

From gaps to priorities: Examining the evidence landscape

Youth Transitions Community Catalyst Research Report

December 2024

Glossary

ECHILD	Education and Child Health Insights from Linked Data
FE	Further Education
FSM	Free School Meals
GRADE	Grading and Admissions Data for England
HE	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
KS3	Key Stage 3
KS4	Key Stage 4
LEO	Longitudinal Education Outcomes
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-economic classification
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Executive Summary

The [Youth Transitions Catalyst Project](#) commenced on 29 January 2024 with the main objective to develop a cross-sector research community that shares a prioritised research agenda informed by the assessment of gaps in existing data and research in the field of youth transitions. The first phase of this project was aimed at understanding the evidence landscape and identifying gaps. In particular,

- Using published literature, the research team identified and mapped out recent evidence (primarily from the last five years) that focussed on young people's transitions within education and the labour market.
- The project's focus has been on research that explored transitions for specific groups of young people (aged 14-24 years) with one or more of the following characteristics or experiences - socio-economically disadvantaged, ethnic minority, physical or mental health conditions, special educational needs and disabilities, history of youth offending and experience of social care. As an exception and in light of the funders' priorities, mature learners were also in scope of this investigation.
- Using the above, researchers were able to identify an initial set of emerging research gaps.
- Several key stakeholders were consulted to further refine the list of gaps to produce a set of youth transitions research priorities.
- Simultaneously, the team also identified a list of relevant administrative datasets that capture young people's journeys across various aspects of our social life. Where publicly available, metadata for each dataset has been recorded, such as list of variables, data access arrangements and quality statements. The resulting information has been compiled in the form of a user-friendly [online tool](#) to access information about datasets related to youth transitions.

This research report provides an overview of the project's aims and summarises the research approach used to address these objectives.

1. Introduction

Existing data allows us to map the journey of young people through various stages of life. During this process, they interact with different systems and organisations who record those interactions on administrative data. Collectively, these datasets provide invaluable insight into the lives of young people as they transition through different phases of life and engage with the education, health, labour market, social care and criminal justice systems.

To understand better what happens to young people as they transition between different stages in their lives, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), alongside the University of Westminster, FFT Datalab and University College London (UCL), has been commissioned to develop a cross-sector research community that shares a prioritised research agenda informed by our assessment of gaps in existing data and research. The project consortium, led by NFER, will also deliver a programme of training and development aimed at building capacity and capability within the research community. This will enable both new and existing researchers to undertake research using administrative data to address priority gaps in the evidence base.

The project's sponsors, ADR England; Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) and the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), have envisioned this project to enhance the use of administrative data within the research community to inform public policy and practice. The project has four main objectives:

1. Create an informed research agenda on youth transitions
2. Build capacity for increased use of administrative data in research
3. Develop a youth transitions research community
4. Address research priorities through primary research

2. Literature search and classification

To map existing evidence on youth transitions, relevant literature was identified using a search strategy that was informed by our co-investigators' collective knowledge of the research themes. The purpose of this literature search was to establish the areas which already have a good amount of evidence and from this, identify gaps within the existing evidence base which can be filled through secondary analysis of administrative data. The objective for this exercise was not to conduct a comprehensive, systematic review, but rather to provide a high-level overview of the youth transitions evidence landscape that is sufficient to initiate a dialogue with key stakeholders and the research community.

2.1. Search strategy

The literature search strategy focussed on identifying a broad range of studies which use administrative and longitudinal datasets to explore marginalised or disadvantaged young people's transitions within and beyond education and training. Recognising the breadth of topics in scope of this project, a set of parameters were defined to focus on the groups and outcomes of greatest interest to the funding organisations (See Table 1).

In addition to the search criteria described in Table 1, a list of relevant datasets was identified and incorporated into the search strategy. While the main focus of this project is on administrative datasets, the role of surveys and longitudinal studies is well established in this field of research. Therefore, alongside [ADR England's flagship datasets](#) such as [LEO](#) and [GRADE](#), other administrative data sources such as those maintained by HESA and UCAS were included. In addition, longitudinal studies such as Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and survey data such as the National Student Survey were also in scope. A full list of relevant datasets included in our search is available in Appendix A.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature search

Criteria	Include	Exclude	Rationale
Status of research	Research in progress & currently being commissioned Published research	Not applicable	Enables evidence map and gap analysis to take account of studies in progress
Date range	Published 2018-2024 Research published prior to 2018 recommended by experts, widely cited or synthesised in literature reviews	Literature published before 2018 (except older literature synthesised in reviews or recommended by experts)	Prioritises recent, contextually relevant research from the last 5 years whilst allowing for inclusion of older studies experts consider to be of enduring relevance
Geographic location	England	Rest of UK and international studies	Contextually relevant to the UK data landscape and YFF & TASO priorities

Criteria	Include	Exclude	Rationale
Transitions in scope	<p>Transition from child/youth to adult social care/health services or justice sector (explored in relation to education or labour market transitions or outcomes)</p> <p>Transitions from child to adult services for disadvantaged/ marginalised/ service-experienced young people in relation to education/ labour market transitions/ outcomes</p> <p>Transition to adult life e.g., housing, financial independence (explored in relation to education or labour market transitions or outcomes)</p> <p>Moves within secondary education (KS3 to KS4 and changing schools)</p> <p>Secondary education to FE</p> <p>FE to HE</p> <p>Secondary education/FE/HE to labour market (including NEET)</p>	Primary to secondary education	In line with YFF and TASO's priorities, the focus will be on educational and/or labour market outcomes for young people transitioning through various domains including health and criminal justice.
'Outcomes' in scope	<p>i.e., measurable outcomes in terms of</p> <p>Key stage attainment</p> <p>Qualifications</p> <p>Access to apprenticeships, FE, HE, employment</p> <p>Continuation rates and progression (particularly in HE)</p> <p>Destinations</p>	Health, social care, housing, justice services outcomes (unless explored in relation to measurable education or labour market transitions or outcomes)	

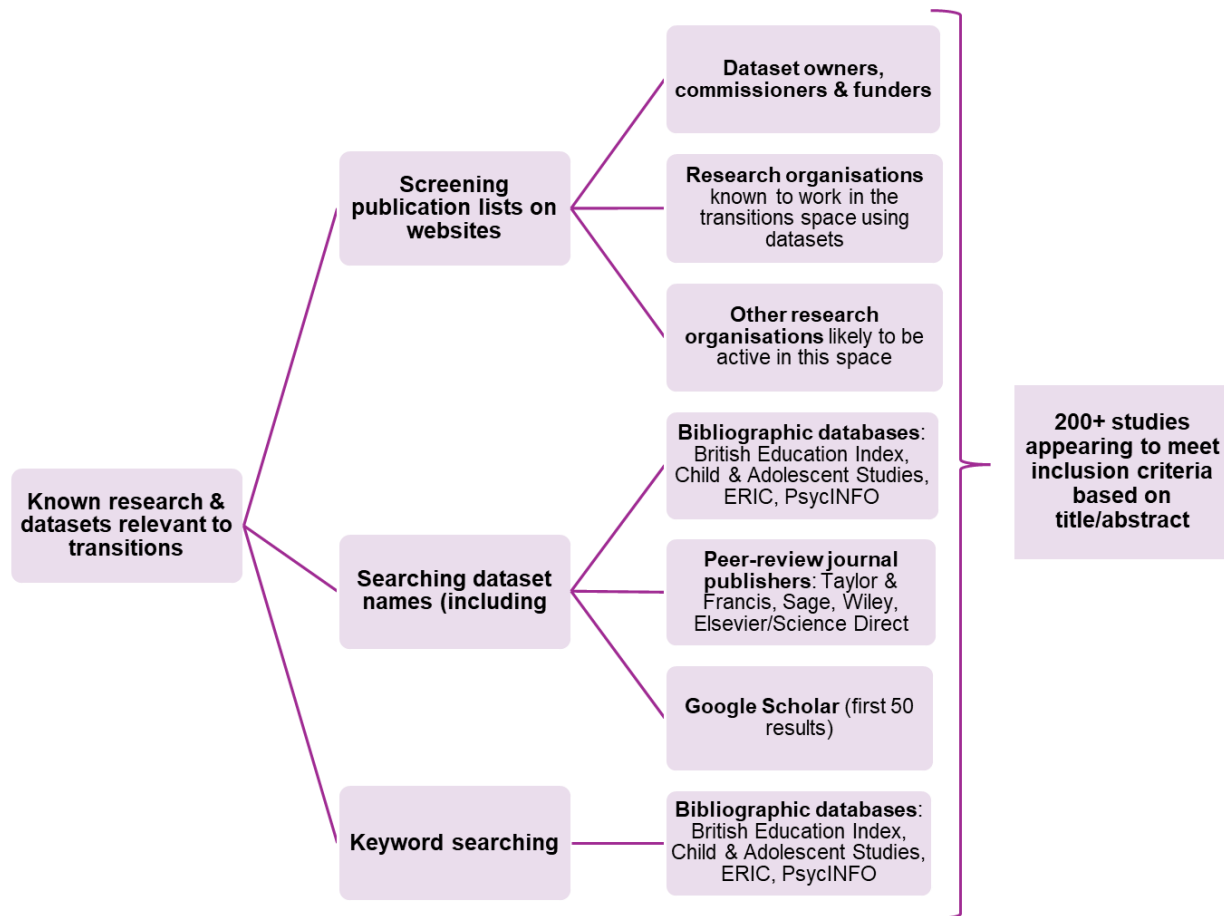
Criteria	Include	Exclude	Rationale
	<p>Early labour market outcomes</p> <p>NEET</p> <p>Impact of health, social care, housing, justice issues on measurable outcomes above</p>		
Populations in scope	<p>Aged 14 to 24</p> <p>Prioritising evidence relating to disadvantaged, marginalised and service-experienced groups including those mentioned in YFF and TASO priorities.</p>	<p>Younger populations</p> <p>Older populations (unless mature learners, care leavers/experienced or with an education health and care plan)</p>	In line with YFF and TASO's priorities.
Research methods	<p>Quantitative and mixed methods i.e., those using quantitative data (e.g., administrative data sets or cohort/longitudinal survey data)</p> <p>[Literature reviews synthesising 'what works' in the priority areas]</p>	<p>Qualitative (e.g., small-scale studies, ethnographies, case studies etc.)</p> <p>Opinion pieces/think pieces</p> <p>Parliamentary, government or independent inquiries or commissions reports</p> <p>Individual 'what works' evaluations of interventions or programmes</p>	Reflects the need to arrive at a research agenda aligned to the strengths of data sets

It was important to cover grey and peer-reviewed literature and to approach the search from different angles to ensure the broadest coverage. Starting from a crowd-sourced list of known research and datasets relevant to young people's experiences, a search strategy was devised which included:

- websites of dataset owners, commissioners and funders
- websites of research organisations known or likely to work in the transitions space and/or use datasets
- bibliographic databases, peer-review journal publishers and Google Scholar searches searching by dataset names (and close variants) and keyword combinations reflecting the transitions, young people and risk factors in scope.

Figure 1 summarises the approach, with further detail available in Appendix A.

Figure 1: Overview of literature search approach



Although this approach provided a broad indication of published studies and research in progress, it was recognised it may not be exhaustive. One limitation was the need to set time limits on the search window, which meant some research which was published before 2018 whose findings would be relevant, was excluded. This was necessary to make the exercise manageable while ensuring that the majority of research which utilises administrative data would be included. We have mitigated this by implementing strategies to strengthen confidence in and future-proof the evidence base. This involved:

- checking the publication lists of key academics in the transitions space drawing on studies identified and recommendations (see Appendix A)
- seeking feedback from key stakeholders including academics and researchers who are active in the youth transitions space on the evidence base, in particular, on whether there are any relevant pieces of research which might be missing from our assessment.

2.2. Classification of research into types

The search for relevant literature on youth transitions has identified different ‘types’ of research. A detailed description of each of these types, with examples, is included in Appendix B.

Type 1 – Descriptions of transitions, the pathways taken and how these vary by marginalised groups: These studies aim to unpack the transitions by describing the experiences of marginalised groups as they move from one stage to another, including along different pathways.

Type 2 – Evaluating impacts of particular pathways on later outcomes: For example, evaluating the impact of particular qualifications or the impacts of time spent in care or custody. The methods used attempt to identify the causal impacts of different pathways on later outcomes and often attempt to answer the question of ‘what works’.

Type 3 – Analysis of impacts from policies/practices designed to support marginalized groups during particular transitions: These studies measure the impact of policies and practices, including regulatory changes, which aim to support young people through transitions.

Type 4 – Operational data studies: These studies describe the process of linking and managing large datasets. They often relate to one or more topics of interest (dictated by the theme of the dataset) and shine a light on the opportunities and challenges associated with data linking.

This categorisation highlighted the complex nature of ‘transition’ studies. It demonstrated that transitions are not always linear; some transitions are implied and not explicit and not all transition studies focus on vulnerable groups. In practical terms we believe this categorisation helps with the identification of gaps in the current evidence base. It allows us to not only present a simplified map of the evidence landscape, but it also makes it easier for prospective researchers to plan further research in order to fill gaps in the current evidence base. This is also likely to help policymakers understand the work that is out there, the strengths and opportunities of administrative data. For example this might highlight the insights that an ‘unpacking’ of a transition can (or cannot) bring; and the new opportunities/limitations for analysis of marginalised groups) and identify priorities in terms of expanding the data landscape and funding primary research.

2.3. Coding

The coding of existing research literature provided the basis for an evidence gap map to indicate which types of research for which transitions and groups of young people feature in recent studies using large quantitative datasets. The coding process focused on more than 200 studies which appeared to have met the inclusion criteria based on their titles and abstracts. Each study was coded using a coding framework according to the following three dimensions:

1. Transition stages (within and into education and labour market)
 - Transition start point (Key Stage 3 (KS3), Key Stage 4 (KS4), Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE), work-based learning, labour market, other starting point)
 - Transition end point (KS4, FE, HE, work-based learning, labour market, other end point)

2. Socio-demographic characteristics of individuals
 - a. Young people with the following characteristics
 - Ethnic minority
 - Disability and SEND
 - Physical or mental health conditions
 - Experience of social care
 - History of youth offending
 - Other marginalised group
3. Research types (described above in section 2.2)

2.3.1 Coding process

A coding team was set up to review the full text of each of the 200+ studies shortlisted in the search, according to the dimensions listed above. Coders were provided with coding guidelines, examples of how studies had been coded and training on how to code studies for this project. The guidelines provided generic advice on each of the three coding dimensions, as well as specific guidance on ad hoc instances encountered during the coding process. Of the entire set of coded studies, a random selection of 20% were selected for quality assurance.

2.4. Futureproofing the evidence base

The search for relevant literature is not a one-off, static operation. With an ever-changing landscape, the project team aims to refresh the repository of relevant research to make sure any subsequent analysis is current and provides a reasonably accurate overview of the evidence base and takes into consideration, for instance, research that is published since the searches took place in March 2024. Furthermore, as the research team engages with the wider research community, there will inevitably be opportunities to learn about ongoing projects.

It is for these reasons that the evidence gap map (described in section 4.1) should be seen as a 'living' document that will be updated throughout the lifetime of this project.

3. Emerging research gaps

Through the mapping of the evidence base, a set of emerging themes where noticeable gaps exist was identified, based on the search of literature between 2018 and 2024. The resulting output is a 'living' document, informed by the present research as well as targeted engagements with key stakeholders and discussions with the wider research and practitioner community. The gaps identified so far should not be seen as a definitive list, but rather an attempt to map the territory sufficiently to prompt discussion, debate and challenge.

The emerging gaps outlined in this section were the basis for subsequent conversations with stakeholders in key areas (see Section 5), providing a starting point for communication of the research that is out there and where some of the priority gaps are which might be addressed using existing or newly linked datasets. It is envisaged, this resource would provide a useful starting position to anyone embarking on a new research project with a focus on young people's transition within and between education and employment.

3.1. Evidence gap map

Once all the literature was classified using the three dimensions described in section 3, a subset of studies was identified that were not in scope of the current inquiry ([see a list of studies that were included in the evidence gap map](#)). They were excluded for the following reasons:

- The study did not focus on specific characteristics of young people, instead they were looking at an entire cohort of young people
- Characteristics were not of significant interest to this project e.g. gender
- The research was not about transitions, or the focus was on non-educational/labour market outcomes
- Transition start/end point was not in scope e.g., Early years to prior to KS3

The majority of the remaining studies were analysed further to understand their distribution which enabled the research team to plot them on an evidence gap map (Figure 2). The map represents the number of relevant studies, each of which has been classified into distinct stages of transition; characteristics of people making those transitions and type of research (as denoted by the 'map key'). For example, in recent years, 13 *descriptive* studies explored the transition of young people from *minority ethnic groups*, from *further to higher education*.

Emerging findings from the classification of research using this approach have been noted in the next section.

Figure 2: Evidence Gap Map

Map Key

- Type 1 studies: Description of transitions and pathways
- Type 2 studies: Evaluating impact of pathways on later outcomes
- Type 3 studies: Analysis of policy impact on transitions
- Type 4 studies: Operational data studies

	Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4	Key Stage 4 to Further Education	Further Education to Higher Education	Key Stage 4 / Further Education to Work-based Learning	Further Education to Labour Market	Higher Education to Labour Market
Young people with a history of youth offending	2	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	0	1	0	1
	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	0	0	0	0
Young people from an ethnic minority group	11	18	13	13	13	16
	3	7	6	2	5	9
	1	2	3	3	2	2
	0	0	0	0	0	0
Young people with a physical or mental health issue	6	6	6	1	3	2
	1	1	1	1	1	2
	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0	0	0
Young people with special educational needs and disabilities	11	10	5	6	8	6
	4	6	4	2	3	4
	0	2	2	2	2	2
	1	0	0	0	0	0
Young people who are / have been socio-economically disadvantaged	11	27	24	24	23	24
	3	20	17	9	17	15
	1	3	6	3	3	4
	0	1	1	1	1	1
Mature learners	0	0	1	1	0	0
	0	2	2	1	3	2
	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0	0	0
Young people with a history with the social care system	6	2	2	1	2	1
	4	0	0	1	0	0
	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	0	0	0	0

[\(A downloadable version of the map is available\)](#)

3.2. *Emerging findings and gaps*

The assessment of the evidence has highlighted a number of key areas that formed the basis for in-depth discussions with the steering group and other stakeholders. These have been noted below.

- Very few transition studies look at educational and/or labour market outcomes for mature learners and young people who offend, followed by young people with experience of social care or health issues (which includes physical and mental health).
- There is limited operational/methodological research on data linking (type 4 studies), which may not be a policy priority, but they may be of interest to data and infrastructure specialists. Also limited are studies that evaluate the impact of policy changes on transition (type 2). While type 2 studies (causal impact) are more than types 3 and 4; they are disproportionately fewer in comparison with descriptive studies (type 1). It is the causal impact studies that address the 'What works' question for policy makers and practitioners.
- There appears to be a disproportionately large amount of emphasis on socio-economically disadvantaged young people. However, it is not a distinct group but an amalgamation of different definitions, used varyingly by different researchers. For instance, in the identified set of 200+ studies there is evidence for different measures of socio-economic deprivation being used (e.g., FSM, IDACI, IMD and NS-SEC). It is known that each measure is unique and that it measures one or more different aspects of deprivation (Jerrim, 2023). It is also known that the majority of research in the primary and secondary education sector has focused on economic deprivation as indicated by FSM, while the higher education sector is interested in more multi-dimensional and area-based measures such as IMD. With the increasing interest in transition studies across multiple stages, it is important to agree on either a single measure of deprivation or encourage researchers to explore the research questions through multiple lenses.
- Similarly, the group identified as 'ethnic minority' is a large, heterogeneous group. Although this appears to be the second most commonly researched characteristic, the outcomes for different ethnic minorities have not been analysed equitably and significant gaps still exist. For instance, only one study was identified in this assessment that has focused on the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- It appears that gaps and opportunities exist in terms of datasets too. While a considerable number of studies have used the LEO dataset, which has been around for a few years now, the more recent additions to the data repository are yet to be utilised fully (e.g., ECHILD and Growing up in England). Longitudinal studies such as the Millenium Cohort Study, Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and Understanding Society play a vital role in this field of research, especially when linked to large administrative datasets, adding depth to the analysis in ways that administrative data alone cannot achieve.
- A small subset of studies represented less 'popular' transitions and to avoid skewing the evidence gap map they were excluded from Figure 2 presented above. These are summarised in Table 2 below. However, these might represent significant gaps in the current evidence. These were explored in the discussions with stakeholders.

Table 2: Number of studies associated with minority transition groups

Transition category	Number of studies
KS3 to Further Education	2
KS3 to labour market	3
KS4 to HE	2
KS4 to Labour market	3
Work based learning to FE/HE/labour market	3
Transition within HE	3
Transition within labour market	2

The project team propose that individuals Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) are treated as a special category for the purpose of this assessment. NEET is not a single characteristic that can be identified in administrative datasets. It is an outcome which is often determined by the absence of individuals from linked education-employment datasets. As such, this group does not fit neatly into the gaps matrix. Nevertheless, it is useful to note that a considerable number of research studies have focussed on this group/outcome and similar to the overall pattern, most studies are descriptive, followed by causal impact studies and very few of the remaining two types.

4. Mapping the data landscape

In response to one of the project's objectives, 'mapping accessible data sources that are required to address the research agenda,' a catalogue of datasets (relevant to the study of youth transitions) and a data mapping tool have been produced. This was achieved by:

- working within the research team and with stakeholders to specify relevant transitions of interest and key groups of research interest
- documenting relevant datasets to achieve the above
- creating an online application (data mapping tool) to display the information using a combination software packages R and Shiny.

4.1. Documenting relevant datasets

Each of the datasets listed in the [ADR-UK Data Catalogue](#) was assessed for their suitability in studying the transitions and key population groups.

The resulting catalogue was supplemented with other datasets the research team were aware of, which covered the youth transitions of interest. For each dataset, the following key information was recorded:

- Specifications / variable lists
- Access and data linking arrangements
- Population coverage
- Time coverage
- Quality statements

This resulted in the production of a catalogue of data sources consisting of 22 datasets. This list was shared with the Steering Group to ensure there are no significant omissions and to confirm that the information captured for each dataset was relevant.

4.2. Creating a visual map

The [online tool](#) has been designed as a more user-friendly way of navigating through the complex information about datasets related to youth transitions. Underpinning the tool is a data catalogue as the primary source of information although further information such as examples of studies that have used a particular resource have also been added to aid greater understanding of the datasets and their potential uses. The aim of the tool is to enable researchers, particularly those unfamiliar with datasets, to find suitable datasets to conduct research into youth transitions. The purpose of the data mapping tool is to provide an accessible overview of the data landscape for anyone who is new to administrative data or wants to find out more about what is available for a particular topic. Interested researchers might access this resource at any stage of their research – for idea and theory generation, to test hypotheses or to validate findings.

5. Stakeholder consultation

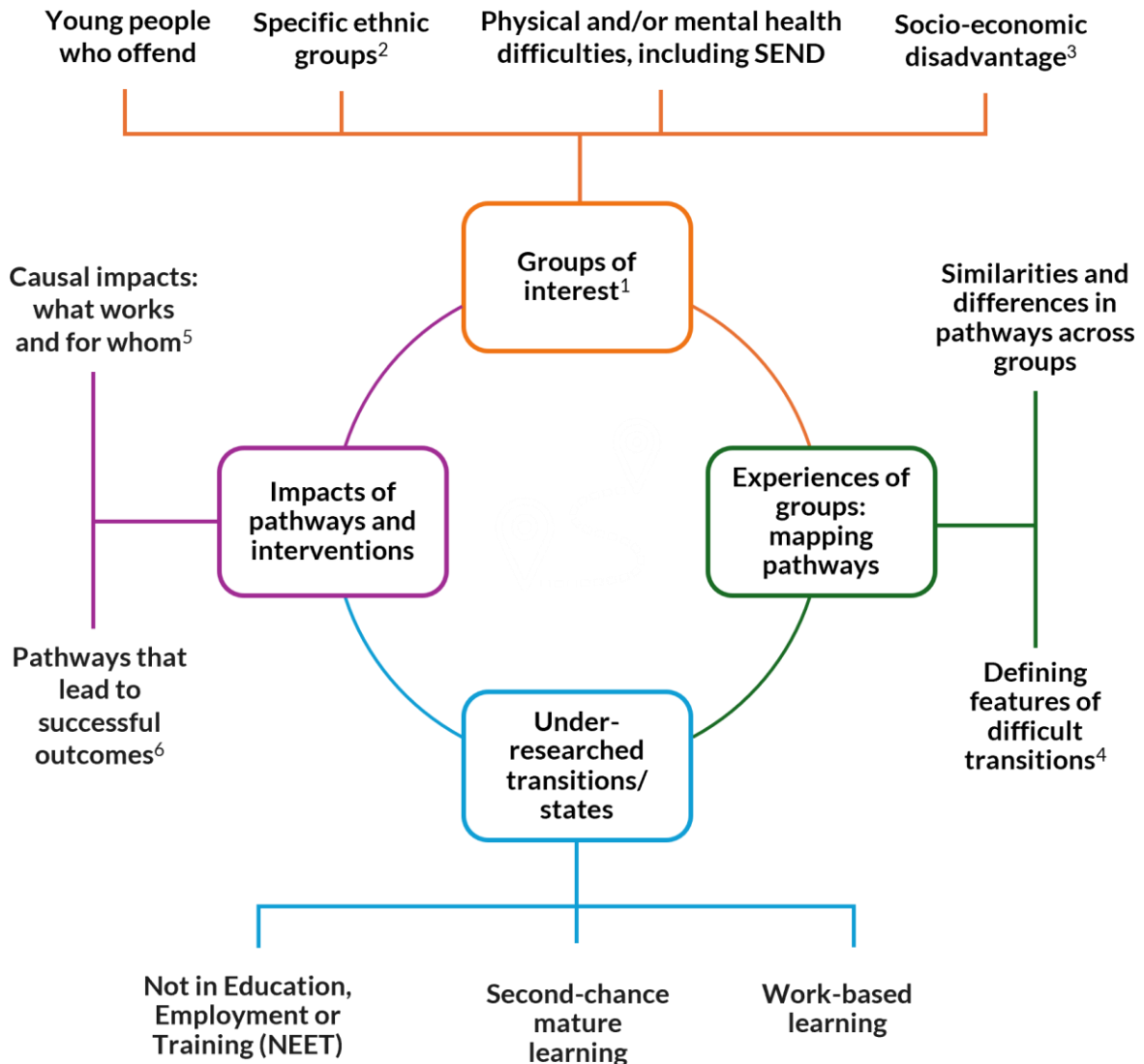
Using the emerging findings from the evidence gaps assessments, the research team consulted a group of stakeholders (individuals and organisations) with a view to understand their own policy and research priorities in the youth transitions space, their experience/understanding of gaps in the evidence and how the catalyst project can help address those gaps (through training, resources and discussion with other groups or individuals). Senior analytical, policy and management personnel across organisations representing government, academia and third sector took part in this exercise.

Through a series of semi-structured interviews, stakeholders were asked to share their views on a) youth transition research evidence, b) challenges associated with administrative data and c) their own organisation's training needs with respect to administrative data.

Insights gained from the first of these three topics were used to further refine our initial assessment of gaps. It resulted in the compilation of emerging research priorities which will be the basis of all our future engagements with the wider research community (Figure 3).

A similar iterative approach will be used throughout the course of this project to translate emerging themes into specific research questions and determine ways in which existing data (or new linkages) could help address some of those questions. The contents of the research agenda will be kept under review and revised if/when new significant gaps and priorities are uncovered through our engagement with the wider policy, practitioner and research communities.

Figure 3: Youth transitions - Emerging research priorities



- 1 Recognise intersectionality and consider individual characteristics and experiences that tend to co-exist or appear to be over-represented in specific transitions.
- 2 Avoid higher aggregations and consider sub-groups such as Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller and Roma'.
- 3 Consider richer measures of socio-economic disadvantage, e.g., duration of FSM during school instead of a binary FSM eligibility indicator at a fixed point in time.
- 4 This includes, for example, school exclusion, low attainment, non-continuation in Higher Education.
- 5 Any investigation on what works must take into consideration extenuating factors such as location, family and school characteristics. The aim should be to develop a theory of change that identifies the core features of a pathway or intervention (and its context) which can be transferred into similar other settings.
- 6 What is meant by 'successful outcomes' should be defined at the outset of any research.

[\(A downloadable version of the Research Priorities is available\)](#)

For the second topic relating to challenges associated with administrative data, stakeholders were asked to share their knowledge and experience of working with administrative data directly or indirectly through other colleagues and/or partner organisations. Their reflections have been summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Challenges associated with the use of administrative data in research



In the final segment of the consultations, stakeholders were asked about their organisations' training requirements with respect to access and use of administrative data. Some participants noted the value of in-house and ad hoc training courses which were largely sufficient for their needs, while others identified other training requirements. The most common requirements cited by stakeholders include:

- awareness of linked datasets
- application process
- preparing the data for analysis and
- statistical analysis, including standard code/syntax.

For the next phase of this project, the research team will offer training and learning resources to meet the knowledge and information requirements of a wide range of audiences. This will build on the feedback from stakeholder consultations and various other community engagement activities aimed at raising awareness about and increasing engagement with administrative data, as well as the research priorities identified by this project.

Conclusion

'Youth transitions' is a complex term that is highly dependent on the context within which it is being used and studied. For the purpose of this project, the research team is focussing on 'journeys of disadvantaged young people into and out of education and employment'. This too is a multi-dimensional definition and can be interpreted in different ways. By observing and classifying recent literature, it has been possible to segment this over-arching concept into components, each of which refer to different stages of transition between education and employment, for different groups of young people with different experiences and outcomes.

The literature search conducted as part of this project has highlighted a vast disparity in the volume of evidence pertaining to various segments of youth transition. It has also identified fewer published studies using administrative data to analyse youth transitions than perhaps expected, which confirms the project's commissioning organisations' observation around under-utilisation of administrative data. While the under-utilisation is partly driven by practical constraints (such as data access procedures), limited capacity and capability is also a significant driver. In the next phase of this project, the research team will aim to address some of the capacity and capability issues which would enhance the use of administrative data in youth transitions research.

It is envisaged that the identification of emerging gaps in the evidence and the resulting research priorities, combined with a more enhanced set of technical knowledge and skills, will act as a catalyst that inspires the research community to address those gaps using administrative data.

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Appendix A: Further information on search strategy conducted in March 2024

Screening publications on websites

Dataset owners, commissioners and funders: ADR UK, Children's Commissioner, DfE, DHSC, DWP, ESRC, HESA, HMRC, MoJ (including YJB), NHS England, Nuffield Foundation, ONS, Social Mobility Commission. UCAS

Organisations known to work in this space: EPI, FFT Datalab, IFS, Impetus, Learning & Work Institute, LSE (CVER & CEP), NIESR, Sutton Trust, TASO, University of Westminster, YFF

Other organisations likely to work in this space: Advance HE, Education & Employers, HEPI, Institute for Employment Studies, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UCL (Centre for Education & Criminal Justice, Centre for Inclusive Education, Centre for Post-14 Work & Education, Centre for Sociology of Education & Equity, CEPEO, CLOSER, CLS, Education, Practice & Society, LLAKES, Quantitative Social Science), University of Oxford (SKOPE), Youth Employment UK

Searching by dataset names (including variations): Children in Need Census, COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study (COSMO), Data First (cross justice), Data on looked after children, DWP benefits data, ECHILD (*Education and Child Health Insights from Linked Data*), Education, health and care plans data, Grading and Admissions Data for England (GRADE), GUIE – Growing up in England, HESA - student and outcomes data, HM Revenue and Customs data on earnings and income, Individualised learner record (ILR), Longitudinal education outcomes (LEO), Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (LYSPE), Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP), Millennium Cohort Study, Ministry of Justice & Department for Education linked dataset, Ministry of Justice offending management statistics, National tracker services: Higher Education Access Tracker, Aim Higher West Midlands, East Midlands Research and Evaluation Partnership, Next Steps (LYSPE2), National Pupil Database (NPD), OFS National Student Survey, Special educational needs person level survey 2024 or person level SEN2, The Personal Cost of Health Conditions in Childhood Dataset, UCAS data, Understanding Society (UK Longitudinal Household Study)

Keyword searching

All results containing at least one keyword from List 1 and at least one keyword from List 2 below screened; exact keywords tailored to each database.

List 1: Transitions	List 2: Populations/risk factors
apprenticeships	looked after/in care
access to education	alienation (<i>used for disaffection</i>)
access to HE/higher education	aspiration
barriers	at risk students
choices	care experienced
decisions	care leavers
destinations	disability/disabled
drivers	disadvantaged (<i>includes socio-economic</i>)
Education work relationship	disengagement
employability	ethnicity
employment outcomes	labour force nonparticipants
employment potential (<i>used for employability</i>)	homelessness/homeless people
entry to employment	marginalised groups
factors	mature students
labour market	mental health
NEETs/not in education, employment or training	minority group students
opportunity/opportunities	NEETs/ not in education, employment or training
outcomes of education	out of school youth
outreach	service experienced
pathways	student mobility
school to work transition	underrepresented groups
transitions	wellbeing
student experience	youth justice/criminal justice
youth employment	
youth unemployment	
widening participation	

Appendix B: Description of Research Types

Beginning to develop a framework and narrative to engage with stakeholders; facilitate reflection and spark engagement/discussion

Taking the example of the **Further Education to Labour Market** transition, one way of looking at the studies we have identified that consider this transition is to use the following broad categorisations:

Type 1: Descriptions of transitions, pathways taken and how these vary by marginalised groups.

These studies aim to ‘unpack’ the transition by describing the various stages of transition and the experiences of marginalised groups as they move from one stage to another, along different pathways.

In the FE to Labour Market transition, we might consider for instance, the use of [Alluvial diagrams \(pages 16-22\)](#) as descriptive of the stages of transition and the specific experiences of young people during this stage of their lives. The description uncovers how the transition experiences of young people from different socio-economic backgrounds varies, as they take different pathways and experience different rates of attrition. More advanced approaches such as hazard/duration models specifically model the process of transition (Xue *et al.*, 2023) and attrition along pathways.

Type 2: Evaluating impacts of particular pathways on later outcomes. For example, evaluating the impact of qualifications or the impacts of time spent in care or custody. The methods used attempt to identify the causal impacts of specific pathways on later outcomes and often attempt to answer the question of ‘what works’. The following examples of this literature for the **Further Education to Labour Market** transition, are typical of academic and policy work across a variety of youth transitions:

- a) Espinoza and Speckesser (2022), A comparison of earnings related to higher technical and academic education.
- b) Matthewes and Ventura, (2022), ‘On Track to Success? Returns to vocational education against different alternatives’,
- c) See pages 25 to 34 of a recent [Nuffield report](#).

This work is often regression-based (OLS, IV, MTE) and/or based on matching. It is often not explicitly focused on ‘unpacking’ details of the transition between, in this case, the start of post-16 learning in FE and subsequent Labour Market outcomes. It attempts to evaluate the most effective pathway through the transition. These studies are often focused on identifying ‘what works’, which are key to YFF and TASO priority themes.

Not all of these studies explicitly focus on marginalised groups of interest and so are not necessarily in scope - but they are often focused on a pathway that is more often taken by these groups. For instance, young people on Free School Meals and with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are more likely to be observed on post-16 pathways that are seen as alternatives to the traditional academic path to university. If we consider the evaluation of specific pathways such

as traineeships (Stokes, Speckesser and Dorsett, 2019), this is a post-16 pathway for lower achievers, where young people from disadvantaged backgrounds predominate¹.

We might consider that there are variations to these studies, [focused on the characteristics that are important in predicting later outcomes](#); as well as official statistics that use administrative data to map the association between earlier years characteristics and later outcomes (ONS, 2022). Clearly, we are now expanding well beyond consideration of the specific FE to Labour market transition and one can make a case that these studies are descriptive (utilising information from one stage such as KS4 attainment, to predict outcomes at a different stage, e.g. HE participation) rather than claiming relationships that are causal – as such they could feature under our Type 1 or Type 2 categories.

Type 3: Analysing impacts from policies and practices designed to support marginalized groups during particular transitions: These studies measure the impact of policies and practices, including regulatory changes, which aim to support young people through transitions.

As recognised in the discussion above, quite a few studies do not at first seem in scope but when we consider their focus – e.g., traineeships, lower achievers - they are predominantly focused on the experiences of marginalised groups. This is often also true of studies that consider impacts of regulatory/policy change – for instance the impact of [reforms following the Wolf review](#); (Robinson, 2021) and (Azmat and Simion, 2021). In many cases the aim of policy is to support disadvantaged/marginalised groups through a particular transition - for instance, post-Wolf reforms were driven by concern over the ‘low quality’ of many qualifications taken by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. For the KS4 to HE transition, we may consider a TASO study as another example of this type of approach (TASO, 2021) – an intervention designed to support marginalised young people in making a particular transition.

As suggested, these are very much our emerging thoughts on ways to present the research findings – one may consider the TASO study as falling under ‘Type 2’ if we were more focused on method as the key to our distinctions. It is also worth noting that many of the studies included here under ‘Type 3’ are driven by concern that policy/regulatory changes have had unintended consequences for marginalised groups experiencing a particular transition. We may also consider the impact of ‘place’ in this context (Montacute and Cullinane, 2018).

There are lots of grey areas:

- The work that is beginning to emerge from more recent linkages (Sutherland *et al.*, 2022; Cathro, Tagliaferri and Sutherland, 2023) is often focused on evaluation of impacts for more fractured transitions; and also allows insight into the detail of these transitions for groups of young people who are observed in large numbers for the first time.
- We can see here where the distinction between ‘pathway’ and ‘transition’ starts to blur – young people who have ‘engagement with the criminal justice system’ are defined by the specific ‘pathway’ they are taking and are a marginalised group experiencing a ‘disrupted’

¹ It is also worth noting that many of the studies we have identified to date focus on social background and less so on the other marginalised groups of interest to YFF and TASO.

transition. Studies recognise the predominance of disadvantage amongst these young people, providing some 'unpacking' of the transition, and evaluate the impact of being on a pathway that involves 'incarceration' (Dorsett and Thomson, 2023).

Type 4: Operational data studies: These studies describe the process of linking and managing large datasets. They often relate to one or more topics of interest (dictated by the theme of the dataset) and shine a light on the opportunities and challenges associated with data linking. These are studies that are of interest as they give an idea of what can/is being achieved with data linkages, even if the analysis is not in scope (Montacute and Cullinane, 2018; Downs *et al.*, 2019; DfE, 2022; DfE and Ministry for Justice, 2022).