

This is 10 years of impact

Unite

Celebrating

Foundation

10 Years

Foreword

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Unite Foundation



At the Unite Foundation 2022 marks our 10th birthday. 10 years of supporting young people who are care leavers or estranged from their families, to have a safe and secure home whilst at university. 10 years of hearing from students about the impact a scholarship can have on their sense of security, creating a stable home to use as a base to complete their degree. 10 years of collecting data on the impact of the scholarship.

As any organisation knows, being able to understand and quantify impact is crucial. The students we support have always told us how powerful the scholarship has been for them. But we have never had enough data to be able to understand and articulate this. This research, conducted by Jisc, goes a long way in helping us to communicate the benefits of accommodation scholarships for students who are estranged from their families or care leavers.

“ Overall, the report provides strong evidence that the Unite Foundation scholarship improves care leaver students’ educational outcomes, specifically in year to year progression, completion and degree outcome. ”

It is worth reiterating that our work is firmly rooted in partnership. The findings in this report (and in all our impact reports over the last decade) are only made possible by the dedication and hard work of hundreds of individuals across our partner universities and our accommodation provider Unite Students. Our unique role at the Unite Foundation, as an independent charity, is to bring these organisations together through long term partnerships to create lasting change for students and higher education institutions.

Over the last 10 years we're pleased to see the growing recognition of the barriers care experienced and estranged students face in getting to university, as well as completing their degree. This research summary accompanies a more detailed look at the history of care experienced and estranged students in our book, 'This is for Everyone'.

We therefore welcome the findings from Jisc's analysis which suggest a very strong connection between our aims and the outcomes of the students we support. Our focus has always been about retention. The findings show that our students stay at university, complete and get good degrees – better than other care leavers and matching or close to the outcomes of the non-care leaver population.

This should not be surprising. The uncertainty of having a home in both practical and emotional terms will have an impact on any young person. Having a home at university means security, creating a solid foundation to experience everything that university has to offer, allowing students to evolve, to grow, to build self-esteem.

I started by saying understanding impact was important. Now, with a robust statistical understanding of the impact of our scholarships, we know that more needs to be done to enable access to the same opportunities for all care experienced and estranged young people. As part of our strategy between now and 2026 we want to work with universities to develop accommodation scholarships that can help students to thrive. The team and I look forward to working with higher education providers, third sector organisations and philanthropists to making this a reality. Please do reach out if you'd like to know more.

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We're a charity that provides a home at university for estranged and care experienced students, through a unique scholarship scheme. The scholarship takes care of students' accommodation and bills, all year round for up to 3 years of study and, so far, over 500 estranged and care experienced young people have gone to university on the Unite Foundation Scholarship. We currently partner with 26 universities across England and Scotland, as well as with Unite Students our accommodation partner and principal corporate donor.

As an evidence-led organisation we've thus far published *New Starts (2015)*¹, one of the first reports published on estranged students, and *'Positive Impact?'* in 2020² examining access, retention and graduate outcomes for students with a background of care or estrangement. The latter research found that "care leavers who complete their university courses really can transcend their backgrounds and do at least as well in their future careers as other students – but too many care leavers and estranged students leave university early".

The difference that we set out to make – our theory of change – is that with the provision of a home at university we provide the stability, connection to other students and a belief in their potential, that care experienced and estranged students can benefit fully and equitably from higher education.

¹ <https://www.standalone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/StandAloneUNITEfoundation.pdf>

² https://thisisusatuni.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PositiveImpactReport2020_UniteFoundation_SheffieldHallamUniversity.pdf

As we celebrate ten years, championing scholarship students with this background and embark, with them, to change the HE landscape for all care experienced and estranged students, we commissioned an independent quantitative analysis report from Jisc³ to better understand the impact of the scholarship scheme to date.

We wanted to know how Unite Foundation scholarship students compared to other groups of students. Looking at progressing beyond their first year, moving from years 2 to 3, completing their degree, and on achieving a 'good degree' – either a 1st or 2:1.

Even with 10 years worth of scholarship student data to work with, there were still challenges based on data volume; a perennial issue when working with minority populations. The young people currently studying are naturally not included in completion and grade outcome measures. To keep robust volumes we had to set ourselves an incredibly stringent test for completion in this analysis of just 3 years and so have not counted those successful scholarship students on longer course pathways (including Scottish, sandwich courses or any re-sit for example).

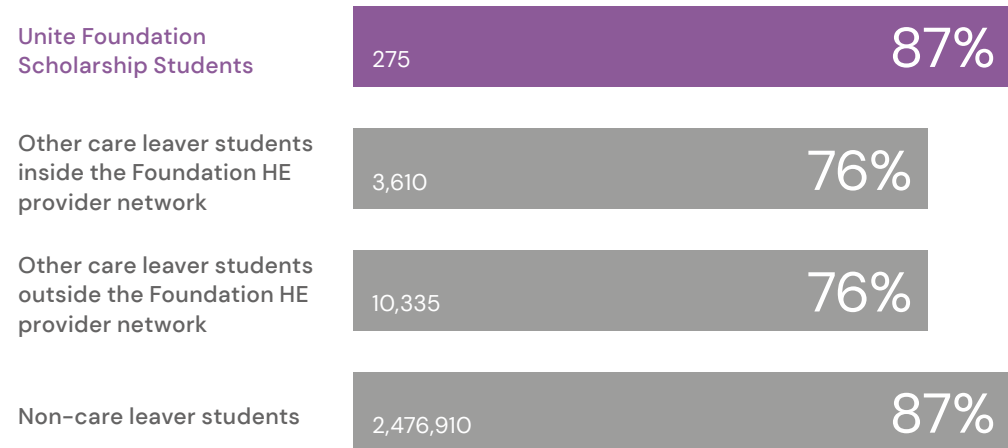
Scholarship students, like other care leaver and estranged young people are a highly diverse group across a range of demographic characteristics including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability. We have not been able to complete analysis to look at the intersectional changes, despite wanting to, given the small numbers in each population.

Nevertheless the analysis report provides strong evidence that the Unite Foundation scholarship improves educational outcomes across all of our test areas, specifically in year to year progression, completion and degree outcome.

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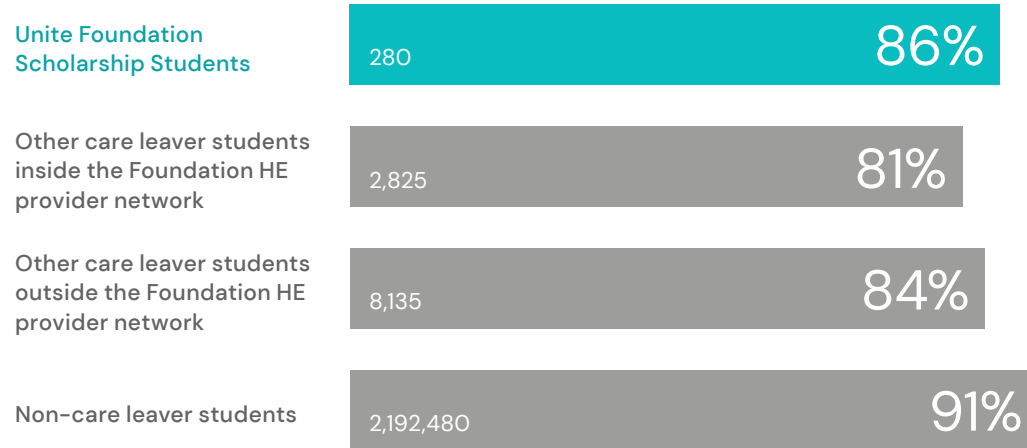
the good news

1st to 2nd year of programme progression
(within 2 academic years) %



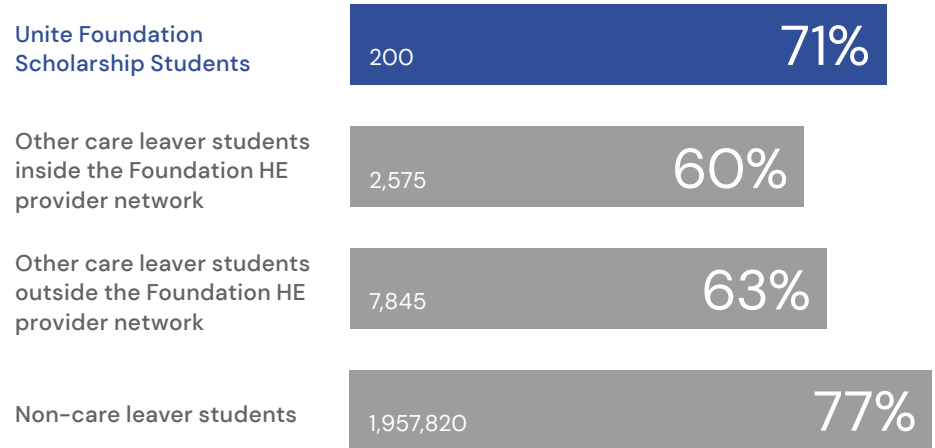
Unite Foundation Scholarship students **stay** at university. Our students progressed from their 1st to 2nd year of programme within two academic years at the same percentage as non-care leaver students and at a statistically significantly higher percentage to the other care leavers groups examined.

2nd to 3rd year of programme progression
(within 2 academic years) %



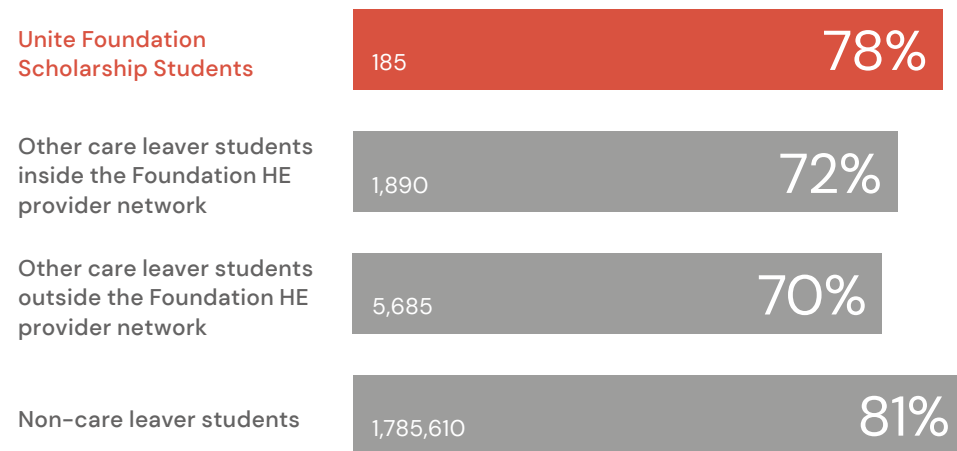
When looking at year 2 to 3 continuation – again within two academic years – scholarship students **progressed** at a greater percentage than other care-leavers and within 5 percentage points of the non-care leaver population.

**3 year completion
(excluding Scottish HE providers) %**



Rates of **completion** were also at a statistically significantly higher percentage than all other care leaver student groups and closer to the non-care leavers comparison group; narrowing the gap in outcomes.

Good honours degree (1st and 2:1) %



Unite Foundation Scholarship students achieved a **'good honours'** degree within 3 percentage points of non-care leaver students and at a statistically significantly higher percentage than all other care leaver student groups.

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time to reflect

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The headlines from this research show that non-care leaver students were the closest comparator group in most performance metrics to Unite Foundation Scholarship students – reflecting our mission to ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes.

The scholarship scheme is oversubscribed each year at an ever increasing rate. Each year we publish a set of balanced priorities to inform how each annual award population is selected. The overarching aim is for each intake to have a breadth of academic ability, discipline of study, location, gender and care leaver or estranged status.

In 2017 we expanded the scheme considerably, widening our HE provider network three fold. Notwithstanding, the analysis identified that the Unite Foundation Scholarship Students comparator group still had a higher proportion of high tariff (academic achievement) and Russell Group students compared to the other student comparator groups; a likely legacy from 3 of our 4 founding university partners from 2012/13 onwards.

As prior academic attainment and Russell Group student status are known indicators of outcomes, the Jisc analysis controlled for those to understand if that was driving the performance in the headlines. The data from the controlled populations suggests the improved performance of the Unite Foundation scholarship students is likely due to the receipt of the Scholarship and not the over-representation of high tariff and Russell Group students.

When controlling for non-Russell Group students, high tariff students and low tariff students. Unite Foundation Scholarship students still performed higher than all other care leaver student groups in all four performance metrics of Years 1 to 2, 2 to 3, completion and good degree.

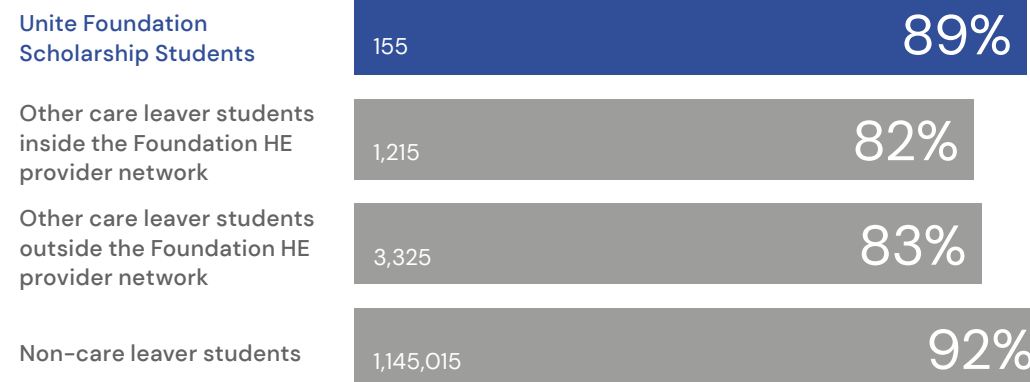
Curiously though, when controlling for Russell Group students, the data followed no clear trend, Russell Group Unite Foundation Scholarship students performed both higher AND lower than other care leaver student groups across the four performance metrics. There was not the direct parallel either to high tariff students as might reasonably be assumed. This may well reflect the widening participation efforts already in train and/or the role Russell Group universities play in delivering nationally important subjects allied to medicine such as nursing.

More striking in this aspect of the analysis was the finding identified when controlling for tariff. Whilst both high and low tariff Unite Foundation students performed higher than other care leavers and so could be discounted for skewing the headline results. Our data showed – against sector norms – that our lower tariff students were outperforming non-care leaver students in the Years 1 to 2 progression metric.

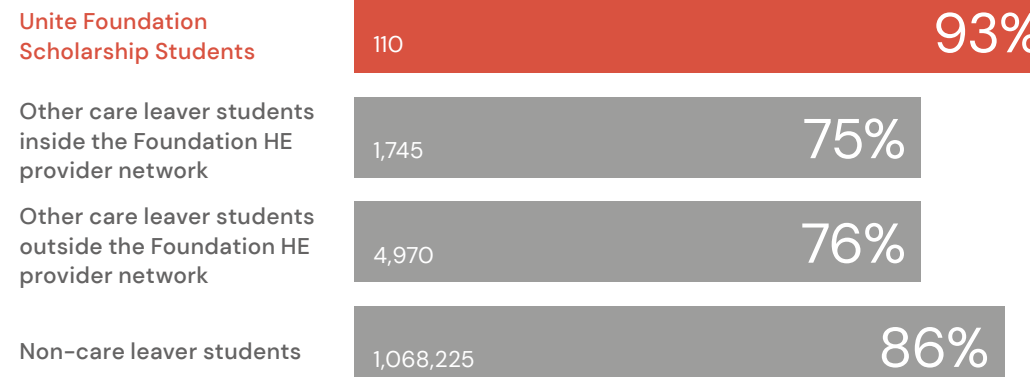
This gap between scholarship students and non-care leavers gradually closed as the analysis ran through to completion rates and class of degree. But we'll be exploring further just how housing stability can support academic efficacy at all levels in years to come.

1st to 2nd year of programme progression (within 2 academic years) %

High Tariff



Low Tariff



This is

what's next

This analysis has been a real watershed moment for the Unite Foundation but is also important for the broader widening participation sector – an example of a widening participation intervention suggesting to statistically significant improved academic outcomes. A priority for us will be revisiting this analysis in three years time so that we can meaningfully accommodate Scottish outcomes and dig deeper into the intersectionality of scholarship students.

We'll be striving to move from 'strong suggestion' to truly understanding causality. This will take years to accomplish alone – make no mistake we're here for the duration – but we're urging others to join this mission. If you're encouraged by our findings, we want you to join a movement working towards the equity of higher educational outcomes for care experienced and estranged young people.