted this debate, and adopted a case-by-case approach on the understanding that each child is different. One EAL advisor explained that “there’s no answer as to whether school or college is better for a 15 or 16 year old on paper - we realised that these kids are not knowable on paper and we could make bad decisions. That’s why we started meeting with kids for interviews before the in-year fair access panel meetings, because you can’t make generalisations” (KIILondon5). Another EAL advisor reported that they too were assessing children before making a recommendation about whether school or college was more appropriate (KIILondon4). Critical to the decision are both the academic and social profile of the child, as well as the specific models of provision and support available within the relevant secondary school or FE college - of particular importance was the presence (or absence) of specialist programmes for newly arrived 16-18 year olds within the FE context.

## ESOL entitlement

Amongst UASC who were studying on ESOL programmes, additional hours were frequently requested. Full time ESOL is typically 16 hours per week, but, one third of children consulted who were studying on these courses considered this to be insufficient for the progress they aimed to make. Professionals concurred, explaining that too few hours lead to slow progress, which in turn lead to feelings of de-motivation and frustration.

### 5.1.2. Individual institution barriers

It is perhaps unsurprising that once a child is in school or college, the majority of challenges to remaining and thriving in education will be encountered at the individual institution level. The most frequently identified barriers at this stage included, in order, lack of language support; challenges addressing SEN; bullying and other social issues; and a lack of school-based expertise in working with refugee and asylum seeking children.

#### English as an Additional Language support

Difficulties obtaining the requisite level of English to catch up with peers was the most significant barrier to thriving in education, with over half the children, parents and professionals consulted considering this a challenge.

Several refugee parents reported that their children (at both primary and secondary levels) were given a week's worth of intensive language study, but then put into normal classes alongside the other children without additional support. One shared that "it was difficult for [her 11 year old daughter], just one week language lessons, after that she needed study everything in English" (ParentWMLRS), and another that the secondary school his son was placed in "never give him extra English support class - nothing happened" (ParentWMLAS).

Professionals repeatedly confirmed that "EAL is certainly a gap now" (KIWML11), that provision is "inconsistent from one school to another - some schools have brilliant provision and others have virtually none" (KIIScotland1), and that in many areas refugee or asylum seeking children will be in "classes that don't have language support assistants" (KIIScotland2).

Multiple school and local authority based professionals in England considered that the quality of EAL provision has (with some key exceptions) largely deteriorated since 2011 when specific central government funding for EAL pupils ended, and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) was absorbed into the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Although Local Authorities are still able to allocate funding to schools based on the size of their EAL cohorts, there are reported knowledge gaps in how these funds are spent. Reforms to local funding arrangements have constrained the ability of many Local Authorities to themselves fund central EAL specialist support services, with Local Authorities who do keep said services now charging schools to access them.

In one Local Authority currently transitioning to this new decentralised model, an EAL specialist confirmed that "schools will now have to use their DSG to buy us back in separately... the idea is that schools either use the money to buy us back (to provide the same sort of support we were giving centrally before), to appoint a teacher to coordinate provision, or to pay for extra EAL hours and the like". However, she and several others identified a key problem with the model, in that the head-count nature of the funding means that schools with small numbers of EAL children may not have the requisite funds to buy back expertise.

## English as an Additional Language support (cont)

She elaborated, “you could have a school that’s had very few EAL children, and suddenly a group arrive - at the moment they would get access to the same level of advice and service through us, but in future, if you get a few really vulnerable children you won’t have enough money to buy back the support those children will need” (KIILondon4). Another Local Authority professional concurred, reflecting that “we now have fewer resources available - the resource is really in the school. And the reality is, if the school has allocated their DSG budget and then a different cohort come in, where are they going to get the money from for [them]?” (KIIWML11)

## Diagnosing and addressing SEN

Whilst there is a rich body of research, guidance and good practice on the assessment and teaching of children with SEN, this does not commonly refer to EAL learners. At the same time, EAL guidance and resources rarely cater for those with learning difficulties. Identifying and addressing special educational needs amongst refugee and asylum-seeking cohorts was the second most frequently cited barrier to learning, with both under and over diagnosis considered to be hindering the learning of affected children.

Clearly, when children do not have English as their mother tongue, and have substantial gaps in prior learning, SEN can be obscured and may take longer to be recognised. Nonetheless, a small number of professionals interviewed had witnessed refugee or asylum seeking children’s education constrained by late assessment linked to a persistent refusal to acknowledge that a child’s lack of progress may not be accounted for by language difficulties alone. “There’s almost just an assumption that it’s a language issue, and so it isn’t addressed” recounted one professional (KIIWML13), and another added that the process of advocating for a child to be assessed and properly supported “can drag on for two or three years at a time” (KIILondon13). Whilst professionals understood that “it can take a while to try and disentangle if it is a language or a learning issue” (KIILondon8), under and late diagnosis of SEN was viewed as particularly concerning in cases where children had self-identified as struggling, telling a teacher or support worker “I can’t learn and I don’t know why”, but remained unassessed (KIIWML13). A national expert also reported cases of overdiagnosis, where “children who don’t have special needs are deemed to have special needs just because they don’t speak English very well” (KIINational2), and subsequently placed in groups where they are not expected to make progress that they may in fact ultimately be capable of.

These cases of delayed or misdiagnosis notwithstanding, the importance of being able to properly discriminate between the presentation of EAL and SEN issues was readily acknowledged by the teachers and other education experts interviewed for this report. However, whilst guidance on this is available, it is clear that it must both be more widely disseminated, and go further. At present (with a few notable exceptions from NALDIC, 2011), the majority of guidance remains primarily limited to distinguishing a lack of English and literacy from SEN. When presented with cases of SEN and EAL together in the same learner, teachers and support staff reported an almost uniform lack of resources and good practice principles - of particular concern given the relatively high proportion of Syrian refugee children presenting with a combination of EAL, SEN and psychological distress.

## **Bullying and social issues**

A quarter of the children represented in our sample had experienced bullying, or other forms of social exclusion and isolation since starting school or college, including at the primary level. Parents explained that their children “can’t enjoy his education because he is bullied” (ParentWMLFR), and that “my son loves science but this school never discover that because he is suffering from bullying - he can’t focus on anything” (ParentWMLFR). One parent went so far as to say that her son was so unhappy that “he said ‘I want to go back to Syria’ - he is prepared to go back to war” (ParentWMLRS).

Professionals had also witnessed “bullying or discrimination by other students” (KIILondon10), and worked with children that “were bullied and intimidated” (KIIWML5). One policy expert told of teachers reporting increasing incidents of hate crime with racial and immigration motives (KIINational3), with data provided from 29 Police Forces to Associated Press confirming this. The number of hate crimes committed at or near schools or colleges in the last two years has risen by almost two thirds to 1,487 (TES 2018). When reported, these crimes are allocated ‘flags’ that describe the motivation behind the attack. In the last two academic years, the race and ethnicity flag was applied to 71% of hate crimes committed at or near an educational establishment. Professionals considered that children did not need to be a victim of such a crime, or of bullying themselves in order to experience a negative psychological impact - witnessing, or simply being aware of this type of behaviour was enough to cause significant distress or fear in learners.

## **Lack of professional expertise**

Finally, two thirds of professionals considered that all of these challenges were exacerbated by a general lack of expertise amongst school staff and teachers in dealing with refugee and asylum seeking children. Whilst some schools have elected to provide specialist training for their staff (see Section 5.2.2), this remains rare, and staff may be left ill-equipped to meet the complex needs of children affected by conflict in an often already under-resourced and overstretched sector.

### **5.1.3. Contextual barriers**

Barriers to remaining and thriving in education linked not to the education system or policies, nor to school or college level challenges, but rather to the broader situation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, have been classed as contextual barriers. The most frequently identified barriers to remaining and thriving in education at this level were, in order, mental health; poverty; placement and accommodation; and issues related to the process of claiming asylum in the UK.

## **Mental health**

The most significant contextual barrier to remaining and thriving in education was mental health difficulties, cited as a severely limiting factor for children by almost half the professionals and a quarter of the children and parents consulted.

The children interviewed spoke about suffering from serious emotional distress for multiple intersecting reasons<sup>11</sup>, including but not limited to, the violence they had witnessed in their countries of origin and/or on journeys to the UK; the grief of being separated from family; the stress of the asylum process; and the fear of the future.

In the cases of the children represented in our sample, these challenges lead to a variety of education-affecting challenges, including being unable to concentrate in class; absenteeism (typically linked to nighttime insomnia or nightmares and consequent morning sleeping); inability to retain information; becoming withdrawn or angry; self-harm and suicide attempts, and struggling to make friends.

Teachers reported feeling ill-equipped to deal with these challenges, with one secondary school teacher explaining,

*“last year I had 5 year 11 boys that were all UASC...I didn’t know that some of them had experienced such huge trauma, I didn’t know what they had suffered on their journeys, didn’t know about their nightmares... I didn’t know what was going on in their heads. On the first day things were absolutely fine, then something happened, and [one of the boys] was rocking under the table, putting his arms around me and crying... With the UASC you just have no idea where they have come from and what has happened, what situations have they left, have they seen something horrendous. That is what I struggle with. I don’t feel trained in that either, all I can do is nurture and provide pastoral and kindness and time, but I don’t feel equipped for young people who have experienced these horrendous journeys” (KIIOxford4).*

At other times, mental health challenges have been misunderstood and treated as disciplinary issues. This issue was raised by just under a quarter of professionals, one of whom had experienced these difficulties being viewed as “a laziness issue, but in fact it’s a real genuine challenge getting into college or school because of difficulty sleeping at night, flashbacks and nightmares... so you’ll get people who are regularly late, and going through disciplinary measures because of that, or people like [name of child], excluded twice within a year because of low attendance and poor punctuality” (KIILondon1).

When issues are identified by teachers and other support workers as mental health difficulties, accessing appropriate support for the child was repeatedly described as problematic. Eligibility thresholds for specialist counselling or therapy were high, and, when met, waiting lists long. One teacher explained that “it takes a long time to get emotional or psychological support” (KIIOxford5), and another education support worker (who was not herself a therapist) was told by a specialist therapy organisation that they would not be able to support the child in question because he was receiving support from her (of a non-clinical nature) and they were only able to accept referrals of children receiving no other form of support. As a result, front-line professionals including teachers, key workers and support workers are left attempting to “do their best” (KIILondon12) for children who appear to be in need of specialist clinical support.

## Poverty

Poverty, or lack of financial resources, was identified as a hindrance to educational wellbeing by just under one third of child, parent and professional respondents and was cited equally by UASC, parents of refugee children and parents of asylum seeking children. Amongst professionals, children in asylum seeking families were perceived to be slightly worse affected. In the educational context, poverty was primarily reported as affecting their ability to purchase equipment and learning aids (including laptops, computers and dictionaries); being able to afford the cost of school trips; struggling to cover the cost of daily transportation to and from school when allocated a place far from their accommodation (for those not eligible for, or experiencing delays in receiving travel passes); and, amongst the 16-18 year olds, managing conflicting priorities of education and needing to contribute to the family income whether through formal or informal employment.

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*Note that as per RSN’s Research Ethics Framework, children were not asked about mental health or distressing past experiences directly, but brought it up themselves when asked about what can make going to school and learning difficult for them.*

## Placement and accommodation issues

Just under a quarter of professionals identified barriers connected to placement accommodation for looked-after children. This was primarily with regard to 16 and 17 year old UASC who are typically placed not with foster carers, but rather in multi-occupancy supported accommodation, with a group of other UASC. Whilst professionals commended the work of dedicated key workers in specific supported accommodation organisations, teachers nonetheless noted that

*“we do see a difference between those in foster care and those in supported accommodation - not necessarily in all cases, but we have more mechanisms for dealing with issues like lateness for a young person in a foster placement. With supported accommodation...there is no-one to wake them up in the morning” (KIIOxford3).*

A Local Authority representative (along with several teachers and support workers), considered that children in multi-occupancy supported accommodation were less able to complete the substantial amount of self-directed learning often incorporated into courses for this age group. She explained “we have got some incredibly committed young people who work very hard on their education, yet at the same time I am sure their living situation is a barrier - for study, you wouldn’t choose a 16 year old living with a group of other 16 year olds” (KIIOxford7).

## Broader asylum issues

Simply being an asylum seeker was considered to have a detrimental impact on educational well-being by just under a quarter of child/parent and professional respondents. The three key issues identified as having a negative effect on education were, in this order, the stress associated with approaching the age of 18; the high volume of extra-curricular appointments that children were expected to keep; and, for children in asylum seeking families, dispersal issues.

Many professionals working with UASC noted a correlation between approaching the age of 18 (and the consequent stresses of beginning the process of applying for further leave) and a disengagement with education or decreased ability to concentrate on studies. “You are so scared that the Home Office reject you,” said one UASC, “that you can’t think about study, there is so much pressure in your head” (ChildLondonUASC). College-based professionals noted increased absenteeism and exacerbation of mental health issues in young people approaching this stage. Extra-curricular appointments included meetings with solicitors, social workers and other professionals supporting them, and impacted not just UASC, but also asylum-seeking children in families, who were frequently expected to accompany parents and, once their English had improved due to participation in the school system, assist with interpreting. Teachers reported that, particularly in the case of appointments with solicitors, the perceived power dynamic meant that children would simply take the first appointment time they were offered, rather than asking for a different time that did not conflict with their school or college time-table. For asylum-seeking children in families, dispersal was as much a problem at this post-enrolment stage as at the access to education stage. Whilst those who were not accepted into schools as a result of being in temporary education were reported to miss out on substantial periods of schooling (see Section 4.2.3), those who were accepted, and then dispersed, also experienced significant disruption to their education. Teachers and support workers reported children having to leave with only a few days’ notice, without any time for continuity planning.

## 5: REMAINING AND THRIVING IN EDUCATION

### Remaining and thriving in education: key learning

Refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education is facilitated by

- The presence of a committed, caring adult, who will support them over an extended period of time (for UASC in particular)
- Participation in education programmes where content and curriculum have been adapted to meet their needs
- High levels of pastoral care and mental health support within the school setting
- Partnerships between schools/colleges and specialist voluntary sector organisations to provide on-site advice, guidance and support
- Creative approaches to peer support, including buddy schemes and school-wide awareness raising
- Training on meeting the educational needs of refugee and asylum seeking children included as standard in teacher and other school/college staff continuing professional development

#### 5.2.1. Local Authority good practice

Once children are in school, as at the admissions stage, the commitment and expertise of Local Authority staff (particularly Virtual School Heads and Social Workers) was found to be instrumental in helping children remain and thrive in education. For UASC, the importance of a committed and caring adult who was able to act as a consistently encouraging presence was found to be critical, and for several, their social worker fulfilled this role. Linked to this, in England, social workers who took a proactive and personalised approach to managing and reviewing Personal Education Plans (PEP) were perceived as contributing to more positive outcomes.

In several instances, Local Authorities who no longer had specialist UASC teams had arranged for social work and education teams to receive training on supporting refugee and asylum seeking children in education from external providers. In all cases mentioned, this was perceived as highly beneficial.

#### 5.2.2. School and college good practice

At the school and college level, refugee and asylum seeking children expressed greater levels of enjoyment and motivation in education when, in this order, careful consideration had been given to the curriculum and content of the courses they were studying; pastoral support and mental health provision within the school were strong; teachers adopted a flexible and personalised approach; and partnerships with specialist organisations and peer support schemes were in place.

## Course content

A tailored or adapted curriculum was found to be particularly helpful for children who arrived into secondary school and FE, where they were less likely to be quickly mainstreamed. For those studying in secondary school, professionals repeatedly stated that models combining intensive English language input in a separate group, with integration with non-EAL pupils for creative arts and sports were beneficial. Some schools with larger numbers of newly arrived refugee and asylum seeking learners had experienced success developing various streams within their EAL provision, ranging from basic intensive ESOL, numeracy and IT, to a reduced package of GCSEs with significant additional English language support.

At the FE level, children were considered to fare better on full-time specialist ESOL programmes for 16-18 year olds that integrate other subjects - including maths, IT, creative arts and a variety of life-skills. Though versions of these courses can be found in a large number of major cities, in other areas, children who did not obtain, or were too old for, a place in a school were typically entering part time adult ESOL. One FE professional in Scotland explained that the specialist 16-18 ESOL provision she ran in Glasgow, was, to the best of her knowledge, the only such course in Scotland, with part-time adult ESOL the alternative. As with providers in England and Wales who run such programmes, she explained that “we have taken the main components of the ESOL curriculum and created a youth-friendly approach” (KIIScotland4). In this instance, they based the learning on topics (such as Geography) teaching integrated grammar and vocabulary.

### **Box 4: Innovative approaches to course content:**

#### **Anniesland Campus, Glasgow Clyde Further Education College**

Whilst ESOL in Scotland is generally aimed at adults, a team at the Anniesland campus of Glasgow Clyde FE College has developed a programme specifically designed for young people who are not able to access school places (usually due to their age). The course is full time, and follows a youth-friendly topic-based ESOL curriculum. Geography, for example, will involve learning English language through the lens of that topic, with integrated grammar and vocabulary. In addition to topic-based ESOL, the programme integrates outdoor learning (in partnership with the Forestry Commission) and creative arts. This enables young people to access the countryside, and use and explore the non-English language or academic skills and talents they may already have. Staff delivering the course are also trained in strategies for dealing with grief and loss (using the Seasons for Growth approach), to enable them to help young people build resilience whilst in the college environment.

#### **Newman Catholic College (Secondary School) London**

When a refugee or asylum-seeking child who does not have sufficient English to enter the mainstream school programme enrolls at Newman Catholic College, they enter one of six different levels of ‘project’ classes. These range from provision for children with no English and limited or no previous education, through vocational subjects, to a bespoke GCSE package. Each child’s English level and academic progress is assessed every half term in order to determine whether they are ready to move up a level within the project classes, or move into the mainstream school programme. The project classes GCSE package is designed for EAL children who are bright and ambitious, with some previous education, but who do not have the full language ability to thrive in a mainstream GCSE class. At present around 25 children are enrolled on this programme, following a set programme of GCSEs with bespoke additional language support.

## Pastoral support and mental health provision

Just over half the professionals consulted considered the availability and quality of on-site pastoral support, and where needed, mental health provision, to be critical for refugee and asylum seeking children in schools and colleges. Whilst the children and parents interviewed did not use the term 'pastoral support', over one third alluded to the same concept, telling that "having someone to listen to me" (ChildLondonUASC), knowing that "someone is caring about your life" (ChildOxfordUASC), and that "there is someone I can talk to if I have problem" (ChildLondonUASC) all helped them to remain in school or college and focus on their studies.

Professionals reported that the presence of designated, specialist pastoral support workers within the school was critical, with one Local Authority worker explaining that she had seen the positive impact of "named people within the school who will be responsible for their wellbeing" (KIILondon5). Another secondary school teacher spoke about the pastoral support they had developed, particularly for UASC in their school, saying,

*"I totally rate the EAL interventions, but having a loving caring adult who is there every day who is smiling and has pastry or coffee if needed, that is always showing them that they care, and having a relationship with that key person, I think that is the key. It takes time to build that but when you have that, the student turns up every morning and tells you if there is a problem... so key that they have that in school when they don't have this at home" (KIIOxford4).*

A further professional described the bi-lingual pastoral support provision established in her school after it became clear that, as well as unaccompanied minors,

*"we have children at home who have parents who are as traumatised as they are and children don't want to discuss their challenges with their parents so as to not worry them, and so for them to have someone at school who shares their language and who they can talk to, is a really massive help to them. We have had a girl who in Syria had to witness the hanging of her grandparents and that was something they'd not discussed as a family. So, we create a space helping them to deal with the traumas they have experienced but not pushing them" (KIINorthWest1)..*

A minority of professionals knew of or worked in schools that had moved beyond pastoral support to in-house mental health provision, but, whilst of "immense benefit, because of the enormous challenges trying to refer children on to external mental health services" (KIILondon4), such on-site expertise was rare. However, a planned investment by the Departments of Health and Education of £300m in mental health support in schools, may lead to positive change. The government proposals, which aim to reach one in four schools in England by 2022, include the creation of new mental health support teams, working in and directly with schools; a new four week waiting limit for NHS children and young people's mental health services; specialist training for senior designated mental health leads in schools; and awareness training for every primary and secondary school in the country, both for staff and pupils.

In the meantime, notable good-practice equipping pastoral, student support, and indeed frontline teaching staff working with refugee and asylum seeking children with mental health first aid skills has been developed. Academics in Oxford have developed a mental health toolbox for schools that non-clinical staff without a mental health background can use when engaging with relevant children (see Fazel 2014). All staff in one voluntary sector organisation consulted had been trained in use of this toolbox, and reported it to have significantly improved their ability to support refugee and asylum-seeking children with mental health difficulties (KIILondon1).

## **Box 5: Mental health toolbox for non-mental health professionals in schools**

### **Dr Mina Fazel, Oxford University**

Dr Fazel's research suggests that traditional mental health services might not access over half of the children who require support, and recommends that innovative ways for services to maximise children's emotional, cognitive and social development be found. Dr Fazel specialises in mental health interventions for refugee children, and has developed a mental health toolbox for schools that any front-line worker can utilise in the educational setting, even if they do not have a mental health background. She has found that school-based interventions hold promise as access to refugee children may be easier within the school setting. Dr Fazel provides training in the use of the toolkit to school-based staff and other educational practitioners.

The importance of non-mental health specialists, and teachers in particular, developing an awareness of helpful approaches when working with children who have experienced intense emotional distress was emphasized. Behaviours that come naturally to many teachers, but may be thought of as simple and so go unnoticed or unappreciated were explicitly valued. Kindness, care and warmth in a school teacher, for example, were identified by two thirds of children and parents as one of the key things that had helped them in school. The phrase "she/he/my teacher is kind" as a response to the question "what helps you learn well in school" recurred fifteen times in interview transcripts, and was often linked to improved ability to learn - with one child explaining that "when she is teaching I never stress... for me when she is teaching my brain is becoming free" (ChildWMLUASC). One Local Authority representative agreed that

*"an approach of warmth is so important. In the college here all the teachers who deal with these young people are committed and want to help the young people – this is really important. I heard a few years ago of a teacher who was shouting a lot and that was very negative and made a lot of young people leave. That kind of approach of kindness is important." (KIIOxford5)*

Another school-based pastoral support worker explained the importance of valuing and assessing these behaviours in schools, "commending a reputation for care just as you would good academic results" as critical to leading to institution-wide culture change.

### **Personalised approach**

The value of schools and colleges adopting a personalised approach, and, to the extent possible, flexibly accommodating the needs of each pupil or student, was identified as a learning enabler by just under one third of professionals consulted. "We put these kids in school uniform", said one Local Authority staff member, "and they all look the same - but that can be disastrous for these kids. They have such individual needs and experiences" (KIILondon5).

*"Young people need to feel that they are individual and that their experience of education is individual. There's a kind of approach sometimes to refugee children that they are all one homogenised group whose response to education will all be the same, when this is clearly not the case" (KIIWML12).*

**Box 6: Valuing every student and meeting individual needs: a teacher's story, Secondary School, South East (anonymous for protection of young person's identity):**

**Dr Mina Fazel, Oxford University**

"We have had one student who has come in Year 10, who was rocking under the table and crying. With him I think the school really excelled in gaining his trust. This happened through the PE staff giving him 1:1 football, taking him off-site for coffee, taking him shopping, letting him have breakfast here, just sitting if he needed to sit. He then started to manage simple English tuition, initially with me sitting next to him holding his hand, but progressed from having this massive dependency, through our help. He had guitar lessons through music therapy, football, small group tuition, 1:1 English interventions, counselling... We maintained and kept going, and didn't give up on him when he attempted to take his life three times. I was at the hospital with him... We gave that young man anything and everything we could, to the point that in Year 11 he was speaking and writing English, could do a lower level foundation GCSE, had a job and girlfriend, was able to maintain purposeful and effective relationships, could deal with anger, and has a job. That is because of our good practice, our commitment and dedication to him. He would have been an easy one to exclude as this would have saved a lot of time and trauma. The amount of money and time we spent on him, for one student, but it was worth it. We have changed that young man's life, he is able to function in society, he is happy and settled, he knows he has been successful - and that is what a good school should do."

**Partnerships, specialist support and embedded services**

The fourth most frequently noted example of good practice was schools partnering with external refugee support charities in order to provide a specialist, embedded support service to refugee and asylum seeking learners.

Models for this type of embedded support varied, but included schools contracting charities to provide a specialist staff member to be on the premises for a set number of hours/days per week and facilitate drop in and appointment-based advice and pastoral support services; a support worker from a charity being given permanent office and meeting space (but no funding) within a school or college to provide a similar service; support workers from a charity being provided with meeting space for a particular slot each week to provide a similar but reduced service; and charities coming into schools to run specific group activities or programmes (again, funding at times provided by the school and at times covered by the charity).

These programmes were particularly appreciated by children, who told that "[support worker's name] helped me so much" (ChildLondonUASC), "they are good all the time" (ChildSouthEastUASC), and "she always listen to me and fix my problems" (ChildLondonUASC). Teachers also reported appreciating knowing that this service was available, as they found themselves now "able to do the thing I am good at, which is teaching, focus on that, and refer a young person who is struggling to [name of support worker], so I worry less" (KILondon14).

## Peer support

Support provided to new arrivals by their peers was considered to be of vital importance in creating a culture of welcome in a school. A quarter of professionals consulted spoke about peer support initiatives, and the majority of primary schools represented or spoken about operated, at the minimum, a buddy-scheme, whereby new arrivals were matched with a child already in the school, tasked with providing a particular welcome and showing them around. In many cases, schools with larger refugee or asylum seeking populations had chosen to match, where possible, refugee or asylum seeking arrivals with more established refugee or asylum seeking students who spoke the same language as them. A smaller, but still notable number of secondary schools ran similar schemes, and these, when mentioned, were only ever spoken of positively.

Children who had been matched with a 'buddy' on arrival spoke warmly of this experience, and one, a year later, had himself now become a 'buddy' in his secondary school. He said, "friends who were here before showed me where to go, the timetable - and now me and my friend show other new people where things are in [Name of school]. I feel happy because I have been in that situation, and so it's good to help!" (ChildOxfordUASC).

One primary school had demonstrated a particular welcome at the peer level when it became aware that it would be enrolling children arrived in the UK as part of the Syrian VPRS. "It's brilliant", explained a Local Authority staff member from the same area, "the whole class had learned some basic Arabic - they showed a really warm welcome to the children" (KISouthEast9). Other schools, particularly those part of the Schools of Sanctuary initiative, had adopted a school wide approach to peer support, ensuring that the entire student cohort was aware of issues facing refugee and asylum seeking children, and the important contribution these children could play in their school.

### Box 7: Peer-led welcome

#### Schools of Sanctuary in Norfolk: A day of welcome

On Friday 20th April 2018, 22 schools across Norfolk held a 'day of welcome' to educate their students about the experiences of displaced people. Specifically designed assemblies and lessons were held in participating schools, and money was raised for local refugee organisations through a non-uniform day. Gaining a better understanding of the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers contributes to improved peer level welcome and understanding between refugee and asylum seeking pupils and their classmates.

## Training

Finally, the provision of training for frontline staff on working with refugee and asylum seeking students, was, as at the access to education stage, perceived as critical to enabling these children to remain and thrive in education.

The most useful forms of training equipped teachers and other school and college based staff with a basic knowledge of typical prior education profiles, an overview of the UK asylum process, an exploration of the barriers to learning at the appropriate level; and an identification and contextualisation of a variety of good practices, again at the appropriate level.

### **Box 8: Training**

Refugee Support Network schools, college and Local Authorities training programme RSN provides training on meeting the educational support needs of refugee and asylum seeking children to schools, colleges, Local Authorities and a range of educational and children's organisations. The training equips staff to understand the education context in common countries of origin, the impact of time spent in refugee camps and journeys to the UK. It also outlines the key barriers refugee and asylum seeking children face as they attempt to access and progress in education and explores the good practice interventions that schools, colleges, Local Authorities and others involved in supporting the child can implement.

In addition to training, subscribing to initiatives and accreditation marks such as UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Programme and School's of Sanctuary were helpful in enabling a school to identify and integrate good practices into their particular context.

### **Box 9: UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award**

The UNICEF RRSA award recognises achievement in putting the UNCRC at the heart of a school's planning, policies, practice and ethos. In order to become accredited, a school must evidence that it has reached the three RRSA strands as follows:

#### Strand A: Teaching and learning about rights

The UNCRC is made known to children, young people and adults, who use this shared understanding to work for improved child wellbeing, school improvement, global justice and sustainable living.

#### Strand B: Teaching and learning through rights - ethos and relationships

Actions and decisions affecting children are rooted in, reviewed and resolved through rights. Children, young people and adults collaborate to develop and maintain a school community based on equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation; this includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners and promotes wellbeing.

#### Strand C: Teaching and learning for rights - participation, empowerment and action

Children are empowered to enjoy and exercise their rights and to promote the rights of others locally and globally. Duty bearers are accountable for ensuring that children experience their rights.

The achievement of Strand B in particular has been shown to contribute to the creation of a school community where refugee and asylum seeking learners are welcomed, included and respected.

## Box 10: City of Sanctuary's Schools of Sanctuary - Resources and community

A School of Sanctuary is a school that is committed to being a safe and welcoming place for all, especially those seeking sanctuary. It is a school that helps its students, staff and wider community understand what it means to be seeking sanctuary and to extend a welcome to everyone as equal, valued members of the school community. It is a school that is proud to be a place of safety and inclusion for all. The programme began in Yorkshire, England, and there are now Schools of Sanctuary in Wales and Ireland as well as many English cities and towns.

There are three simple principles to being a School of Sanctuary:

1. Learn about what it means to be seeking sanctuary.
2. Take positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within your school and the wider community.
3. Share your vision and achievements – be proud!

The Schools of Sanctuary movement has produced a range of tools for schools, including an audit/self-assessment kit, evaluation criteria, various action guides, teacher notes, workshop plans and multiple teaching resources.



### 5.2.3. Voluntary Sector good practice

#### Specialist partnerships with schools

See Section 5.2.2 above. In some cases these partnerships are instigated by the school or college, who then approaches a voluntary sector organisation; and in others they are instigated by a voluntary sector organisation, who then approaches a school or college.

#### **Box 11: In-school/college support**

##### Young Roots

The London charity Young Roots collaborates with the College of North West London to run a weekly lunch group, where students can drop in to play music, board games and cards, or just socialise with their friends. They also provide a drop-in casework service, which enables students to access on-site advice about immigration and housing issues, finding solicitors, registering with GPs, accessing benefits and other services.

##### Paiwand

Paiwand partner with a variety of schools and colleges in London to offer weekly girls' and boys' groups, sporting activities, life-skills workshops, leadership training and social activities to refugee and asylum seeking students. They also recruit volunteers who will go into schools to provide additional educational support to refugee learners in the school setting.

##### Refugee Support Network

RSN partners with schools and colleges across London to provide a specialist education support service to young refugees and asylum seekers. RSN's specialist staff help young people to overcome issues that are preventing them from accessing, remaining or progressing in education, and run drop in and appointment-based support sessions - always with the goal of helping the young person to move forward in their education.

#### 1:1 education support

For over half the children consulted, receiving additional, one to one educational support was cited as a critical enabler of educational wellbeing and progress, particularly in the case of UASC or asylum seeking children in families whose parents did not have a high enough level of English to assist them in their education. One third of the professionals consulted also identified this as a useful form of support - either because they had seen it benefit a child they knew, or because they had heard about the positive impact of this type of support from other institutions or local authorities.

This type of support can take several forms, including bespoke educational mentoring provided by NGO volunteers, volunteer classroom assistants sitting next to a child in a particular class and ensuring they understand what is being taught, and voluntary sector-run homework clubs where children are able to review what was studied in class and complete their homework in an environment conducive to study, with volunteers able to provide them with individual help.

## **Box 12: Educational Mentoring**

Refugee Support Network, London, Oxford, Birmingham

RSN provides bespoke 1:1 educational mentoring for refugee and asylum seeking children and young people across the UK, working from hubs in London, Birmingham and Oxford. Children and young people are referred for mentoring by a teacher, social worker or other professional, and assessed and matched with an educational mentor who meets with them every week for a minimum of 6 months. The mentor and mentee work towards goals in the young person's individual education action plan, and at the six month mark over 90% of mentees have improved their basic skills and confidence, and over 80% demonstrate improved mental health outcomes.

Young Roots

Young Roots provide weekly language support via trained 16-25 year old peer mentors. These mentors provide English support in 1:1 and small group sessions in North West London and Croydon to other refugee, asylum seeking and migrant young people who have a lower level of English.

## **Extra-curricular social activities**

Just under a quarter of children (or their parents) said that being able to participate in non-educational, social activities had a positive impact on their education. They reported increased feelings of positivity and belonging, which in turn appeared to help them take a more optimistic view of their educational options and potential progression. One boy explained that "after I do football, I feel I am the same as everybody else and why not I succeed just like them?" (ChildLondonUASC). In addition to the benefit of sports teams, others talked of youth clubs, performance arts programmes and programmes of social activities for entire families. At times these activities or clubs were run specifically for refugee or asylum seeking children, and at other times they were mainstream youth activities that had gone out of their way to welcome, or (in the case of fee-paying activities) provide bursaries for young refugees and asylum seekers.

## **Box 13: Extra-curricular social activities (examples only - this type of support is provided by numerous organisations)**

Asylum Welcome Youth Club, Oxford

Asylum Welcome's youth club, 'Venda', runs every Tuesday evening for young refugees and asylum seekers. Activities include pool, table football, films and video games. Volunteers help with homework, making CVs, applying for jobs or finding accommodation. Fresh food, often a hot meal, is provided. Young people are also connected with leisure activities that match their interests, and can participate in day trips in the school holidays, going swimming, to the cinema, to football matches, and to other cities.

Amplified Arts Academy, London

Amplified Arts Academy is an interesting example of a mainstream youth service that has proactively included refugee and asylum seeking young people. The pioneering London performing arts academy works from the premise that every young person should be given the opportunity to explore the creative arts. Scholarships are provided specifically for young refugees and asylum seekers, and young people are equipped with the skills and technical ability to make an impact in their chosen field. The programme also focuses on building self-worth and confidence, and has proved a professional, safe and nurturing environment for refugee and asylum seeking students who otherwise may not have the opportunity to train at a high level in performance arts.

## Holistic support to broader needs

Finally, just under a quarter of children (or their parents) and a quarter of professionals noted the value of the provision of holistic support meeting the child's broader needs, particularly those connected to their progression through the UK asylum process. Several teachers and educational support workers spoke of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and suggested that it was particularly challenging for them to teach children when some of their basic needs (for secure housing or health for example), remained unmet. Being able to refer to, or simply knowing that a child was already receiving support from, a broader refugee or asylum seeking children's organisation, enabled them to focus on teaching with confidence that their other needs were not remaining un-engaged with.

### Box 14: Holistic Support

#### Refugee Council Children's Section

The Children's Section works to safeguard and improve the lives of separated children seeking asylum. The Children's Panel Advice Service has operated since 1994 and is the only national service of its kind. Advisers work directly with separated children seeking asylum, helping them through the asylum system and ensuring that they are protected. The team also offers advice and information to carers and other professionals working with children and young people. Specific services are provided for trafficked children, those undergoing age disputes, and those in need of therapeutic support. Social evenings, residential trips and sports projects are also provided.

#### The Children's Society

The Children's society works across England to help refugee and asylum seeking children find accommodation, overcome language barriers, and rebuild their lives in new communities. Projects in London, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Birmingham and Coventry provide a range of services including advice, social activities, destitution support, life skills development, cultural orientation, emotional and family support.

## 6. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

### 6.1 Access to education

Having considered the findings emerging from the data gathered for this report, the following recommendations should be considered to improve refugee and asylum seeking children's access to education:

Central government policy makers (Home Office or Department for Education, as appropriate) should:

- **Recognise that all children, including asylum seeking children in temporary initial accommodation should be in receipt of an education**, and, in view of this recognition, develop clear guidance on education provision for asylum seeking children that fully incorporates the reality of extended periods of stay in initial accommodation. Whilst working to improve the speed of dispersal from initial accommodation is important, it is nonetheless likely that significant numbers of asylum seeking children will remain in initial accommodation for extended periods for the foreseeable future, and their education must no longer be delayed. Where it is deemed that enrolment in mainstream school is not in the best interest of the child at this time due to a possibly imminent geographical move, roll-on, roll-off interim provision for children in initial accommodation should be explored.
- **Review the National Transfer Scheme through a specific education lens**, gathering robust statistics on the impact of transfer on access to education, both in entry Local Authority and receiving Local Authority. Ensure that, where transfers are to take place, this happens more swiftly, and that the sourcing of an education placement in the destination Local Authority begins as soon as a child is identified for transfer.
- **Review, and consider simplifying the process by which the Secretary of State can require an academy to accept a pupil**. Particular attention should be given to ways in which this process could be shortened.

OFSTED should:

- **Include refugee and asylum seeking children in its Common Inspection Framework list of groups of learners**. This would help focus proportionate attention of the quality of educational provision and outcomes for this group with its specific needs, and would reward schools, colleges and other educational providers which do a good job of meeting their needs. This would also reassure schools that they will not be penalised for accepting refugee and asylum seeking children at the upper-secondary level

Local Authorities should:

- **Provide specialist training on education needs of UASC** for Social Workers in Local Authorities where expert UASC teams have been disbanded.
- **Provide better and clearer information to schools on new EAL arrivals in Years 10 and 11** - including ensuring that schools in their locality are aware of provisions enabling them to exclude these children from their results profiles, and that there are clear Local Authority policies on schools accepting UASC arrivals into Y10 and Y11 if school is deemed to be the best placement for them.

Local Authorities should:

- **Provide support for navigating online application processes for non-looked after children** - particularly for Dublin III children and families. This could involve a small period of support from the Local Authority, or clear signposting to NGOs willing to take on this work.
- **Develop initial guidance on appropriate curriculum and good practice for interim provision**, including more information sharing on successful models between Local Authorities - in particular where PPP has been used to facilitate the provision of high quality interim provision for young people awaiting mainstream places
- **Develop clearer guidance on education provision** for young people undergoing age assessments, particularly age-assessments that will determine them to be adults or children (as opposed to a younger or older child), to ensure that both safeguarding and right to education duties are met. Said guidance should distinguish clearly between cases where education is withheld for potential safeguarding reasons, and cases where it is withheld because of potential future dispersal on the basis of the as-yet-unknown outcome of an age assessment process.
- **Improve advance planning for children with SEN arriving through the Syrian VPRS and other resettlement schemes**. Given the nature of the vulnerability criteria for acceptance onto resettlement schemes, it should not be a surprise that Local Authorities are receiving children with complex needs. Advance planning must be improved to enable these children to start school promptly on arrival.

Schools or colleges should:

- **Ensure the presence of a designated staff member** to support admissions of refugee and asylum seeking children
- **In schools, ensure all staff with involvement in enrolment and admissions are fully aware of guidance around EAL arrivals at upper-secondary level**, and the ability to exclude these children's GCSE results from their results profiles
- **In colleges, consider introducing rolling enrolment** for 16-18 ESOL courses

## 6.2 Remaining and thriving in education

The following recommendations should be considered to improve refugee and asylum seeking children's ability to remain and thrive in education:

Central government policy makers should:

- **Monitor the impact of the DSG on EAL spending**, examining what schools are electing to spend resources on, and what this means for EAL children at the outcomes level
- **Increase the number of available funded ESOL hours** for 16-18 year olds
- **Ensure training for the planned senior designated mental health leads in schools** (as per the Government's mental health in schools strategy) includes specific content on supporting refugee and asylum seeking children
- **Seek to capitalise on and raise awareness of existing good practice** across England, Scotland and Wales by creating improved networking and information sharing opportunities for professionals working in education for refugee and asylum seeking children

Local Authorities should:

- **Provide specialist training on education needs of UASC** for Social Workers, Key Workers and Leaving Care Personal Advisors in Local Authorities where expert UASC teams have been disbanded.
- **Promote broader training and dissemination of good practice in SEN diagnosis** in refugee and asylum seeking children with EAL needs
- **Ensure schools in their localities are equipped with resources, good practice principles and training on supporting the learning of children with both SEN and EAL needs**, particularly in schools currently receiving resettled refugee children with SEN.

Schools and colleges should:

- **Ensure training in the educational support needs of refugee and asylum seeking children** for teachers at all educational levels is included as standard in continuing professional development
- **Ensure staff engaging with refugee, asylum seeking, or indeed any vulnerable children are equipped with non-clinical staff mental health tools** (see Box 5 above on Mental Health Toolkit)
- **Consider partnering with a specialist voluntary sector organisation** to provide in-school/college advice and pastoral support for refugee and asylum seeking learners
- **Introduce peer-support schemes** to welcome young refugees and asylum seekers
- **Consider joining** Schools of Sanctuary, or working towards UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award

Donors should:

- **Consider increasing provision of funds for** homework clubs, educational mentoring, social activities and broader holistic support in order to improve the education outcomes for refugee and asylum seeking children

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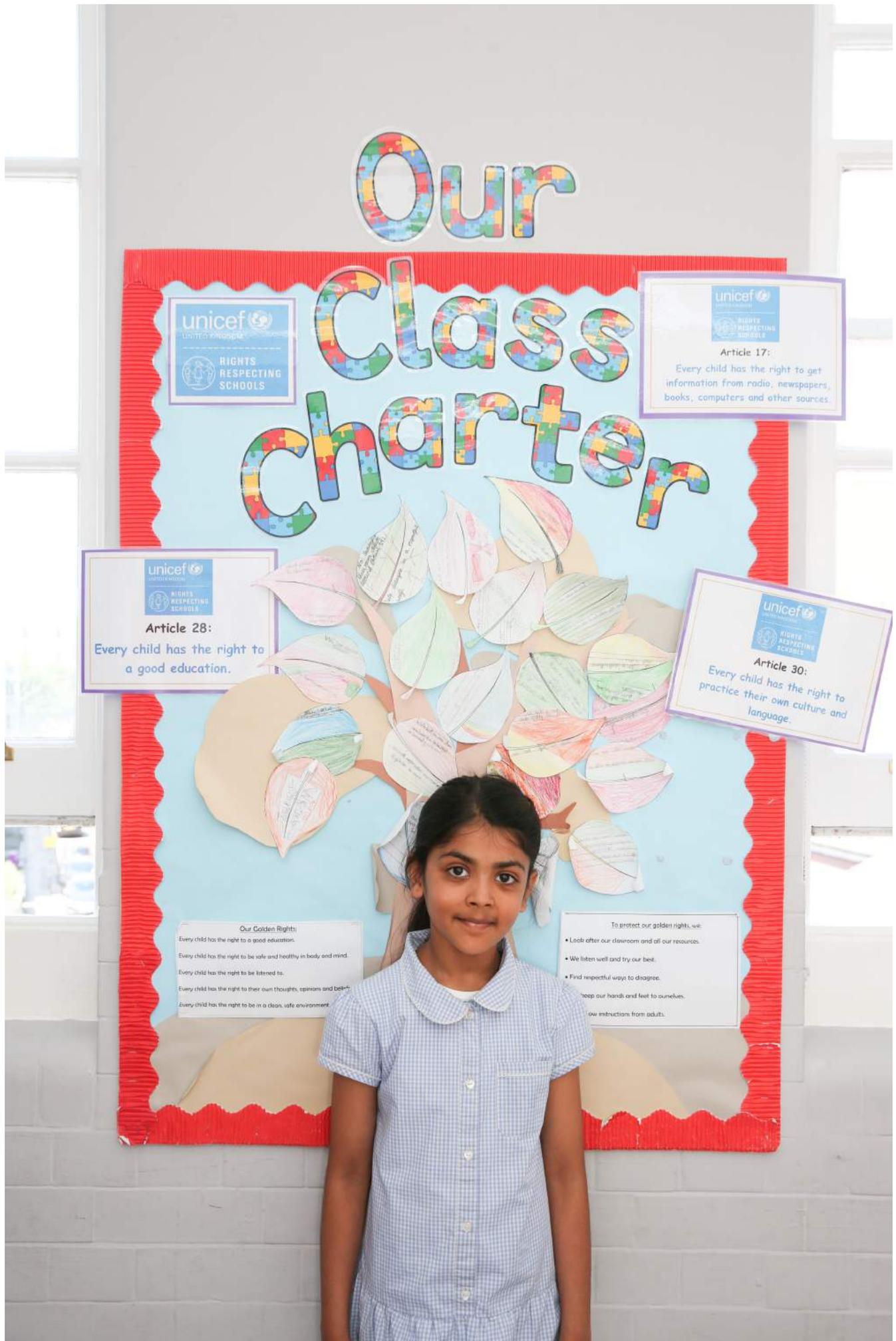
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## APPENDICES

### 1. Copy of FOI request submitted

#### Priority 1:

**If, due to the cost threshold, it is not possible to provide responses to all questions, questions 1-4 are the priority questions.**

- 1) a) How many UASC entered into care in your Local Authority in the last academic year (2016-17)?  
b) Of these, how many were in education at the end of the school year 2016-17?
- 2) Of the UASC who entered into care in the last academic year and entered into education in the last academic year (i.e. response to Q1b), how many:

	Started education within 20 days	Started education between 21 days - 3 months	Started education after 3 months or more
Entering education at primary level			
Entering education at secondary level			
Entering education at FE or sixth form level			

- 3) How many UASC in the care of your LA are currently out of education?
- 4) Of the UASC in the care of your LA currently out of education, how many have been waiting for an education placement for more than 20 days?

#### Priority 2:

**If within the cost threshold, answers to the following questions would also be much appreciated:**

- 1) How many of the UASC in the care of your Local Authority are currently in education, in  
a) primary school; b) secondary school; c) School Sixth Form; d) Further Education up to the end of Key Stage 4; e) Further Education Key Stage 5 and beyond;  
f) Pupil Referral Unit, g) alternate provision?
- 2) What is the total number of a) primary schools; b) secondary schools; c) school sixth forms; d) FE colleges; e) PRUs are there in your LA?
- 3) How many a) primary schools; b) secondary schools; c) school sixth forms; d) FE colleges; e) PRUs in your LA are providing places for refugee and asylum seeking children?

## 2. List of Key Informant Interviews

Name	Organisation	Role	Region
Angela Griffiths	London Borough of Croydon	Virtual School Head	London
Amanda Wooster	Cardinal Newman Catholic College (Secondary School)	Refugee Project Leader	London
Karen Schmaker	London Borough of Wandsworth	Educational Psychologist	London
Laura Armstrong	College of North West London	Head of ESOL	London
Despina Tsiakalou	Young Roots	Service Manager	London
Helen Bailey	Croydon College	Lecturer in ESOL	London
Peter Ferguson	Westminster Kingsway College	Lecturer in ESOL	London
Jackie Keylock	London Borough of Havering	Ethnic Minority Achievement Advisor (retired 2016)	London
Jo Hutchinson	Education Policy Institute	Director, Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners	London
Bryony Norman	Refugee Support Network	Specialist Education Support Worker	London
Michelle Wain	London Borough of Havering	English as an Additional Language Advisor	London
Bernadette Alexander	London Boroughs of Hillingdon, Kensington and Chelsea, and Aspiring for Children	Former Virtual School Head, Co-founder of AfC	London
John Fenning	Asylum Welcome	Syrian Resettlement Coordinator	South East
Anne Hardy	Kent Refugee Action Network	Learning for Life Lead	South East
Caroline Dodd	Oxfordshire County Council	Senior Practitioner, UASC	South East
Jo Huyg	Ethnic Minority Business Service	Project Officer	South East
Charlotta Nuboer-Cope	Key 2	Orientation Programme Lead	South East
Delia Mann	Oxfordshire County Council	Service Manager, UASC	South East
Melanie Tuck	Oxford Spire Secondary School	Head of English as an Additional Language	South East
Lucy Mettyear	Oxfordshire County Council	Head of Virtual School and Service Manager for	South East

## 2. List of Key Informant Interviews

		Vulnerable Learners	
Sue Vermes	Rose Hill Primary School	Head Teacher	South East
Sarah Bhatti	Cheney Secondary School	Designated Teacher for Looked After Children and Education Inclusion	South East
Carol Hrynyk	Abraham Moss Community School (Secondary)	Head of English as an Additional Language	North East
Emma Johnson	Oasis Academy Foundry Primary School	Principal	West Midlands
Rev David Butterworth	The Methodist Church, Birmingham District	Chaplaincy Support	West Midlands
Felix Kupay	Entraide	Founder and Director	West Midlands
Liz Clegg	The Meena Centre	Founder and Director	West Midlands
Barbara Forbes	City of Sanctuary	Secretary	West Midlands
Paul Doddridge	Oasis Academy Woodview Primary School	Principal	West Midlands
Steph Neville	St Chad's Sanctuary	ESOL Coordinator	West Midlands
Kate Keen	Solihull Local Authority	UASC Coordinator, Virtual School	West Midlands
Pauline Harrison	South and City College	Faculty Head - Foundation Studies	West Midlands
Razia Butt	Birmingham City Council	Education Advisor	West Midlands
Andrew Wright	Birmingham City Council	Virtual School Head	West Midlands
Louise Kinsella	The Children's Society	Refugee and Migrant Children Service Manager	West Midlands
Holly Taylor	Welsh Refugee Council	Programme and Partnerships Manager, Asylum Programme	Wales
Stuart Winstanley	Welsh Refugee Council	Young Persons Caseworker	Wales
Louise Kalicinski	Displaced People in Action	Children and Young Person's Project Worker	Wales
Lee Evans	Tros Gynal Plant	Development Manager	Wales
Iona Hannigan	Welsh Refugee Council	Researcher	Wales
Faruk Ogut	Displaced People in Action	Resettlement Team Coordinator	Wales
Lauren Hunter	British Red Cross	Casework Coordinator for Reunited Families	Scotland
Ishbel Drysdale	Glasgow City Council	Deputy Head of English as an Additional Language Service	Scotland
Lynn Ma	Glasgow Clyde College	Senior Lecturer, ESOL	Scotland

## 2. List of Key Informant Interviews

Zaki El Salahi	Barnardos Scotland	Project Worker, Barnardo's Fostering Edinburgh & Lothian Supported Carers Scheme	Scotland
Cadi St John	British Red Cross	Group Learning Coordinator	Scotland
Catriona MacSween	Aberlour Child Trust	Service Manager, Scottish Guardianship Service	Scotland

