Refugee Education UK

The Bell Foundation

Education for late arrivals

Examining education provision for displaced young people arriving in the UK late in the education system

Foreword

Written by Angel, an REUK youth advocate

Education is an inherent human right, fundamental to all, irrespective of borders or circumstances. Access to schooling and guidance from teachers should be universal, transcending barriers, for it serves as the cornerstone of our humanity, nurturing knowledge and fueling curiosity.

For asylum seekers and refugees, who have endured unimaginable turmoil in their homelands, **education emerges as a beacon of hope amidst darkness when arriving in a safe country.** It represents not just the acquisition of knowledge, but a pathway to rebuilding their lives in a foreign land. Through education, they are not merely taught facts and figures; rather, they are introduced to a world of boundless opportunities and supportive communities.

Indeed, education becomes their sanctuary – a realm of hope, dreams, and belonging.

As soon as I arrived in the UK, at the age of 12, starting school became a priority. However, it took me almost two months to be enrolled in school. It was not until my family and I settled in a small town in a house provided to us by the Home Office that I was enrolled.

I entered Year 8 at the very start of 2016, yet this still made me feel like an outsider; everyone seemed to have already formed friendships and settled in, while I struggled to find my place in the school or adapt to the way that classes were taught. I vividly recall my first day of school. Upon returning home, I found myself in tears, confiding in my mum that I dreaded going back. It took me roughly three years to fully adjust and establish connections. At first, language was a significant barrier, as I had little grasp of English. However, being young made it easier to pick up.

Yet, there's an element of luck involved in such experiences. I can't help but imagine the immense challenge it would be for someone arriving in Year 10 with limited English proficiency, expected to grasp the curriculum and sit for GCSE exams in less than a year. Unfortunately, schools often overlook such circumstances.

So, research like this is really important as it sheds light on the current system. It helps educators identify where things aren't working well and how they can make them better for asylum seekers and refugees settling into new communities. Through research like this, teachers can learn about the common problems that young refugees and asylum seekers face when they arrive late, and they can come up with ways to help them settle in at school. The teachers, therefore, will acquire an essential awareness on the situation that asylum seekers and refugees end up in. **This awareness will help prevent young refugees and asylum seekers from losing hope and to keep fighting for their dreams through education.**

About the organisations

Refugee Education UK (REUK) is a UK charity working towards a world where all young refugees can access education, thrive in education, and use that education to create a hopeful, brighter future. Our direct programme work supports children and young people to get into school, from primary to university, and to thrive academically and in their wellbeing. Alongside our direct work, REUK provides training, resources and bespoke support to education institutions across the country and carries out research to build evidence on issues related to refugee education. Find out more about us at www.reuk.org.

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, we aim to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged through language. The Bell Foundation is the operational name for The Bell Educational Trust Limited. Find out more at www.bell-foundation.org.uk.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ARE	Appeal Rights Exhausted
DfE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ESFA	Education, Skills and Funding Agency
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Child
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Executive Summary

Education is a right for all children, as enshrined in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This right is not suspended for those children who have been forced to flee their homes.

The UK is a party to the UNCRC and, therefore, recognises and protects the right to education for all displaced children. However, this right is far from guaranteed in reality. Evidence demonstrates that numerous barriers make accessing education difficult, and that these accumulate and become increasingly complex as displaced children progress through the education system (Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020). Delays in accessing education are particularly acute for those arriving late in the education system, at the upper secondary and further education levels (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018).

This report presents the findings from a research study that examined the experiences of displaced young people, aged 13-19, who arrived in the UK late in the education system – referred to as late arrivals. The research study used a mixed methods approach and reflected the experiences of more than 400 individuals, predominantly charity, education and local government stakeholders. It involved an online survey with 180 practitioners; an analysis of 222 queries to REUK's advice line from late arrivals and those who support them; and interviews and focus groups with 23 practitioners.

The research found that:

Late arrivals may remain out of education for extended periods of time

- Nearly two thirds (62%) of 133 survey respondents reported instances of late arrivals not accessing any form of education for prolonged periods of time.
- Just under half (47%) of the 222 queries to REUK's advice line were about young people not currently in education. These queries included young people out of education for six months and over a year.
- Those left out of education experience negative effects on their wellbeing and safety: they may face isolation, a deterioration of mental health and vulnerability to exploitation, instead of making meaningful progress and contributions to life and society in the UK.

Accessing secondary education becomes increasingly difficult the later young people arrive

- Research findings demonstrate that accessing education becomes particularly challenging for those who arrive mid-year in Year 11 when their peers are preparing for GCSEs. 80% of 112 survey respondents thought it was either difficult or very difficult for a young person to get a secondary school place after the winter break of Year 11.
- Young people who arrive at a Year 11 age may encounter enhanced challenges. Schools are unlikely to accept them and so they may remain out of education until they turn 16, the age that they are generally eligible to access further education. This period of time was described by survey respondents as a "no-man's-land".
- The top four barriers to secondary school access, as reported by 121 survey respondents, were: the complexity of placing in-year arrivals; a lack of available school places; changes to or uncertainty with young people's accommodation, including because of dispersal policies; and

schools being unable or unwilling to accept late arrivals.

Accessing a meaningful further education place can be challenging

- While getting a place in college was generally perceived as easier than getting a place in secondary school (37% of 141 survey respondents thought it was either difficult or very difficult to get a place in college), this mostly related to getting a place on an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course.
- Getting a place on a further education course with components that advance young people's career or education aspirations was described as more challenging, including because of entry requirements for such courses. Research participants reported how, in this way, young people's options and opportunities narrow at the further education level.
- The top four barriers to further education access, as reported by 145 survey respondents, were: a lack of available further education places; changes to or uncertainty with young people's accommodation placements, including because of dispersal policies; unclear or inaccurate information about accessing further education as a displaced young person; and complex admissions and enrolment processes.

In the absence of school or college places, the charity sector is left to bridge gaps

- When asked what practice they had observed in the absence of a school or college place, 75% of 133 survey respondents reported temporary, informal education provision run by charities or voluntary groups. This was followed by interim education activities coordinated by the local authority, as reported by 49%.
- Respondents described challenges facing charity sector and local authority provision, reporting how it is often under-funded, under-resourced and stretched, and so undermining its reach and impact.
- While the charity sector was perceived to play a crucial role in bridging gaps in education whilst children are waiting for school or college places, findings emphasised that it should not be considered a replacement or substitute for accessing education in a supported, mainstream education environment.

Ensuring late arrivals access their right to education can and should be addressed. Doing so would benefit and advance cross party efforts to tackle inequality through educational attainment.

It requires a coordinated and intentional approach from the Department for Education, the Home Office, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, local authorities, and secondary and further education institutions to reduce barriers to education access. Evidence-based recommendations to this effect are made by this report, and further detailed in an accompanying policy brief.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This section details the purpose of the research study, key definitions and the research scope. It also sets out the research and policy context underlying the report's findings.

1.1 Purpose of the research study

This research study stemmed from observations by Refugee Education UK (REUK) and The Bell Foundation regarding the barriers to education faced by displaced young people who arrive in the UK late in the education system (hereafter referred to as 'late arrivals', see section 1.2 for a full definition). As a provider of direct services to refugee, asylum-seeking and other displaced young people and practitioners, REUK had experienced an increase in queries to their education advice line about supporting access to education for late arrivals. Additionally, both REUK and The Bell Foundation had noticed an increase in questions posed by practitioners during training about 'good practice' in enabling access to quality education for late arrivals.

This research study was developed in response to these observations. It aimed to:

- uncover, through insights from practitioners and practice, what happens across the UK with regards to education access for late arrivals, aged 13-19; and
- inform evidence-based policy influencing work and training on education provision for late arrivals.

The research questions this study addressed were:

1. What barriers to accessing education exist for displaced young people who arrive in the UK at the upper secondary and further education (FE) levels (known as late arrivals)?
2. What initiatives or interventions support or smooth access to education for these late arrivals?
3. What recommendations can be made to policymakers and education institutions about providing access to quality education for late arrivals?

1.2 Definitions and research scope

For the purposes of this report, the term **'late arrivals'** refers to displaced young people, aged 13-19, who are newly arrived in the UK.

The term **'newly arrived'** denotes those young people who have been in the UK for approximately less than one year.

The term **'displaced young person'** refers to young people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, for reasons including, but not limited to, conflict, persecution, trafficking or poverty. It includes those with refugee status, asylum seekers, and individuals with other immigration statuses.

For the purposes of this report, the term **'practitioner'** refers to individuals who, in various indirect and direct capacities, support displaced young people. It includes, but is not limited to, education professionals, charity sector support workers and staff, and local government representatives and staff.

While the original intention of the research was to cover the UK, findings ended up being heavily weighted towards England (see section 2.3 for more detail on the research sample). This report and its recommendations are, therefore, focused on the England context.

1.3 Research context

Education is a right for all children regardless of their immigration status, as enshrined in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). As a party to the UNCRC, the UK is committed to upholding the rights of all children within its jurisdiction.[1] However, the right to education is far from guaranteed for displaced children. Research demonstrates that numerous barriers make accessing education difficult for these children, and that these accumulate and become increasingly complex as they attempt to progress (Ashlee and Gladwell, 2020). Research suggests that delays to accessing education are particularly acute for those arriving late in the education system, at the upper secondary and FE levels (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018).

Because data on displaced children's education is not generally publicly available (Chanut, 2023), the length of these delays is not currently known. However, some evidence suggests that up to a quarter of refugee and asylum-seeking children wait for three months to access an education place, and some up to a year (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018). Long periods out of education can be harmful to the mental health of displaced young people, with potentially long-term impacts on their socio-emotional development and educational outcomes (EPI, 2023). Additionally, research shows that children who are missing from education face increased vulnerability to safeguarding issues and exploitation (Parish et al., 2020).

A literature review carried out during the early stages of the study revealed a paucity of research focused on the educational journeys of late arrivals in the UK. While some insights exist, they are generally embedded within broader studies on refugee and migrant education. Nonetheless, available evidence suggests that although there are international and national guidelines and policies concerning the care and education of displaced children, navigating these often fragmented policies can be extremely difficult, and their implementation is frequently problematic (McIntyre and Abrams, 2021; McIntyre and Hall, 2020). Additionally, according to McIntyre, Neuhaus and Blenno (2020, pp. 396-397), the education of displaced children in the UK is situated "within legislation on immigration and the associated welfare policies of housing and benefit systems" – legislation that is often exclusionary and hostile, consequently undermining the implementation of good practice in refugee education.

Available evidence suggests systemic issues result in barriers that make accessing quality and meaningful education challenging for late arrivals. This includes:

[1] It is worth noting that the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom in 2016, noted that many refugee and asylum-seeking children continue to have their best interests overlooked, and face discrimination. Specifically, the Committee noted that "asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children and their families face difficulty in gaining access to basic services, such as education" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p.20).

- a lack of data on these children and their outcomes at the governmental and institutional level (Ott and O'Higgins, 2019; McIntyre, Neuhaus & Blenno, 2020; McIntyre and Abrams, 2021);
- insufficient funding for schools, undermining their ability to plan and offer suitable provision for late arrivals, including English language provision (McIntyre, Neuhaus and Blenno, 2020; Ott and O'Higgins, 2019);
- challenges and institutional concerns about access to the curriculum at the GCSE level and above (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018; Prentice, 2022); and
- inadequate training for educators tasked with teaching these children and for those in local authorities (LAs) assigned to care for their wider needs (McIntyre and Neuhaus, 2021; Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018; Prentice and Ott, 2021).

Despite the numerous barriers identified by existing evidence, there are positive examples of initiatives that support late arrivals to flourish in their education. Previous research has highlighted the crucial role of schools in providing specialist pathways for late arrivals, as well as the importance of short-term induction and orientation programmes for very newly arrived young people (see, for example, Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018).

1.4 Policy context

The findings of this research are situated within a complex policy context, which this section summarises at a high level. *Please note that, as findings from this research are heavily weighted towards England over other UK nations (as described in section 1.2), this section focuses on policy in England.*

All children in the UK have a right to education regardless of their immigration status. LAs have a duty to provide suitable full-time education for all children of compulsory school age resident in their area. This education must be appropriate to the child's age, ability, and any special educational needs they may have, regardless of their immigration status, as detailed in Section 14 of the Education Act 1996.

1.4.1 Policies affecting access to secondary education

Once a child has an address, they can apply for a school place at any time of the year. According to the Department for Education's (DfE) Schools Admissions Code (DfE, 2021), the responsibility for school admissions lies either with LAs or with school admission authorities, depending on the type of school and specific context (DfE, 2021, p. 6). Admission authorities for state-funded schools must not check the immigration or nationality status of foreign national children as a pre-condition for admission (DfE, 2024c).

Each LA is required to have a Fair Access Protocol to ensure that unplaced and vulnerable children, as well as those struggling to access a school place in the middle of an academic year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible (DfE, 2021). Displaced children (from refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant backgrounds) are among the groups of "vulnerable and/or hard to place children" who can be placed by Fair Access Protocols once LAs can demonstrate that "reasonable measures have been taken to secure a place through the usual in-year admission procedures" (DfE, 2021, pp. 33-34).

There are provisions for schools to exclude late arrivals' results from their results profiles. Schools can request the removal of a student's results if they have "arrived from a non-English speaking

country in Year 10 and Year 11" (DfE, 2024b, p.31) – recognising the potential impact of language barriers on a student's results.[2]

Statutory guidance for England states that LAs must secure an education placement for all looked after children, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), within 20 school days of entering care (DfE, 2018). This provision also extends to UASC aged up to 18 seeking to enrol in FE.

1.4.2 Policies affecting access to FE

16-18 year-olds

All children in the UK are required to continue in some form of education or training until they turn 18. This can be full-time education, an apprenticeship or traineeship, or volunteering for 20 or more hours a week while in part-time education or training (DfE, 2016). LAs have "broad duties" to encourage, enable and assist young people aged 16-18 in their area to participate in education, employment, or training (DfE, 2016, pp. 5-6). This includes: "securing enough suitable education and training provision to meet the reasonable needs" of young people in their area; making support available to these young people that LAs consider "appropriate to encourage, enable, and assist them to effectively participate in education or training"; and tracking young people's participation in education or training (DfE, 2015, pp. 5-6).

The Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) is responsible for funding courses for students in full or part-time education between the ages of 16 and 19 in England. To access funding through this stream, students must be 16, 17, or 18 as of August 31st at the beginning of the academic year. The ESFA states that "most young people legally residing in England will be eligible for 16 to 19 study programme funding". Exceptions exist, but young people referred to in this report – including asylum seekers and young people with a range of immigration statuses – are eligible for ESFA funding (ESFA, 2024a).

19 year-olds

Young people aged 19 as of August 31st at the beginning of the academic year, or older, fall under the Adult Education Budget (ESFA, 2024a), soon to become the Adult Skills Fund (ESFA, 2024b). For these young people, funding rules for FE can be restrictive and complex. Eligibility for funding may be restricted to certain courses and limited hours, and impacted by individual factors. An exception exists for students with an Education, Health and Care Plan, who often still qualify for ESFA 16-18 funding until the age of 24 (ESFA, 2024a).

Asylum-seeking students aged 19 and older in England will normally need to wait six months from the date of their asylum claim whilst their claim is being processed before accessing funded courses (ESFA, 2024a).[3] Those with more secure statuses (such as refugee status or indefinite leave to remain) do not need to wait before accessing funded courses. Asylum-seeking learners remain ineligible for Advanced Learner Loans to pay for Level 3 courses that are not funded under Adult Education Budgets. Those who are Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) are generally not permitted to study at FE level, with some exceptions, including if they are care leavers, are receiving LA support, or are receiving Section 4 support (ESFA, 2023).[4]

[2] Please read REUK's and UNICEF UK's 2018 research report to learn more about the lack of awareness of this policy and its impact on admissions of refugee and asylum-seeking learners: Gladwell, C, and Chetwynd, G, (2018). Education for refugee and asylum-seeking children: Access and equality in England, Scotland and Wales. UNICEF UK.

[3] This policy stems from a time when many asylum cases were decided within a six month window. However, at present, asylum decisions often take longer than six months to resolve.

[4] Section 4 support is support provided to those who have become ARE, when their asylum claim is unsuccessful and they do not have accommodation and/or cannot afford to meet their essential living needs. For more, see: nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/rights-and-entitlements/support-options-for-people-with-nrpf/home-office-support/section-4-asylum-support

The ESFA establishes funding rules for most of England. However, responsibility for the Adult Education Budget has been devolved to an increasing number of mayoral combined authorities across the country (DfE, 2024a). This decentralisation has allowed mayoral combined authorities to tailor adult education to address skills shortages and meet local demands. It has also resulted in varying levels of access to funding for certain courses based on postcode.

1.4.3 Dispersal policies

Asylum seekers in initial accommodation are frequently required to relocate with short notice to what is known as 'dispersal' accommodation, often situated in a different region or part of the country (McIntyre and Hall, 2018). According to the 'Allocation of Asylum Accommodation Policy' (Home Office, 2024, p.10) the impact of dispersal on a child's education is only taken into consideration if the child is in their final year of school or college and preparing for GCSE, AS, or A-Level exams. This policy stipulates that all other requests for a preference for the location of accommodation based on educational needs should generally be declined (Home Office, 2024).

Chapter 2: Research methodology

This section details the research methodology, including data collection, data analysis, the research sample, and ethical considerations and possible limitations.

2.1 Data collection

This research study adopted a mixed methods approach to examine late arrivals' access to education. It examined the experiences and perspectives of more than 400 participants, predominantly individuals working with or supporting late arrivals (referred to as practitioners) from three data sources:

- An online survey shared with practitioners.
- An analysis of REUK's advice line queries from young people and those who support them, including parents/carers and practitioners.
- Key informant interviews and focus groups.

2.1.1 Online survey

An online survey, comprising closed and open-ended questions, was shared with practitioners across the UK. The survey aimed to capture the experiences and perspectives of practitioners – individuals engaged, in various capacities, in supporting displaced young people regarding late arrivals' experiences of accessing education (see section 2.3 for more information on the sample, including details about the composition of the practitioner sample). The survey featured four sections: background information about practitioners; access to secondary school; access to FE; and practices adopted while young people wait for mainstream education placements.

The survey was collaboratively designed by REUK's research and programmes teams. A list of barriers to accessing secondary school and FE was developed, predominantly based on findings from two REUK research reports (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018, and Ashlee and Gladwell, 2020). This list was refined by REUK's programmes team to reflect the realities observed in their casework with young people at the secondary and FE levels. The survey was piloted by a small number of key practitioners who provided feedback, informing the development of the final version.

The survey was launched in June 2023 and was disseminated by REUK and The Bell Foundation through relevant refugee support and education practitioner networks, as well as through social media. The survey closed in December 2023. A total of 184 survey responses were received but, after data cleaning and validation, 180 were included in analysis.

2.1.2 Analysis of REUK's advice line queries

REUK runs an advice line which provides guidance to displaced young people and those who support them – including but not limited to parents/carers, siblings, social workers, support workers and teachers – on accessing and progressing through education. Individuals contact REUK through email or Whatsapp, and queries are monitored and tracked by REUK's programmes team. Queries to this advice line received between 1 July 2022 and 10 November 2023, and recorded as relating to young people aged 11 and 19, were analysed. A total of 222 queries fell within this scope and were included in the analysis, which sought to understand the nature of the challenge faced and whether young people were accessing education.

The age range was selected as 11-19, instead of the study's specified range of 13-19, because there were instances where the age of the young person involved in a query was unknown.

Instead, inferences about their age could be made based on their education level (for example, if they were in secondary school). In such instances, queries were included in analysis, but the lower age limit was reduced from 13 to 11 to account for the fact that some young people in secondary school are aged 11 and 12.

2.1.3 Key informant interviews and focus groups

Key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted with practitioners from education institutions, the charity sector and LAs.

Key informant interviews were carried out with individuals involved with initiatives aimed at supporting or easing late arrivals' access to mainstream education. These initiatives were identified through a desk-based review and snowballing from survey responses. The interviews took place between October 2023 and January 2024 and sought to gain insights on the purpose of the initiative, its practicalities, and the observed outcomes for young people. Three of the initiatives examined had recently participated in another recent REUK research study (called InSPPiRE) and practitioners had already provided written case studies. To minimise repetition and respect practitioners' time, these written case studies were analysed instead of conducting new interviews, with the consent of participants.

Secondly, four semi-structured focus groups were analysed. These focus groups were originally conducted for a REUK and University of Nottingham initiative (called STRIVE), and were focused on identifying policy solutions and recommendations for supporting displaced young people into education. The focus groups took place in early 2023. Because the topics covered were highly relevant for this current study, participants provided their consent to reuse the data.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 Quantitative analysis

Descriptive analysis and basic inferential statistics of both survey and advice line data were carried out in Google Sheets. Descriptive analysis was conducted on all closed questions in the survey and advice line variables to explore general trends and frequencies.

For advice line analysis, data was disaggregated, where appropriate, by:

- Immigration status: data was disaggregated based on the immigration status categories with sufficient entries for analysis – Ukrainians and asylum seekers.
- Age: data was disaggregated by the stated age categories with sufficient entries for analysis – 13-15, 16-18, and 19.[5]
- North/South responses: data was disaggregated by those who worked in Northern regions of England and those who worked in Southern parts of England.[6]

[5] This recognises that age determination is a challenging issue for refugee and asylum-seeking young people. For the purposes of this study, age was taken as was stated.

[6] This recognises that the North/South divide is a non-official divide, but has been written about in articles such as geographical.co.uk/culture/a-country-divided-why-englands-north-south-divide-is-getting-worse. For the purpose of this study, this divide helps to understand regional differences in responses. South includes: East, London, South East and South West. North includes: West Midlands, East Midlands, North West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber. Data was insufficient to disaggregate by individual region, and there was insufficient data to disaggregate by other UK nations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

For survey analysis, data was disaggregated, where appropriate, by:

- Organisation/institution affiliation: data was disaggregated by the categories that had sufficient responses for analysis – education institution, LA and charity sector.
- Immigration status: data was disaggregated by those who worked exclusively with UASCs, and those who worked exclusively with non-UASCs (i.e. the remaining categories of children, who were assumed to be with families as opposed to in the care of the LA).[7]
- North/South responses: data was disaggregated by those who worked exclusively in Northern regions of England and those who worked exclusively in Southern parts of England.[8]

Chi square tests[9] were conducted when potentially significant differences existed between disaggregating factors detailed above. The value of p (significance) is given when such differences were found to be statistically significant (i.e. $p<0.05$). It is important to note that given the relatively small sample size for chi square tests, statistically significant findings should not be overstated without further research.

[7] As survey respondents were given the option to select multiple categories of immigration status, significant overlap made it difficult to disaggregate findings by immigration status. That is, a respondent who selected 'children in families as part of resettlement schemes' may also have selected 'Ukrainian young people' and 'asylum-seeking children in families'. By grouping responses by UASCs and non-UASCs – that is children not under the care of the LA, and assumed in families – it was possible to obtain a sufficient number of respondents that only worked with UASC or non-UASC categories (i.e. unique responses) for disaggregation.

[8] As survey respondents were given the option to select multiple regions, there was significant overlap that made it difficult to disaggregate findings by region, given the small sample size. By disaggregating by North and South, it was possible to obtain a sufficient number of respondents who worked only in the North, and only in the South, and therefore disaggregate findings.

[9] A chi square test is a statistical test that reveals whether an association between two variables is significant, or due to chance.

2.2.2 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis focused on identifying salient and recurring themes that would support, interrogate or provide further insights into quantitative findings. MAXQDA was used to code key informant interviews and focus groups, and Google Sheets was used to code free text from the survey. Coding was iterative. A set of codes was developed and added to at regular intervals. When quotes are used from survey respondents and practitioners interviewed, the category of their institutional/organisational affiliation is reported.

2.3 Sample

Box 1: Research sample overview

This research report represents the experiences of more than 400 individuals:

- 180 practitioners participated in the online survey
- 222 queries to REUK's advice line were analysed
- 23 key informants took part in interviews or focus groups: 11 took part in 10 interviews, and 12 took part in four focus groups

2.3.1 Online survey

A total of 180 practitioner responses were analysed following data cleaning and validation (see annex 1.1 for a more comprehensive breakdown of the sample). Respondents were asked to provide information on their organisation/institution affiliation. The top three categories were: education institutions (33% of respondents), LAs (32% of respondents) and charity/community groups (30% of respondents). Respondents from education institutions (n=60) comprised FE colleges (45%), secondary schools (23%), secondary schools with sixth forms attached (9%), and sixth form colleges (3%).

Respondents were asked to identify the regions of the UK in which they worked, with the option of selecting multiple regions. While all regions of the UK were represented, responses were weighted towards Southern parts of England: 28% of respondents identified themselves as working in the South East, 25% in London, and 17% in the South West. When disaggregated by the North-South divide in England[10], the North was represented by 37% of queries, while the South was represented by 66%. Other nations of the UK were represented by 6% of total responses. In terms of working exclusively in either the South or the North of England, 58% of respondents (n=105) worked exclusively in the South, and 30% (n=54) worked exclusively in the North.

Respondents were asked to select the category of displaced young people that they worked with or supported, with the option of selecting multiple categories. 72% of respondents stated that they worked with UASCs, followed by 52% who worked with asylum-seeking children in families, 48% who worked with children who are part of resettlement schemes, 42% who worked with Ukrainian young people, 36% who worked with young people from migrant backgrounds, and 28% who worked with children joining family members already in the UK.

Of those who worked with young people as part of resettlement schemes (n=87), 82% of respondents worked with Afghan resettlement schemes, 62% with Syrian resettlement schemes, and 25% with Hong Kong schemes. 16% identified 'other' schemes, and, when information was included, this covered the UK Resettlement Scheme and community sponsorship.

When disaggregated by those who worked with UASC versus those who did not work with UASC (i.e. other categories of displaced adolescents, assumed to be in families), 72% of respondents worked with UASCs, and 73% worked with non-UASCs. In terms of those working exclusively with either UASCs or non-UASCs, 27% of respondents (n=48) worked exclusively with UASCs, and 28% (n=51) worked exclusively with non-UASCs.

[10] See footnote 8.

2.3.2 Advice line queries

A total of 222 advice line queries were analysed. Queries were disaggregated by age (see annex 1.2 for a more comprehensive breakdown), and the majority (65%) of queries related to young people aged 16-18. This was followed by queries related to young people aged 19 (20%) and young people aged 13-15 (12%).

Of the 222 queries analysed, 41% came from young people themselves, and 59% came from those who support them, which included parents/carers, charity sector support staff and schools/colleges. The young people about whom the queries pertained held a range of immigration statuses. The two most common categories were asylum seekers (42%) and Ukrainians (32%) – and other categories included refugees (8%) and UASC (5%).

Queries related to young people from all regions of the UK, but were heavily centred on Southern parts of England. London represented 32% of all queries, followed by the South East which represented 13% of all queries. When disaggregated by the North-South divide in England, the North represented 16% of queries, while the South represented 54%. Just over a quarter of queries were marked with 'unknown region', and 4% related to other UK nations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The country of origin of the young people associated with the queries was known for a quarter of all queries. These countries were widespread and covered 32 countries. The top three countries were: Ukraine (35% of queries), Afghanistan (7%) and Iran (6%).

2.3.3 Key informant interviews and focus groups

A total of 10 initiatives were examined through semi-structured interviews with 11 practitioners (with one interview being a joint interview). Five were college-based initiatives, two charity sector initiatives, two bespoke provisions, and one LA initiative. These were based in London (n=2), South East England (n=2), East of England (n=1), East Midlands (n=1), West Midlands (n=1), Yorkshire and the Humber (n=1), North East England (n=1) and North West England (n=1).

A total of 12 participants participated in four focus group discussions. Four were teachers/educators, three were participants from the charity sector, two were leaders in education institutions, two were LA representatives, and one represented a professional association.

Please note that, for ease of presenting the data in the findings section of the report, the term 'key informant interviews' encompasses both interviews and focus groups.

2.4 Research ethics and possible limitations

All research adhered to high ethical standards and was conducted in line with REUK's safeguarding and research ethics policies and procedures. Participants who participated in other REUK research projects and whose existing data was used for this study were given the option to opt in. The data of participants who did not provide informed consent for this purpose was omitted before analysis took place.

It is important to note that the sample does not claim to be representative of the practitioner population nor the issues facing displaced young people across the UK. Instead, the research provides a snapshot of some of the issues facing these young people, with a particular focus on England at a specific point in time.

There are two possible research limitations to consider:

- Firstly, data from both the survey and the advice line was skewed towards Southern England, and particularly London and the South East. While the study was initially envisaged to cover the whole of the UK, data from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was limited. The research recommendations are, therefore, focused on England.
- Secondly, inferential statistics are reported throughout the research findings. While the sample is small, it was sufficient to run chi square tests. A decision was taken to report the results of these chi square tests in order to disaggregate findings and reflect, to some extent, the complexity of the issues presented. However, given the relatively small sample size for quantitative research, their results should not be unduly emphasised.

Chapter 3: Research findings

This section presents findings from the research study. It is divided into four sections:

- Context (what the evidence tells us is happening for late arrivals' education)
- Barriers to upper secondary school (what the evidence tells us is hindering access to meaningful secondary education)
- Barriers to FE (what the evidence tells us is hindering access to meaningful FE)
- Initiatives that support access to meaningful education for late arrivals

Please note that the quotes provided throughout this section are verbatim, and do not necessarily represent the views of REUK and The Bell Foundation. 'Practitioners interviewed' refers to those who took part in both key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

3.1 Context - what is happening for late arrivals

3.1.1 Spending time outside of education

Evidence from this research showed that displaced young people who arrive in the UK late in the education system may face numerous barriers (see sections 3.2 and 3.3) that cause them to remain out of education for "substantial periods of time" (key informant interview, charity sector). Of 222 advice line queries, 47% (n=104) related to young people recorded as not accessing education. The time spent out of education was only known for a fifth (n=21) of these queries. 71% of these queries related to young people out of education for more than one month, and examples included young people out of education for six months and over a year.

Nearly two thirds (62%) of 133 survey respondents reported instances of young people not accessing any form of education for prolonged periods. Those working exclusively in London (n=26) were more likely to report these instances than those working exclusively outside of London (n=82): 81% and 54%, respectively. A chi-square test revealed this difference to be statistically significant (p value = 0.013).[11]

[11] Chi square (1) = 6.23, p = 0.013

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed frequently described late arrivals experiencing "huge gaps" (key informant interview, charity sector) between arriving in the UK and starting school or college. For example, one survey respondent noted: "We have seen children waiting for over six months to be enrolled in schools, and not being in any form of education meanwhile" (survey respondent, charity sector). One practitioner recounted seeing young people arriving in January and having "no hope of getting into formal education until September" (key informant interview, charity sector), resulting in approximately nine months out of education.

3.1.2 Impacts of time spent out of education on young people

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed described how being out of education can negatively impact late arrivals' wellbeing, particularly considering the hardships they may experience as a result of their forced displacement, including "trauma of why they left [their] home country, trauma of [the] journey, trauma of the processing system once arriving in the UK" (survey respondent, education institution). Young people living in temporary

accommodation were described as "languishing in hotels for really long times and waiting for placements" (key informant interview, charity sector).

Practitioners interviewed and survey respondents emphasised how displaced young people face boredom and isolation while waiting for an education placement. They reported young people remaining idle and "staying at home and playing computer games" (survey respondent, education institution) for significant amounts of time.

Safeguarding concerns were also identified. For example, one survey respondent stated:

> "Young people - particularly unaccompanied young people - are particularly vulnerable to victimisation, trafficking and exploitation, the lack of a structured environment, positive activities and safe adults (e.g. in education settings) does nothing to prevent any of this" (survey respondent, charity sector).

One practitioner, when describing in an interview the rationale for establishing education provision for displaced young people (see section 3.4), reflected on the impact of being out of education. They noted that it could leave late arrivals "isolated" and "increased the risk of them being vulnerable to exploitation" (key informant interview, bespoke provision).

3.1.3 Experiences of accessing upper secondary school

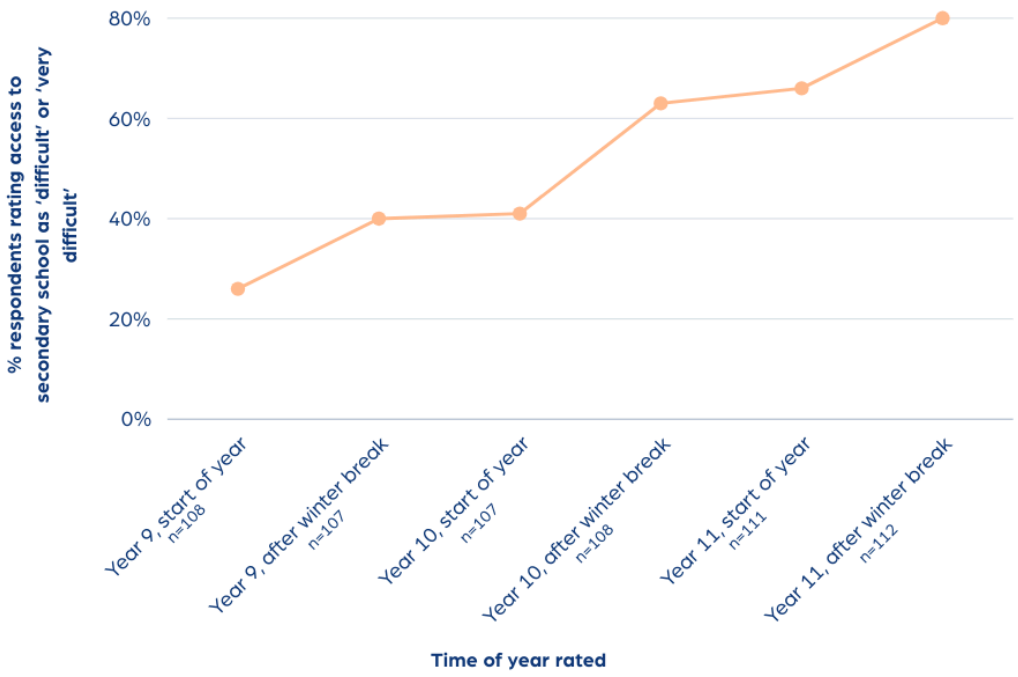
Evidence indicated that accessing secondary education becomes increasingly difficult for displaced young people the later they arrive in the education system – both in terms of the academic year and the time of year. This was particularly challenging after the turn of the year in Year 10. Survey respondents were asked to rate the ease or difficulty of obtaining a school place from the start of Year 9 to after the winter break of Year 11. The percentage of respondents rating access to education as 'difficult' or 'very difficult' rose from 41% (of 107 responses) at the start of Year 10 to 62% (of 108 responses) after the winter break of Year 10 (see Graph 1). This finding was echoed by practitioners interviewed, one of whom said:

> "We saw a lot of the children who were in Year 10, Year 11 [who] were not able to get a school place, particularly those people who arrived academically mid-year. They were sort of okay, up until maybe November of last year, and then after that, it became increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to get the youngsters into school" (key informant interview, charity sector).

Challenges can be exacerbated in Year 11, particularly after the winter break. Of the 111 survey respondents who provided ratings on the ease or difficulty of accessing a secondary school place at the start of Year 11, 66% chose 'difficult' or 'very difficult'. This rose to 80% of the 112 respondents who provided ratings for after the winter break of Year 11 (see Graph 1). When explaining their rating, one survey respondent said: "The later they come the harder it is [to get them a place]. Summer term of year 11 is very hard to get a school to accept them" (survey respondent, LA).

Survey respondents highlighted that young people arriving at a Year 11 age often remain out of education until they turn 16, the age they are typically eligible to enrol in college. One respondent described this period of time as a "no-man's-land [...] that place between not getting a school place and not being old enough for FE" (survey respondent, education institution). Others elaborated on this, with one stating: "My biggest concern are the hundreds of young people who are sitting at home for a year until they are of an age that can access FE" (survey respondent, education institution). Another expressed: "So [young people who arrive at] KS4 [Key Stage 4], especially late arriving Y11 [Year 11] young people, are 'treading water' until they are old enough to get into college" (survey respondent, LA).

Graph 1: Percentage of respondents rating access to secondary school as 'difficult' or 'very difficult', by time of year rated



3.1.4 Experiences of accessing FE

Compared to securing a place in Years 10 and 11 of secondary school, getting a place in a FE college was less frequently seen as challenging: 37% of 141 survey respondents rated it as either 'difficult' or 'very difficult'. A larger proportion of survey respondents perceived getting a place in sixth form as challenging, as compared to getting a place in college, with 64% of 107 respondents rating this as 'difficult' or 'very difficult'.

Late arrivals getting a place on an ESOL or functional skills course was, generally, perceived as relatively straightforward. However, accessing FE courses that could advance their education and career aspirations was reported as particularly challenging. For example, one survey respondent noted:

> "While getting a place (e.g. on an ESOL course) is not too difficult, finding opportunities which adequately engage and challenge the young people I support can be much more difficult! Young people with a strong educational background in another country and with really good English are often stuck studying only ESOL because they don't have any formal English qualifications, even if they'd be capable of participating in other courses" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed suggested that being over the age of 16 "really closes off the options for talented young people" (survey respondent, LA), and that accessible options may be limited to "just ESOL courses with few vocational elements" (survey respondent, LA) or "low level vocational, basic literacy and numeracy or stand-alone ESOL courses" (key informant interview, education institution). Emphasising the long-term impacts of narrow FE options for young people, one survey respondent stated:

> "There needs to be much [on] offer for qualifications post school. It takes new arrivals a few years to learn the language before they

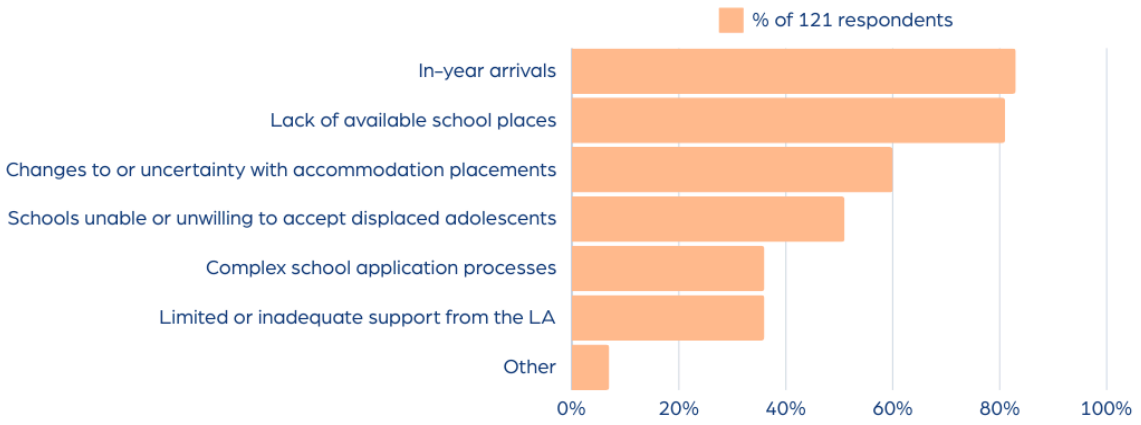
> can gain qualifications beyond English and Maths but in our area if they don't complete GCSEs while at school there is almost no opportunity to get them later. Some students are highly aspirational and want to go to university but not having qualifications limits their options or makes them less competitive compared to peers" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Practitioners interviewed expressed concern about young people aged 16-18 running out of time before they turn 19, when they become eligible for adult education and their funded options and opportunities further narrow (see section 1.4.2). One practitioner reflected: "Adult learners also don't have a great shot [...] once they go on to adult provision, it is two or two and a half hour classes a week" (key informant interview, education institution).

Qualitative survey responses suggested that 16-19 year-olds' "overall educational development is neglected" (survey respondent, charity sector) in comparison to those under 16. Shedding further insight on this, one survey respondent described how "the emphasis is on getting school aged children into primary and secondary school and the 16-19 year old cohort are left until after this priority group are dealt with" (survey respondent, LA) – and so alluding to young people seeking to access FE facing longer periods out of education than those seeking access to school.

3.2 Barriers to upper secondary school

Graph 2: Barriers to secondary education for late arrivals, as reported by percentage of 121 survey respondents



Evidence from this research demonstrated numerous barriers to accessing upper secondary school. Graph 2 illustrates the prominence of these barriers, as reported by the survey respondents who completed the secondary school section (n=121). Throughout the rest of this section, each barrier is addressed in order of frequency, supplemented with insights from the advice line and key informant interviews.

3.2.1 In-year arrivals

The barrier of in-year arrivals was encountered by 83% of 121 survey respondents. Practitioners interviewed also reflected on this issue in interviews, with one observing a pattern of "young people who are arriving later in the year always struggling more to get in [to secondary school] than the kids who are coming earlier" (key informant interview, charity sector).

Challenges were particularly associated with those arriving in Year 11. Of the survey respondents that reported in-year arrivals as a barrier (n=101), 78% identified insufficient time for students to prepare for or complete GCSE exams as a challenge. This is further illustrated by one survey respondent who said:

> "After [the] Christmas holidays [it] starts to get tricky the nearer to March you move because Y11 [Year 11] is preparing for exams and revision is taking place therefore new arrivals will be arriving into revision mode and then soon enter exam season" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Practitioners interviewed recognised the practical difficulties of young people arriving mid-way through Year 11. For example, one noted: "We recognise and appreciate if a young person arrives, sort of Year 11, midway through, so it's after September, it is incredibly difficult for [education] provisions to work" (key informant interview, education institution). They linked this to the challenge of placing young people in classes when the timetable is focused on GCSE revision and exams, rather than regular teaching.

Limited financial incentives for schools to enrol students who arrive in-year, after the October school census date, was reported by 38% of 101 respondents. Practitioners interviewed provided further insights on this. One described how education institutions "won't get funding for [in-year arrivals]" if they arrive after the "census in October" (key informant interview, school leadership). They explained that this lack of funding could affect a school's willingness or ability to accept displaced students,

particularly if they need additional support inside and outside of the classroom.

3.2.2 Lack of available school places

A lack of school places was encountered by 81% of 121 survey respondents. Of those encountering this barrier (n=98), 74% reported schools being full and already oversubscribed, 64% reported schools being unable to oversubscribe, and 52% reported long waiting lists for places to become available. While a lack of school places emerged prominently from survey responses, the issue was less evident from the analysis of REUK's advice line; 8% of the 37 secondary school queries related to young people remaining out of education due to local schools having no available places.

Some survey respondents alluded to schools using a lack of school places as an excuse because they were unable or unwilling to accept and accommodate displaced young people. For example, one reported encountering "schools unwilling to accept children claiming they are full" (survey respondent, education institution). The reasons why schools may be unable or unwilling to accept displaced students are further elaborated in section 3.2.4.

A lack of school places in the middle of an academic year was reported by 73% of the 101 survey respondents who selected in-year arrivals as a barrier (see section 3.2.1). Providing further insight on this, one survey respondent described how "vacant school places quickly become filled at the start of the year so those pupils coming in mid-year find it more difficult to be placed in school" (survey respondent, education institution). Challenges pertaining to a lack of school places are further elaborated in section 3.2.2.

As with in-year arrivals, Year 11 appeared to pose a particular challenge with regards to a lack of school places. For example, one survey respondent reflected: "In my experience, it is especially difficult for children of Y11 [Year 11] age to get a school place - I have known children having to wait many, many months with many schools saying they have no places" (survey respondent, charity sector).

3.2.3 Accommodation insecurity and instability

The barrier of accommodation insecurity and instability was encountered by 60% of 121 survey respondents. Evidence suggested that this barrier may be geographically variable, with respondents working exclusively in Southern regions of England being more likely than those working exclusively in Northern regions of England to report it: 68% of 68 respondents working in the South, as opposed to 44% of 36 respondents working in the North. A chi square test revealed this difference to be statistically significant (p value = 0.022).[12]

Survey respondents who reported accommodation insecurity and instability (n=73) identified young people having to move out of their borough (reported by 71%) and out of their city (reported by 48%). 41% described changes in accommodation resulting in young people being required to commute more than one hour to reach an education placement. Qualitative survey responses demonstrated how young people of a secondary school age can be "re-homed at short notice" (survey respondent, education institution), and how "uncertain accommodation status can create challenges either at application, or later in the year as families are moved" (survey respondent, LA).

Of 73 respondents, 63% reported young people experiencing a further break in their education as a result of accommodation changes. One survey respondent described accommodation changes as "the biggest driver of 'out of education' problems" (survey respondent, LA). Another reflected: "When people are moved to new hotels their education is disrupted" (survey respondent, charity sector).

[12] Chi square (1) = 5.26, p = 0.022

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed suggested that accommodation insecurity and instability can have particular ramifications for young people in Year 11. Despite Home Office policy stating that consideration should be given to a young person being in their final year of school and preparing for GCSEs before dispersal (as described in section 1.4.4), evidence from this research indicated that moves often occur at this crucial time: 55% of 71 survey respondents reported encountering the issue 'adolescent was moved during a key educational milestone (e.g. Year 11)'. Providing further insight into this, one practitioner interviewed reflected on frequently encountering young people in Year 11 being dispersed, suggesting that "they will be waiting a long time before they get another school place" (key informant interview, education leadership).

3.2.4 Schools unable or unwilling to accept displaced students

Just over half (51%) of 121 survey respondents encountered schools being unable or unwilling to accept late arrivals. Various reasons were suggested for this, many of which related to a lack of capacity or resources within schools to meet the needs of displaced adolescents. Of those that reported this barrier (n=61): 84% reported schools being unable to provide sufficient English as an Additional Language (EAL) support; 76% reported schools being unable to provide adequate in-class support; 73% reported schools being unable to provide academic interventions for students who have missed years of schooling; and 61% reported schools being unable to provide appropriate mental health or pastoral support for displaced students.

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed suggested that the challenge of providing an appropriate placement for young people whose peers are preparing for GCSE exams can be a driving factor behind schools feeling unable to admit late arrivals. Of 61 survey respondents, 76% reported schools being concerned that displaced young people would have insufficient time to prepare for GCSEs. One practitioner interviewed noted: "[Late arrivals] won't be admitted into schools because their peers are doing GCSEs and they haven't got any alternative kind of, or meaningful, provision" (key informant interview, education institution).

Schools' reluctance or unwillingness to accept late arrivals – as opposed to schools feeling unable to – was also evident. Just under half of 61 survey respondents reported encountering schools expressing concerns about late arrivals' academic grades affecting their place in school performance tables. Additionally, practitioners interviewed suggested that the mechanisms by which the GCSE results of EAL arrivals at the upper-secondary level can be excluded from a school's results profile are not well known to schools. However, they also emphasised that this negative perception of late arrivals' impact of performance tables is often unfounded. As described by one practitioner:

> "We've got a high proportion of children with EAL in the school and they are our best performing cohort by a mile [...] They do themselves and the school proud, and I'm not sure that that's really a fair concern [the concern of EAL students bringing school profiles down]' (key informant interview, school leadership).

Some data suggested that this concern may differ depending on the cohort of late arrival. For example, one practitioner interviewed suggested that Hong Kong British National Overseas are "fought over for admissions purposes, because they're seen as, you know, the gold standard of getting your maths GCSE up" (key informant interview, LA). Suggesting "clear discrimination in the admissions process" (survey respondent, charity sector), one survey respondent reflected on how "schools in [region redacted] have been willing to over-subscribe for Ukrainians (particularly grammar schools) - but not for newcomers from other backgrounds" (survey respondent,

charity sector). Additionally, respondents who worked with UASCs (n=31) were significantly more likely than those who worked with non-UASCs (n=39) to report schools being unable or unwilling to accept displaced adolescents (p value = 0.022): 71% and 44% respectively.[13]

3.2.5 Varied support from LAs

Limited or inadequate support from the LA was encountered by just over a third (36%) of 121 survey respondents. Respondents from LAs were significantly less likely than respondents from the charity sector (n=38) to report this barrier: 15% and 53% respectively (p value < 0.001).[14]

The specific challenges selected by the 43 respondents who reported limited or inadequate support from the LA included: a lack of resources or staff to provide timely support with applications and enrolment (77%); a lack of communication between different departments within the LA (65%); and a lack of clarity about who is responsible for ensuring that displaced adolescents access school (63%). Elaborating on the latter, one survey respondent stated that "no one has a clear route for these young people into education" (survey respondent, university). Providing insight into the reasons behind this lack of capacity, one practitioner interviewed stated that LAs are "under so much pressure" (key informant interview, charity sector), often with extremely stretched capacity.

Qualitative data from survey respondents and practitioners interviewed suggested that LA capacity and expertise can geographically vary. Charity sector practitioners suggested that rural areas and newer dispersal areas may be less likely to have expertise and capacity to support late arrivals into education. Additionally, they reflected that limited communication from the Home Office can prevent forward planning and preparation, explaining that "hotels are getting set up quite suddenly and local authorities are literally panicking and don't know what to do" (key informant interview, charity sector). Supporting this, just under half (47%) of 43 survey respondents identified a lack of communication between the LA and the Home Office as a barrier to secondary school access for late arrivals.

Finally, just over half (53%) of 43 survey respondents identified a lack of mechanisms to identify, track and monitor displaced adolescents. This issue was reinforced by practitioners interviewed who suggested that, with the exception of UASC, LAs do not consistently identify displaced young people in their area or monitor their education outcomes. This could result in some young people "not coming onto [the LA's] radar for months" (key informant interview, LA) and being rendered invisible. This was particularly identified as affecting displaced children whose families had applied to academies and were not known to school admissions teams – and was linked to wider issues of children missing in education.

3.2.6 Complex school application processes

Of the 121 respondents who completed the secondary school section of the survey, 36% reported complex school application processes as a barrier to secondary school access for late arrivals.

Evidence suggested that parents or those who support displaced young people may struggle to navigate these complex processes: 41% of 37 secondary school queries to REUK's advice line were associated with requests for information and advice on accessing secondary school – namely how to practically navigate the application and admissions process. Survey respondents illuminated some of the reasons behind these struggles: 77% of 44 survey respondents reported parents' or carers' English skills preventing them from completing applications; 70% reported the difficult/inaccessible online nature of application processes; 64% reported a

[13] Chi square (1) = 5.25, p = 0.022
[14] Chi square (1) = 14.26, p < 0.001

parents being unaware of local school options; and 52% reported a lack of support for parents to complete applications.

Qualitative survey responses suggested that the ease of navigating the school application process may vary depending on a young person's circumstances. For example, one survey respondent said:

> "Pupils who do not arrive on resettlement schemes and who are from families with limited educational background or English struggle with the admission process of trying to gain a school place and this can cause delays and time out of education" (survey respondent, education institution).

In addition to families struggling to navigate the application process, the practical complexity of the process was evident. Just over half (52%) of 44 survey respondents reported documentation issues during secondary school application and registration. Qualitative survey responses further highlighted this issue, with one respondent observing "schools and colleges requiring documents and paperwork that families and YP [young people] do not have" (survey respondent, LA).

3.2.7 Other barriers

Two additional barriers emerged from the analysis of qualitative survey responses and key informant interviews.

Age assessments

Firstly, the impact of age assessments on late arrivals' ability to access secondary school was evident.[15] One survey respondent identified age assessments, which "can take a very long time (up to two years) to resolve", as "the main reason children we work with don't access school [because] LAs won't do anything interim till it's complete" (survey respondent, charity sector). Another described age assessments as a "huge challenge", stating that "these can take over 6 months and there is reluctance from schools to take children who may not be the age they claim due to safeguarding concerns" (survey respondent, education institution).

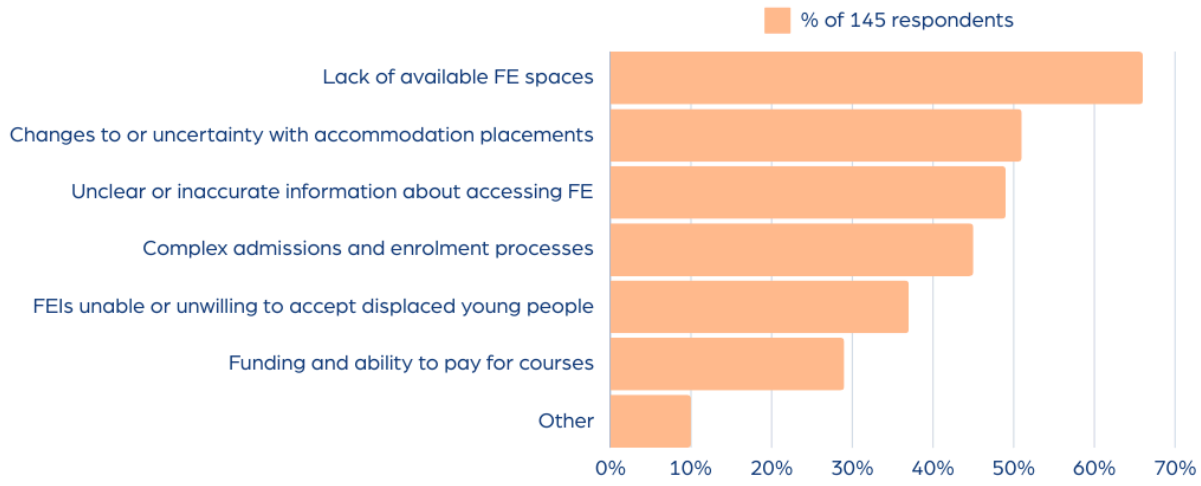
Costs associated with attending school

Secondly, the costs associated with attending school were also clear. This included transportation costs, particularly if young people have to travel significant distances to reach school, and the cost of affording resources such as books and uniforms. One survey respondent reported a "lack of funding for items such as school uniform, stationery, bags etc" (survey respondent, LA), and linked this to challenges once accessing education, including experiences of bullying. These challenges are further illuminated through an analysis of REUK's advice line queries: 46% of 37 secondary school queries related to challenges young people who were already registered or attending school faced, and included queries about funding for uniforms, resources, technology and travel.

[15] Many UASCs and other forcibly displaced children arrive in the UK without evidence of their age. The Home Office has a duty to carry out an initial assessment of their age to establish whether they are, or could be, children. See here for more.

3.3 Barriers to further education

Graph 3: Barriers to FE for late arrivals, by percentage of 145 survey respondents who completed the FE section of the survey



Evidence from this research demonstrated numerous barriers also exist with access to FE. Graph 3 shows the prominence of these barriers, as reported by the 145 survey respondents who completed the FE section of the survey. Throughout the rest of this section, each barrier is addressed in order of frequency, supplemented with insights from the advice line and key informant interviews.

3.3.1 Lack of available FE places

A lack of available FE places was encountered by 67% of 145 survey respondents. Respondents working exclusively with non-UASCs (n=37) were significantly more likely than those working exclusively with UASCs (n=43) to report encountering a lack of FE places: 88% and 46% respectively. A chi square test revealed this to be statistically significant (p value < 0.001).[16]

While the issue emerged less frequently from an analysis of REUK's advice line, nine percent of the 109 advice line queries pertaining to FE related to a lack of places on local, accessible FE courses.

Evidence from this research indicated that accessible college courses for late arrivals who are new to English – such as ESOL courses or functional skills courses – are often full or, as reported by 66% of 63 respondents, have long waiting lists. Additionally, 67% of 63 respondents reported college courses having limited enrolment dates throughout the year, leaving those who arrive in-year facing long periods out of education. Elaborating on this, one survey respondent stated: "The local FE college is generally full at the start of the autumn term, so it's difficult for any mid-year new arrivals to get places" (survey respondent, LA). Another said: "E1+ [Entry Level 1] college spaces have filled up by Oct or at the latest Jan/Feb in previous academic years meaning we often cannot help in-year arrivals with college & they wait a long time" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Qualitative survey responses suggested that the availability of FE places varies geographically and depends on the availability of colleges that are experienced in, or committed to, supporting students from displacement backgrounds. When such colleges were identified, they were described positively and their popularity was evident,

[16] Chi square (1) = 16.66, p < 0.001

demonstrating the potential of FE institutions to provide accessible provision. However, survey respondents noted that these colleges are likely to be oversubscribed, especially if they are one of the only accessible options in a local area. This is illustrated by a survey respondent who stated:

> "The ease of getting into college depends on the area e.g. in the north east, there is very good provision for this cohort at [name of college redacted], but nowhere else. Places are very limited so there are not enough for the numbers in the area" (survey respondent, LA).

Additionally, qualitative survey responses suggested that courses in sixth forms will likely require grades or qualifications that late arrivals may not have, particularly if they have not previously studied in the UK. For example, one respondent suggested that "sixth forms are highly unlikely to accept children without GCSEs" (survey respondent, LA). Another stated: "The young people we work with often don't have sufficient prior qualifications to access 6th form courses which tend to be at Level 2 and above" (survey respondent LA).

3.3.2 Changes to or uncertainty with accommodation placements

Just over half (51%) of 145 survey respondents had encountered changes to or uncertainty with accommodation placements as a barrier to FE for late arrivals. Of the survey respondents that selected accommodation uncertainty and changes as a barrier (n=74), 73% described young people having to move out of their borough, 69% described young people having to move out of their city, and 54% described changes in accommodation resulting in young people being required to commute more than one hour to reach an education placement – reflecting the significant disruption caused to late arrivals seeking to access FE. Additionally, immigration policy barriers, including dispersal, were reported in 11% of 109 FE advice line queries.

Evidence demonstrated that accommodation moves can disrupt young people's education. For example, one survey respondent described the issue of "young adults being relocated just as places [in education] are secured" (survey respondent, charity sector). Additionally, survey responses reflected the disruption caused to those young people who were able to access and start an appropriate education placement: 57% of 74 survey respondents reported late arrivals being moved during, just before, or in the middle of a milestone for their course (such as exams, assessments or placements). One practitioner interviewed described the frequency of moves on their college course. They explained:

> "We've just lost about five or six of them. There's a local hotel that's being shut down and they're not there anymore. They've all been disbanded to various parts of the country [...] They just get up and [are] moved with about 24-48 hours notice. It's not good for them because they've built relationships with us. Their confidence is beginning [to improve]. English is improving just so much [...] It's a real shame, they get moved on" (key informant interview, education institution).

Re-accessing appropriate education after moving can be challenging: 53% of 74 survey respondents reported moves resulting in a further break to young people's education. Providing insight into this issue, practitioners interviewed described how dispersal makes it difficult for education institutions and LAs to plan ahead and ensure that places are available and accessible to those who need them. For example, one stated:

> "We don't know who's coming [...] we don't know who's going to be placed in this area [...] we don't get that information. It is literally just when social workers come here with their students and fill in an

application. So we have a waitlist now" (key informant interview, education institution).

3.3.3 Unclear or inaccurate information about accessing FE

Just under half (49%) of 145 survey respondents reported unclear or inaccurate information as a barrier to FE. Additionally, nearly half (48%) of 104 FE advice line queries were general requests for information, advice and guidance on accessing FE.[17] These queries included requests for information about young people's rights and entitlements to study at FE, access to funding, practical guidance on applying and enrolling in FE courses, and qualification requirements for certain courses.

The frequency with which survey respondents reported unclear or inaccurate information as a barrier was associated with their institutional affiliation and whether they worked with UASCs or non-UASCs. Respondents from the charity sector were significantly more likely than education institution respondents and LA respondents to report unclear or inaccurate information: 72% of 46 charity sector respondents reported this barrier, as compared to 38% of 48 education institution respondents, and 39% of 44 LA respondents (p values = 0.001[18] and 0.016[19] respectively). Additionally, those who worked with non-UASCs were significantly more likely than those who worked with UASCs to report unclear or inaccurate information about access to FE as a barrier: 62% of 37 respondents, and 35% of 43 respondents respectively (p value = 0.015).[20]

Of 71 survey respondents who selected unclear or inaccurate information as a barrier to FE, 83% reported a lack of information and advice and 69% reported conflicting information about rights and entitlements. Qualitative survey responses suggested that late arrivals may receive confusing information or a lack of information about studying at the FE level. For example, one survey respondent described how "adolescents and adults have struggled with knowing exactly which college courses they are allowed to do" (survey respondent, charity sector). This may get more complex the older young people are, with one respondent explaining:

> "Many young people [...] who have the right to full time education but arrived in the UK too old to become a LAC [looked after child] are unaware of their right to study immediately and assume they have to wait 6 months same as adults rather then be able to access education immediately" (survey respondent, education institution).

Those who support young people may also struggle with information about their rights and entitlements. One survey respondent, speaking about newly arrived children aged 16-18 with high levels of English language fluency, stated "no one seems to know what [they] are eligible for".

Unclear or inaccurate information may not only relate to immediate access to FE, but also to pathways through FE that enable young people to make meaningful progress and achieve their career aspirations. Of 109 advice line queries, 22% were seeking information and advice about pathways through FE. Young people and those who supported them requested guidance on course options that could help them realise their career aspirations, and the steps needed to access them.

[17] This high percentage of queries seeking advice, guidance and advice as compared to other barriers will be affected by the nature of an advice line. Nonetheless, it demonstrates how many are seeking general information about accessing FE, as opposed to facing a specific or tangible barrier.
[18] Chi square (1) = 11.1, p = 0.001
[19] Chi square (1) = 9.98, p = 0.016
[20] UASC's status as looked after children may be an explanation for this difference, as their education entitlements may be clearer to education professionals. Chi square (1) = 5.93, p = 0.015.

3.3.4 Complex admissions and enrolment processes

Of 145 survey respondents, 45% reported complex admissions and enrolment processes as a barrier to FE. Those working with non-UASCs (n=37) were significantly more likely to report encountering complex admissions and enrolment processes than those working with UASCs (n=43): 51% and 26% respectively (p value = 0.018).[21]

Of the 65 respondents reporting complex admissions and enrolment processes as a barrier to FE: 89% reported encountering language barriers affecting enrolment; 85% reported a lack of trained staff at enrolment who understand the needs and entitlements of displaced young people; 63% reported complex documentation requests at enrolment; and 35% reported unfriendly or unwelcoming staff at enrolment. While representing a small percentage of advice line queries, 7% of 109 advice line queries related to barriers encountered during college enrolment. These queries included examples of unnecessary or unreasonable documentation requests and challenging staff at enrolment.

The complexity of enrolment and admissions processes did not emerge strongly from qualitative analysis of survey responses and key informant interviews. However, qualitative survey responses indicated that young people and their parents or carers often require support or advocacy in order to navigate these processes.

3.3.5 FE institutions being unable or unwilling to accept displaced young people

Institutions being unable or unwilling to accept displaced young people was reported by 37% of 145 respondents. This related to both a "lack of physical capacity" (survey respondent, education institution) within FE institutions to meet the needs of displaced students, as well as a reluctance to admit them.

With regards to a lack of capacity, of the 53 survey respondents who selected FE institutions being unable or unwilling to accept students: 68% reported FE institutions being unable to fund academic interventions for adolescents who have missed years of schooling; 66% reported FE institutions being unable to fund language support for students; and 43% reported FE institutions being unable to fund mental health or pastoral support for displaced students – which, according to two practitioners interviewed, may be best provided in young people's mother tongue.

Additionally, analysis of key informant interviews suggested that some colleges may be unable to accept displaced students, particularly when they arrive mid-year or mid-way through a course, due to funding issues. As described by one practitioner, "colleges aren't funded for any student they take mid-year" (key informant interview, education leadership).

In terms of accessing sixth forms attached to schools, participants described how, generally, access is restricted by limited courses or pathways that are accessible to late arrivals with enhanced language or education support needs. As described by one survey respondent, "very few sixth forms have flexible educational pathways to accommodate this age group" (survey respondent, LA).

A reluctance on the part of FE institutions to admit displaced students also emerged, partly due to a lack of understanding about rights and entitlements to FE. Of the 53 survey respondents, 57% reported encountering FE institutions with a lack of knowledge about displaced students' rights to study, and 36% reported encountering a nervousness about providing a place for students with an insecure immigration status. This reluctance was also linked to FE institutions facing a pressure to demonstrate course completion rates, as reported by 40% of the 53 survey respondents. Elaborating on this issue,

[21] Chi square (1) = 5.64, p = 0.018

one survey respondent described the issue of the "Home Office moving learners out of borough when they are due to take qualification assessments and have not completed their studies which affects our retention and achievement and therefore directly affects funding" (survey respondent, education institution).

3.3.6 Funding and ability to pay for courses

Of 145 survey respondents, 29% reported young people being unable to pay for their FE courses. Charity sector respondents (n=46) were significantly more likely than LA respondents (n=44) to report this issue: 43% and 20% respectively (p value = 0.019).[22]

Evidence underscored the complexity of the FE funding landscape for displaced 16-19 year-olds. 11% of 109 FE advice line queries pertained to navigating policy barriers, including immigration-related and age-related restrictions on studying at FE. Moreover, 69% of 42 survey respondents reported encountering circumstances whereby a young person's immigration status rendered them ineligible for government funding.

Challenges with accessing funding for courses also emerged. Of 42 survey respondents, 57% reported limited or no grant/scholarship options to pay for a course, and 55% reported young people being unable to evidence their eligibility for government funding. Additionally, 55% reported young people having to wait six months before becoming eligible to access government funding. The impact of this waiting period for asylum seekers over the age of 18 was reinforced in qualitative responses from survey respondents and practitioners interviewed.

Challenges with accessing funding to cover study-related costs, including travel and resources, was also evident. Of 42 respondents, 71% reported limited or no bursary options available at college to cover transport and other study-related costs.

3.3.7 Other

Two additional barriers emerged from the analysis of qualitative survey responses and key informant interviews.

Age assessments

As with secondary school, qualitative evidence revealed the impact of age assessments on access to FE. One survey respondent described "an issue around age-disputed young people who are often unable to access appropriate education until their age disputes have been resolved", a process they reflected "can take years" (survey respondent, charity sector). Another reflected: "Age dispute cases can prevent a significant number of the young people we support from accessing further education" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Evidence suggested that age disputes could intersect with accommodation instability, with one survey respondent stating: "Clients who have been assessed as over 18 have been moved from their accommodation to hotels elsewhere and are no longer able to attend college" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Qualification equivalency

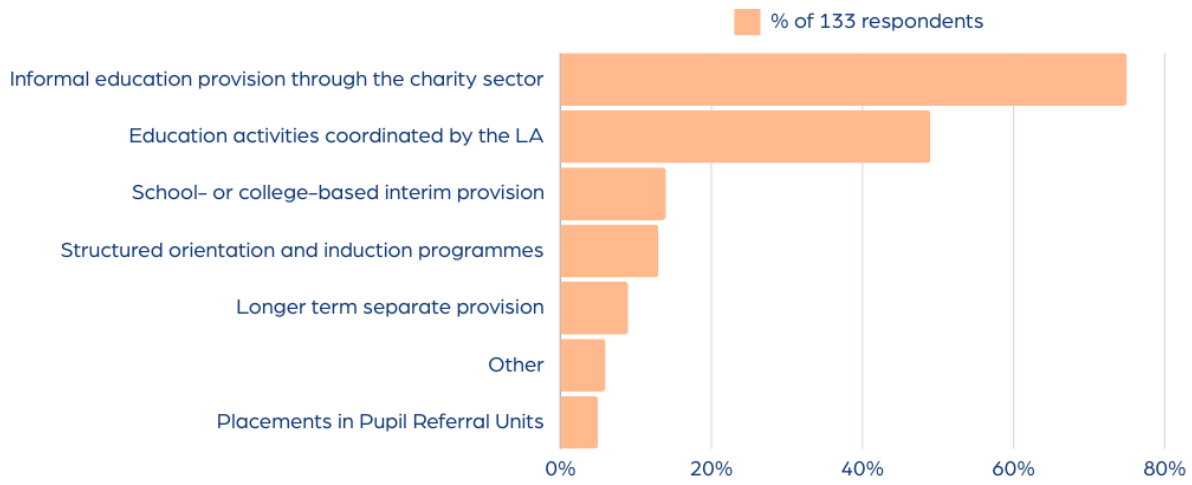
The ability to demonstrate how qualifications from countries of origin equate to UK qualifications also emerged as a barrier. One survey respondent reflected that "it can [be] complicated for young people entering the UK to convert any qualifications they have from school in their own country" (survey respondent, LA), and so rendering young people only eligible for ESOL courses.[23]

[22] Chi square (1) = 5.46, p = 0.019

[23] Much has been written about the challenges of recognition of prior learning for displaced students attempting to access university. It is beyond the scope of this report to translate the details of this to the FE stage of education, but interested readers can read a UNESCO summary of key arguments and potential solutions here.

3.4 Initiatives that support access to education for late arrivals

Graph 4: Initiatives supporting young people to access education, by percentage of 133 respondents



This section presents research findings related to initiatives or interventions supporting access to education for late arrivals. Graph 4 shows the frequency with which various initiatives were reported by survey respondents and, throughout the rest of this section, each category of initiative is addressed in turn.

3.4.1 Informal education provision provided by the charity sector

Of 133 survey respondents, three quarters (75%) reported encountering informal education provision provided by the charity sector. Those working exclusively in Southern regions of England were significantly more likely than those working exclusively in Northern regions of England to report young people accessing such provision in the absence of a school or college place: 80% (of 80 respondents) and 61% (of 36 respondents) respectively (p value = 0.032).[24]

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed highlighted the charity sector's role in bridging gaps for large numbers of young people unable to access mainstream education. A range of initiatives were described, including weekday, weekend, and holiday provision designed to fill gaps while young people wait for a school or college place, as well as to enhance learning for those with a place but lacking sufficient support, particularly with language and literacy. Additionally, the charity sector was described as playing an important role in supporting young people and their families to navigate application, admissions and enrolment processes for both secondary school and college.

While the evidence indicates the charity sector's vital role, survey respondents and practitioners interviewed suggested that this should not necessarily be the case. For example, one survey respondent noted: "It is not right that children are left dependent on the voluntary sector for getting them places and/or providing education" (survey respondent, charity sector). Practitioners interviewed further suggested that charity sector provision should not be considered a replacement for education in a supported, mainstream environment. As stated by one

[24] Chi square (1) = 4.62, p = 0.032

practitioner from the charity sector when reflecting on their initiative: “I think that given the limits of being a charity, we have put together a good programme this summer. However, there is no substitute for attendance on a normal college course” (key informant interview, charity sector).

Survey respondents and practitioners interviewed alike reported challenges facing charity sector provision. A lack of funding and capacity was evident, leading to waiting lists for places and limits on the reach of charity sector provision. As illustrated by one charity sector survey respondent: “Because of national government policy around this group, there is SO LITTLE funding for anyone to do anything about this [supporting late arrivals]” (survey respondent, charity sector.

Box 2: Case studies on charity sector provision

Springboard Youth Academy

Having observed an increasing number of displaced young people arriving in London late in the education system, and the challenges they faced in accessing a mainstream education placement, Springboard Youth Academy (in London) provides structured weekend, half-term and summer supplementary programmes for new arrivals aged 13-18. These programmes provide young people with an opportunity to make new friends, acquire English language and life skills, and progress into or through mainstream education – thereby bridging gaps for those young people left behind by the mainstream school system.

These programmes are grounded in a participatory and experiential English language learning curriculum. In the mornings, young people engage in participatory English language sessions followed by sports or social activities and lunch. In the afternoons, they engage in experiential sessions, whether arts-based or simulation-based, that reinforce the morning’s sessions and provide opportunities to use vocabulary in a more practical way. Springboard Youth Academy also embeds peer leadership into the iterative design of their curriculum: alumni can contribute to and deliver the programmes, take on practical leadership roles, and progress into paid staff positions where there is interest. Find out more: springboardyouth.com/programmes/.

Hertfordshire Welcomes Refugees

In the East of England, a refugee support voluntary group, Hertfordshire Welcomes Refugees, responded to the set up of asylum seeker accommodation in the area and the resulting large numbers of young people of a Year 10 and Year 11 age unable to get a school or college place mid-year. By coordinating with key stakeholders, including a local FE college, the local council and voluntary groups, they set up a one-off summer school programme for 15-19 year-olds. The programme provided up to 25 young people with ESOL lessons, some of which were delivered by the local FE college as a taster session and to support access to formal ESOL provision within the college from September. The programme also provided science learning sessions, a local orientation, opportunities for making friends, trips, and arts and sports activities.

The summer programme helped bridge the gap for young people who had missed out on an education placement in the previous academic year. It offered them the chance to advance their English language skills ahead of September enrolment and provided opportunities for isolated young people to form social connections with others, feel welcomed into the local community, and have fun while waiting to enter mainstream education.

3.4.2 Education activities coordinated by the LA

Of 133 survey respondents, just under half (49%) reported encountering education activities coordinated by the LA. Those working exclusively with UASCs (n=44) were significantly more likely than those working with non-UASCs (n=32) to report encountering such activities: 64% and 41% respectively (p value = 0.047).[25]

Practitioners interviewed described a range of education activities and support provided by LAs, with one reflecting on "really great instances of local authorities doing great stuff and really responding to it [the local need for education support] very proactively" (key informant interview, charity sector). Examples of LA education activities included: providing tuition for young people; "English language/school readiness sessions" (survey respondent, LA); and funding of education provision for late arrivals, including school- or college-based provision (see section 3.4.3); and longer term separate provision (see section 3.4.5) or orientation programmes (see section 3.4.4).

LAs were also reported to provide accessible information, advice and guidance for parents and carers of young people, such as through "community-based hubs for newly arrived families in areas of high immigration to support these families in accessing education (survey respondent, LA), and through translated, clear information on websites.

The importance of LAs providing school admissions support and coordination was threaded through the responses from survey respondents and practitioners interviewed. Some LAs were reported to undertake outreach activities in local temporary accommodation to identify and register school-aged children. Partnerships and collaboration were key for this, and examples emerged of collaborations between teams within LAs (for example, the refugee support and school admissions team) as well as between LAs and local education institutions. For example, one survey respondent stated:

> "Our In Year Fair Access Protocol does service newly arrived displaced adolescents well if they are unable to secure a school place, particularly for yr11 arriving after Christmas, where we have an agreement with a local college to offer them an access course with a view to carrying on their education in college after leaving secondary school" (survey respondent, LA).

However, as with the charity sector, challenges affected LAs' ability to provide comprehensive education activities and support. The level of support "varies from LA to LA" (survey respondent, LA), as a result of significantly differing funding, expertise and capacity landscapes. Practitioners interviewed reported "pressure on local authorities" (key informant interview, LA) which affected their ability and capacity to implement initiatives to support late arrivals into education.

[25] The importance of the virtual school for UASC and looked-after children was evident, and perhaps an explanation for this statistical difference. A virtual school is a LA initiative that exists to bring about improvements in the education and outcomes of looked after children (LAC), including UASC. It is not a physical school, but instead offers effective coordination of education services at a strategic and operational level for LAC. Chi square (1) = 3.95, p = 0.047.

Box 3: Case study on LA support

Hampshire County Council's Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMTAS) is a rights-respecting service that advocates for the rights of children from ethnic minority groups, including those learning English as an additional language. The service receives referrals for children struggling to access or thrive in a mainstream education environment. Over the last few years, the service has received large numbers of referrals for young people from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong and other displaced populations. It has also seen a large increase in referrals for late arrivals.

The service triages late arrival referrals as a priority and, as part of their wider service, provides dedicated support to help these young people settle into school. This includes Pupil Profiling, which assesses the students' skills in both their first language and English, and determines other support needs to develop tailored recommendations for appropriate provision. Support may also include interpreter assistance for progression meetings, such as careers interviews or post-16 options, and the delivery of a 'study skills' programme that trains young people to effectively use their skills in languages other than English to access a mainstream curriculum delivered in English.[26] Some late arrivals have the opportunity to take a GCSE in their heritage language, with EMTAS providing support with this.

The service also provides teachers with training on best practice when working with late arrivals, emphasising the assets, and strengths of these young people. Additionally, the service has set up a dedicated webpage for supporting late arrivals, with resources and guidance for local schools and colleges, young people and their parents and carers.

[26] Correction: an earlier version of this report stated that the study skills programme "trains young people to effectively use their level 1 ESOL skills to access a mainstream curriculum delivered in English". This has been corrected to make clear that the programme supports young people to use their skills in languages other than English to access a mainstream curriculum delivered in English. This correction was made on 2 October 2024.

3.4.3 School or college-based provision

Of 133 survey respondents, only 14% reported encountering interim provision provided by schools and colleges.[27] While less frequently reported than charity sector and LA activities, where they exist, survey respondents and practitioners interviewed highlighted significant benefits for late arrivals when they access tailored and supportive provision within an education setting.

The types of setting-based provision noted by survey respondents and practitioners interviewed included bespoke pathways for late arrivals in schools and colleges. They also included enhanced ESOL provision (or ESOL Plus provision) that provides late arrivals with a robust ESOL focus and curriculum alongside other courses or elements, ranging from subject-specific courses to vocational and life skills courses. Such ESOL courses were described as being "far more motivational" and able to "improve engagement, attendance and integration with other students" (survey respondent, LA) compared to stand-alone ESOL courses. Furthermore, some college courses were noted to accept students from the age of 14/15 (referred to as early college transfers) when these students are unable to access a secondary school place.

However, the availability of school- and college-based provision can depend on the presence of a committed and appropriately resourced education institution in the area. Where such provisions exist, they appeared to be responding to a well-established local need, and so are not present throughout the UK. Additionally, issues of under-resourcing, under-funding and under-prioritisation also emerged. For example, one survey respondent stated: "We have an alternative pathway in one academy school but it is poorly funded and under-staffed and not given the priority it needs" (survey respondent, education institution).

[27] This may be an underrepresentation as the phrasing of the survey question related to interim provision, and so likely does not include examples of enhanced ESOL provision or bespoke pathways within schools or colleges.

Box 4: Case study on school-based pathways

Leeds City Academy is a secondary school renowned for being multilingual and multicultural. Roughly 70% of their students are EAL learners, of which about half are at early stages of English language acquisition. The school welcomes refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children throughout the year, including UASC and others who arrive in Years 10 or 11. Responding to this, the school has developed a range of initiatives to welcome and support late arrivals.

Firstly, the school has developed a one week induction course for new arrivals, led by student support workers with expertise in EAL. This course can be extended to two weeks for students who arrive with limited literacy in their first language, or who have large gaps in their schooling history. The course focuses on welcome, familiarisation with the education system in the UK, and equipping school staff with information and knowledge about the students and their needs. Following the course, students continue into mainstream timetables with additional EAL support.

Secondly, the school has established a 12-week, small-group intervention course, offered up to three times a year for any 'New To English' or 'Early Acquisition' students. Students on this course follow a timetable comprising a daily English language and phonics lesson alongside lessons in mainstream subjects taught by EAL teachers alongside subject specialist teachers in drama, art, maths, technology and Physical Education (PE). Upon completion of the course, most students enter mainstream education with additional EAL support or interventions. Older students (from Year 10) may enter mainstream GCSE classes but take 'Extra English', an option delivering GCSE English Literature and Language, more intensively than the mainstream option, tailored to those who are new to English and at the early stages of English language acquisition.

Those few students who arrive later on in Years 10 or 11, are new to English, and cannot immediately take GCSEs, are still accepted by the school. These students access an ESOL course called Trinity, established after the closure of a local college's 14-16 provision led to an increased number of late arrivals seeking an education place. Recognising the importance of addressing this need, the school decided to offer these late arrivals the opportunity to access a meaningful, accredited course that facilitates onward access to colleges on completion. On this course, late arrivals access intensive ESOL alongside a smaller number of mainstream subjects, including entry level science, in a supportive mainstream school environment.

For another example of school-based provision, refer to this case study of Newman Catholic College's specialist pathways for late arrivals.

Box 5: Case study on an Accelerated Learning Pathway

Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College (in London) – a college that provides GCSEs, A Levels and Vocational Courses to 14-19 year-olds – has established accelerated learning pathways for newly arrived students. Building on international evidence on the benefits of accelerated and bridging learning programmes, the college has established two key provisions.

Firstly, they have a dedicated Year 10 and 11 provision for up to 100 newly arrived students, approximately 50% of whom are refugees and asylum seekers. This provision

enables students to achieve qualifications – with the vast majority of students leaving with five GCSE grades at the end of Year 11, and all students accessing at least three external qualifications in Science, Maths and English. Students are able to progress to positive destinations that align with their career ambitions. The Year 10 and 11 provision also enables students to quickly integrate and adjust to life, and learning, in the UK, while celebrating their identities and achieving physical and emotional wellbeing.

Secondly, they have a Newly Arrived Academy for 16-18 year-olds. This includes 100 students who have either progressed from the Year 10 and 11 provision to post-16 provision, or are newly arrived in the UK in Years 12 and 13. This provision enables students to make swift progress with their English literacy and oracy, achieve high grades, and progress to ambitious post-18 destinations that advance their career aspirations. Students play a key role in the college community and leadership groups and many have progressed to study Medicine or access Russell Group Universities.

Recognising the access challenges faced by newly arrived learners to access education because of inflexible entry criteria and start dates, Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College has enabled continuous enrolment throughout the academic year, often within 48 hours of a referral being made. They also adopt a flexible and assets-based approach to assessment, focused on young people's potential – with excellent outcomes for young people's academic results and progression.

Box 6: Case studies on bespoke and enhanced ESOL provision in colleges

Three case studies provided by **Wirral Met College** (North West England), **Warwickshire College Group** (West Midlands), and **Heart of Yorkshire Education Group** (Yorkshire and the Humber) highlight the impact of enhanced and bespoke ESOL provision in college settings (referred to as 'ESOL Plus'). They demonstrate the ways such provision can address local needs – such as high numbers of UASC or the presence of asylum seeker or refugee housing in surrounding areas – and welcome and support displaced students. Several key features of such provision emerged.

Firstly, in terms of curriculum, the courses generally provide ESOL provision alongside subject-specific or vocational elements. This can include ESOL from Entry Level 1 through to Level 2 alongside qualifications or courses in different subjects – including maths, digital skills, functional skills and science. This provides young people with the opportunity to develop their English language skills while also furthering their academic development and progression.

Secondly, the courses focus on wellbeing and pastoral support, recognising the hardships and traumas that young people may have faced or continue to face. For example, Wirral Met College has established a partnership with a local mental health organisation that provides counselling and other therapeutic services in a range of languages, including common refugee languages. Through this partnership, Wirral Met College is able to refer young people who present with complex mental health support needs to receive specialist and accessible mental health support.
Thirdly, the courses focus on progression, whether into other college courses or employment. For example, once students have made meaningful progress with their ESOL early in the year, Warwickshire College Group collaborates with vocational course teachers across the wider college environment to provide taster sessions in courses that students are interested in (such as engineering, ICT, plumbing or business). These taster courses help students develop the skills and knowledge they

need to be accepted onto those vocational courses once they have graduated from the ESOL programme. Additionally, Heart of Yorkshire Education Group provides employability skills workshops to explore young people's career aspirations and interests, and tailors language learning to include specific vocabulary that supports their progression into wider courses.

Fourthly, the courses are adaptable to the needs of displaced pupils. Heart of Yorkshire Education Group responded to the reality of young people being frequently moved and dispersed by the Home Office by implementing multiple points of assessment and achievement in their ESOL course throughout the year. This approach allows young people to have a greater chance of leaving the course with formal recognition of their achievements, which can be transferable or support access to new courses in a new context if they are dispersed unexpectedly. Wirral Met College responded to a pressing local need for in-year placements by providing regular enrolment windows throughout the academic year, as well as providing an intensive summer programme – ensuring year-round opportunities for refugee young people to access education provision.

3.4.4 Structured orientation and induction programmes

Of 133 survey respondents, only 13% reported encountering structured orientation and induction programmes for young people who are newly arrived in the UK – typically intensive programmes designed to "build language, numeracy and life skills for adolescents whilst also advocating to both speed up and smooth the transition into mainstream education" (survey respondent, charity sector).

Box 7: Case study on structured orientation programmes for newly arrived young people

REUK's Orientation Programme in Oxfordshire (South East England) is a structured, four week education programme that provides newly arrived UASC with a warm and informal environment to prepare for entering mainstream education and life in the UK with a focus on welcome and wellbeing. It is commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council's Virtual School and run by REUK, and is rooted in the need to: respond to the long waiting periods that many UASC face in getting a mainstream education placement; and support young people to feel better prepared when starting their education placement. The focus of the Orientation Programme is providing UASC with an opportunity to learn English with their peers while receiving information sessions, delivered with interpreters, about UK culture and life skills – including wellbeing, mental health, the asylum process, sexual health, respect and consent, friendship and grooming, laws, personal safety, internet safety, and the city of Oxford. The programme caters for all levels of education background, from those who are illiterate in their own language through to those who have had some years of schooling in their country of origin.

The programme has been running since 2012, and is currently based in community/charity space in the city of Oxford. The programme is flexible in terms of classroom size and is able to adapt to support as few as three or as many as 10 young people. The programme's admissions are rolling, allowing many young people to start as soon as the day after arrival in Oxfordshire. While attending the four week

programme, social services secure young people a school or college place so they transition directly into mainstream education upon completion of the programme. The Orientation Programme has established partnerships with local schools and colleges, in order to facilitate successful transitions to mainstream education and provide the receiving institution with advance information about the progress and needs and potential risks of the UASC they will soon be admitting and supporting. The Orientation Programme has also established strong rapport and regularly communicates with Social Services and young UASC's support workers to ensure joined-up working and support.

3.4.5 Longer-term separate provision

Of 133 survey respondents, fewer than 10% reported encountering longer term separate education provision for late arrivals.[28]

Describing one such provision – which was examined through a key informant interview (see Box 8) – one respondent stated "specialist interventions like NEST in Nottingham look incredibly promising - this is the level of tailored support which displaced students need, and should be replicated in other areas with high numbers of displaced children arriving" (survey respondent, charity sector). When considering longer term separate provision, it should be remembered that rapid inclusion in mainstream education is preferable wherever possible.

[28] Please note that the original phrasing of this survey question was 'alternative provision', which may have been misunderstood as alternative provision such as Pupil Referral Units. This may, therefore, be underreported.

Box 8: Case study on longer-term, separate provision tailored to late arrivals

Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team (NEST), in the East Midlands, is a full-time bespoke provision for displaced young people, aged 15-19, funded by Nottingham City Council and part of the Hospital and Home Education Learning Centre (HHELC). NEST stemmed from the observation that displaced young people, including UASC, were arriving in Nottingham when college and English language provisions were full, leaving them only able to access ad hoc tutoring for a couple of hours a week, at best.

NEST was developed through a partnership with Nottingham City Council and the University of Nottingham. It is a holistic provision that provides learning and formal qualifications in English language, Maths, ICT and some first languages. This is complemented by a diverse range of educational experiences through the curriculum and an embedded trauma-informed and therapeutic approach.

The provision is full-time (8.45am-3pm, five days a week), and each cohort runs for one year. The bespoke curriculum is tailored to the unique needs of students, who are actively consulted in its development. It emphasises the skills, talents and potential of newly arrived young people, focusing on English language development alongside enrichment activities that enable young people to familiarise themselves with their new community and environment. A key priority for NEST is the psychosocial support provided to young people. To this end, there is an on-site psychotherapist with expertise in supporting refugees and UASC, who provides on site individual and group counselling. Since 2018, NEST has supported up to 50 displaced young people each academic year. To learn more, visit: https://nest.schooljotter2.com/.

3.4.6 Other provision

Two other categories of provision emerged:

- Firstly, 6% (of 133 respondents) reported 'other' provision. This primarily related to young people from Ukraine continuing their home country education online, as well as young people engaging in other forms of online education, including English language learning.
- Secondly, 5% (of 133 respondents) reported seeing late arrivals placed in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). When this was referenced, it was described negatively. For example, one survey respondent stated: "I cannot imagine why a Year 9-aged UASC was placed by [name of LA redacted] in an independent PRU/ private tuition centre. The child was unhappy, social opportunities were non-existent, and the learning was limited" (survey respondent, education institution).

Chapter 4: Conclusion and recommendations

This section sets out the research conclusion and provides detailed, evidence-based recommendations resulting from the research study.

4.1 Conclusion

The research findings presented in this report illuminate the complex reality of accessing education as a displaced young person arriving in the UK late in the education system. They reinforce what is already known about the high education ambitions of young people who seek safety and protection in the UK, and the significant value they bring to schools, colleges, communities and society. And yet they reveal a disheartening reality. Despite their right to education, late arrivals are likely to remain out of education for extended periods, with some waiting for six months and over a year to access education in school or college, with negative consequences for young people's wellbeing, safety, and future. The findings show that accessing education becomes increasingly difficult the older displaced young people are when they arrive in the UK and the later they arrive in an academic year – factors beyond their control.

This report uncovers particular short- and long-term challenges for displaced young people who arrive at a Year 11 age. These young people may initially encounter what has been described as a "no-man's-land": a period when schools will not accept them (for reasons including a fear of negative impacts on school performance tables and a lack of appropriate provision while peers prepare for GCSEs) but they are too young to access FE. They are likely to miss out on vital months of education in a supportive school environment, instead remaining idle while waiting to turn 16 – the age they are typically eligible to access FE. However, once they reach 16, their options narrow and are often limited to ESOL or vocational courses that do not always advance their education or career aspirations. At this stage, young people face an added pressure of time; they have a narrow window of opportunity to access funded FE before they turn 19, after which funding can become more restrictive and course options even more limited.

Findings from this research underscore the variable reality of education access for late arrivals – sometimes associated with a young person's immigration status, route of entry to the UK and place of residence. However, they reveal that, across the board, late arrivals encounter a lack of education places in schools and colleges – a barrier that becomes particularly pronounced when they arrive in the middle of an academic year or part way through a course. This report also contributes evidence on the significant disruption caused by accommodation insecurity and instability, and the extent to which dispersal can undermine late arrivals' ability to access and remain in school or college, with long-term negative consequences. The report also highlights a reluctance from education institutions to admit displaced students. Practitioners reported misconceptions about displaced young people's potential and the impact of their inclusion on the wider institutional environment, as well as a lack of funding and resourcing to provide appropriate provision and support.

Despite the numerous barriers to education access for late arrivals evidenced by this report, examples of promising practice in the absence of a mainstream school or college place are highlighted. The charity sector appears to assume a crucial role in bridging gaps

and providing interim education or learning support, despite a backdrop of being under-funded and under-resourced. The important role of the LA in providing, coordinating or funding education provision and support for late arrivals is also evident – but this can be geographically patchy and sometimes exclusive to certain categories of late arrivals. This research also uncovered the transformative role of bespoke pathways provided by education institutions, where they exist. However, their reach can be limited to a select few schools or colleges with a commitment to, or funding for, supporting late arrivals.

While not advocating for bridging provision to be viewed as a substitute for education in a mainstream school or college environment, this research demonstrates its vital role in filling gaps in education and mitigating, to some extent, the negative impacts of being out of any form of education for prolonged periods of time – a reality this research shows is not uncommon for late arrivals.

4.2 Recommendations

Ensuring late arrivals access their right to education can and should be addressed. Doing so would benefit and advance cross party efforts to tackle inequality through educational attainment. It requires a coordinated and intentional approach from the Department for Education (DfE), the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), LAs, and secondary and FE institutions to reduce barriers to education access.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations should be considered to improve late arrivals' access to education. There are three categories of recommendations for:

- The Government
- Local government
- Education institutions

Please note that an accompanying policy brief, aimed at national and local government, provides more detailed policy recommendations. It can be accessed here.

4.2.1 The Government should:

Create an intentional and coordinated approach to including late arrivals in the education system. This should be done by the DfE consulting with other relevant departments to:

- Develop a strategy for ensuring that all late arrivals are able to seamlessly and continuously access their right to education, irrespective of the time of year that they arrive.[29]
- Ensure this strategy is translated into clear information and guidance that is effectively disseminated to local authorities, schools and multi-academy trusts.
- Implement an alternative approach to lagged funding to ensure schools and colleges receive appropriate funding for students who arrive in-year, after the census date.
- Consider extending provisions that ensure that looked after children, including UASC, are able to access an education placement within 20 days of coming into care, to all categories of displaced children.

Consider and reduce the educational impacts of dispersal. The DfE should work collaboratively with the Home Office and the MHCLG to ensure that, within accommodation and dispersal policy, educational access and outcomes at all levels is an explicit consideration when deciding whether to disperse a young person. As far as possible, families with children who are late arrivals should not be dispersed once they have secured a school or college place. Where dispersal is unavoidable, the Home Office should provide advance notice to LAs about the dispersal of families with compulsory education-aged children in order to allow the arrangement of school or college places before the relocation takes place.

Take steps to ensure no child falls through the cracks and misses out on a school placement:

- The DfE should consider whether to reinstate local authorities' responsibility for coordinating in-year admissions for schools within their administrative area, including for multi-academy trusts. The DfE should ensure data is tracked and monitored, including pupil wait times for education places.
- The Home Office should provide LA school admissions teams with regular and accurate updates about the location of existing and new refugee and asylum seeker accommodation in their area.

[29] REUK would be happy to collaborate on this task.

- The MHCLG should fund and resource LAs to undertake outreach to families and young people in asylum seeker accommodation in their local area, ensuring they are aware of their rights and entitlements to education.

Support and enable schools to accept late arrivals. The DfE should:

- Create sustainable education funding uplifts (such as those for pupils from Afghanistan or Ukraine) for all refugee and asylum-seeking learners, regardless of country of origin or immigration status, to enable schools to provide the support these learners need.
- Provide guidance so that schools are reminded of current arrangements for including late arrivals in their schools, such as the ability to exclude some late arrivals' GCSE results from their results profiles, if this is a concern.
- Develop guidance for school leaders on how to embed whole school EAL provision, and equip teaching assistants to strengthen in-class EAL support for newly arrived children.

Address the complexity of information about FE entitlements. The DfE should provide frequent updates and accessible information to LAs, mayoral combined authorities, and colleges on ESFA policy, including any changes to guidance. Given the particular complexity of the rights and entitlements of those from displacement backgrounds, a subset of this guidance should be tailored to the rights and entitlements of displaced young people.

Ease FE admissions and enrolment processes. The DfE should:

- Consider extending current post-16 education entitlements so that late arrivals are able to get three years of funding if they arrive after post-16 admissions but before the age of 20.
- Provide guidance to information, advice and guidance (IAG) teams at colleges on enrolment of displaced students, including what documentation they need and need not request.

4.2.2 Local government should:

Engage in a multi-stakeholder approach to deliver short-term interim provision that both meets the needs of late arrivals and expedites their transition into mainstream settings. LAs and mayoral combined authorities should work alongside FE colleges, schools and the voluntary sector to deliver such provision where there is a local need, including:

- Structured orientation programmes aimed at preparing very newly arrived young people for mainstream education;
- Accelerated pathways within schools or colleges with strong enrichment and contextualised English language provision for those learners who need to develop their proficiency in English;
- Short-term, interim provision where an appropriate mainstream school or college place is not yet available.

Engage in education outreach in local temporary accommodation. With support from the MHCLG, LAs with temporary accommodation in their administrative area should ensure young people are aware of their rights and entitlements to education. They should provide them with support to apply for school or college places.

Support schools in their administrative area to accept late arrivals. LAs can do this by coordinating the sharing of resources between schools where a need is identified (for example, the translation of documents and guidance into first languages prominent in the local area, and the sharing of wellbeing and mental health resources across schools such as access to counselling in first languages).

Support local education institutions to ease FE admissions and enrolment processes for displaced young people. LAs should build on existing work and convene a coordinated effort from local education providers, including FE providers, to ensure a localised, agile response is done according to local need.

4.2.3 Education institutions should:

Support and train staff to ease school and college enrolment and admissions processes.

- Schools should ensure all staff involved in enrolment and admissions are fully aware of guidance around EAL arrivals at upper-secondary level, including the ability to exclude these children's GCSE results from their results profiles.
- Schools should ensure the presence of a designated member of staff to support the admissions of displaced children, providing support to parents/carers where needed.
- FE institutions should invest in regular training for staff involved in supportive admissions and enrolment of displaced learners.[30]
- Schools and FE institutions should provide clear and comprehensible information about admissions for those learners, parents and carers who are at the early stages of English language acquisition in different formats (text, and audio or video). This should be publicly available and, if possible, translated into key languages spoken by displaced communities.

Take an assets-based approach, recognising late arrivals' potential and ensuring they can access school. Where there is a local need, and if funds and resources allow, schools should consider:

- Setting up bespoke pathways for late arrivals (such as that implemented by a school in Box 5) that meaningfully contribute to their progression and next steps, while enabling them to access education in a supportive school environment.
- Implementing tailored and contextual timetables that allow young people to access at least some qualifications.
- Exploring partnerships with local colleges, where capacity within schools is more limited, and where colleges have provision for 14-15 year-olds. For example, young people could undertake some qualifications at school while participating in a part-time, age-appropriate college course (such as ESOL, ESOL Plus or courses that relate to a young person's academic interests or work ambitions).

Provide tailored and contextual FE provision that meets the needs of displaced students. FE institutions should consider:

- How discrete 16-19 ESOL could be enhanced and enriched (taking inspiration from practice described in Box 7) to allow displaced students to make meaningful progress in their education and career goals.
- Where there is a local need and if funds and resources allow, establishing bespoke and accelerated pathways for late arrivals (taking inspiration from those detailed in Box 6).
- The introduction of rolling enrolment for college courses so that young people who arrive in an area in the middle of the year (including because of dispersal) are able to more quickly access education.
- With mayoral combined authorities and the DfE, more frequent opportunities for assessments and formal recognition of progress on 16-19 ESOL courses, where young people may be dispersed.

[30] REUK runs bespoke training programmes for colleges (for more information, please see reuk.org/training).

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Annex: Sample background information

Online survey sample

	Count	Percentage of total respondents (n=180)
Organisation/institution affiliation		
Charities/NGOs/community groups	54	30.00%
Education institution	60	33.33%
Government department	1	0.56%
LA	58	32.22%
Other (accommodation provider)	1	0.56%
Other (foster carer)	2	1.11%
Other (legal professional)	1	0.56%
University	3	1.67%
Region of the UK (note will not add to 100% as multiple options allowed)		
North East	16	8.89%
North West	20	11.11%
Yorkshire and the Humber	18	10.00%
East Midlands	18	10.00%
West Midlands	21	11.67%
East	17	9.44%
London	45	25.00%
South East	50	27.78%
South West	31	17.22%
Wales	6	3.33%
Northern Ireland	7	3.89%
Scotland	4	2.22%
Category of young person worked with/supported (note will not add to 100% as multiple options allowed)		
UASC	129	71.67%
Young people in refugee families who have been part of refugee resettlement schemes	87	48.33%
Displaced young people joining family members in the UK (family reunification)	50	27.78%
Ukrainian young people	77	42.78%
Young people in asylum-seeking families	93	51.67%
Young people from broader migrant backgrounds	65	36.11%
Other	4	2.22%

Advice line sample breakdown

	Count	Percentage of total queries (n=222)
Age categories		
11-12	5	2.25%
13-15	26	11.71%
16-18	144	64.86%
19	44	19.82%
Unknown age within age range 11-19	8	3.60%
Immigration status		
Ukraine	76	34.23%
Refugee	17	7.66%
AsylumSeeker	94	42.34%
LLR	3	1.35%
ILR	2	0.90%
Other	9	4.05%
UASC	10	4.50%
Unknown	11	4.95%
Region of the UK		
North East	4	1.80%
North West	7	3.15%
Yorkshire and the Humber	8	3.60%
East Midlands	6	2.70%
West Midlands	11	4.95%
East	14	6.31%
London	70	31.53%
South East	29	13.06%
South West	7	3.15%
Wales	1	0.45%
Northern Ireland	2	0.90%
Scotland	5	2.25%
Unknown	58	26.13%

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