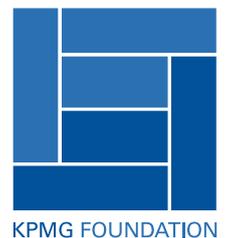


# THE CARING UNIVERSITY IN 2016: PRACTICE, PARTNERSHIP AND STRATEGY WITH THE CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENT

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*Action on Access - at the heart of Widening Participation*  
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# PREFACE

**“You need to help the care leaver to understand that it is about the chance for a new start.”**

Jake, student, Sheffield Hallam University.

The awareness of issues surrounding the educational progression of students from a care background has risen significantly and practice has changed markedly across higher and further education in the past ten years. The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education<sup>1</sup> (the QM) has played a large part in that progress. Now that the QM has finished, the emphasis and challenge going forward needs to be on the embedding of practice into mainstream provision across the sectors, without the Quality Mark as a driver, and ensuring that support is in place and ongoing for care leavers and care experienced students.<sup>2</sup>

The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers operated for nine years between 2006 and 2015 during which a total of 112 universities achieved the award. By 2014, however, it was clear to Buttle UK that Looked after Children were now recognised more properly within the student cohort and were being provided for within bespoke support and general Widening Participation programmes; and that many institutions were demonstrating an exemplary support for them. Buttle UK made the decision that universities themselves should now carry this work forward and that Buttle UK need no longer manage their Quality Mark.

This Guide seeks to show how these challenges have been, and are being, successfully met in pre-entry and post-enrolment phases in institutions that achieved the exemplary standard of the QM; and how these practices and policy developments continue to benefit and improve the experience of care leavers and care experience students across all institutions.



1. Buttle UK Quality Mark documents are all available on the Buttle UK website:  
<http://www.buttleuk.org/areas-of-focus/quality-mark-for-care-leavers/quality-mark-documents>

2. Throughout the Guide, for the purposes of clarity and consistency the following terms will be used:  
‘Care leaver’ - to denote young people from a care background who are still in school or college before they enter further or higher education (pre-entry).  
The term ‘student’ refers to students from a care-experienced background, enrolled and studying in a university (post-enrolment). We will make it clear when we are referring to students generally.  
The term ‘Looked after Children’ will be used sometimes as a general term.

# INTRODUCTION

**“Buttle galvanised partners to work together more proactively and systematically to make the difference for our young people. It developed powerful relationships between partners that we will continue to build on through strategies such as the West Midlands Post 16 Learner Support Partnership Agreement which takes the Buttle ethos back to the sector and makes it self sustaining through peer support and challenge.”**

Tony Clifford, Head of Virtual School for Children in Care, City of Stoke-on-Trent.

Early in 2015, *Action on Access (AonA)*<sup>3</sup> was pleased to be asked by Buttle UK to undertake research to a) examine and report on the accuracy of this assessment and b) to identify what was current effective practice and what improvements were being developed.<sup>4</sup>

*AonA* has worked with Buttle UK since 2000. We have also supported institutions, Aimhigher partnerships and the networks that followed them through to the present; influencing policy; providing advice and information to the sector on care leavers and higher education; linking up people and organisations working with Looked after Children; and communicating and disseminating good practice. *Action on Access* wrote, published and promoted *The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark: A Practice Guide*.<sup>5</sup>

*AonA* is committed to the continuation of support for this specific group of young people and adults and we continue to advocate for them through membership of the National Strategy Group of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL).<sup>6</sup> In 2015, *AonA* was instrumental in securing the funding for, and the creation of, the bespoke National Network for Collaborative Outreach for Care Leavers, with Buttle UK, NNECL and Virtual Heads, and with the support of our national steering group, the *Action on Access* Advisory Forum.

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In the same way that the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education arose from research and findings in the 2005 report *By Degrees: Going to University from Care*,<sup>7</sup> *AonA* believes it is important to

undertake renewed, up-to-date research to examine the progress and strong commitment initially established through the Quality Mark programme. It is of import also to elicit the views and experiences of care experienced students themselves; accordingly their individual voices can be heard throughout the Guide.

In researching this Guide, *Action on Access* participated in discussion and conducted interviews with several universities that had achieved exemplary status under their QM. We interviewed Named Contacts / Designated Members of Staff (DMS) and other deliverers of the QM; senior staff who managed and reported on the QM; and students who benefited from the QM.

We were given access to internal reports, publications, information pamphlets and related materials. Secondly, we analysed the activity and monitoring reports that all institutions had submitted to Buttle UK.

Thirdly, to set the context, we reviewed recent literature and the increasing number of resources aimed at supporting care experienced students in higher education. These are included in the Resources section at the end of this Guide. We interviewed students who contributed their own valuable observations on what works and what doesn't work; and who illustrated clearly the immense benefits to them of what is now in place. Finally, we looked to illustrate the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark on institutions and on the sectors. The key Quality Mark publications

3. For brevity, throughout this Guide, *Action on Access* will be referred to frequently as *AonA*. For more information on the work of *Action on Access*: <http://actiononaccess.org/>

4. The field research for this study was conducted during the 2015-16 academic year. Institutions are experiencing re-structuring and other turbulence so some of the job titles and activities may have changed by the time of publication.

5. The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark: A Practice Guide, (*Action on Access*: 2010) can be read or downloaded from the *Action on Access* website: [http://actiononaccess.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/franbutpdf.pdf](http://actiononaccess.org/wp-content/files_mf/franbutpdf.pdf)

6. The NNECL (National Network for the Education of Care Leavers) website provides information about the network, HE activities and resources for care leavers; children in care and those who support them; and contains the HEFCE-funded National Network for Collaborative Outreach Single Point of Contact on Looked after Children: <http://nnecl.org/>

7. *By Degrees: Going to University from Care*, Sonia Jackson, Sarah Ajayi and Margaret Quigley (Institute of Education, University of London, 2005). This can be read or downloaded from the Buttle UK Website: <http://www.buttleuk.org/research/by-degrees-going-to-university-from-care>

and documents can be found on the Buttle UK website.<sup>8</sup>

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*AonA* took seven distinct activities arising from the QM framework structure to underpin fieldwork research and to probe further into how institutions had developed and were developing practices which were reflected in both strategy and institutional commitment. These seven activities are built into the structure of the Guide:

- **Raising aspiration and pre-entry**
- **Application**
- **Induction and pre-enrolment support**
- **Strategic implementation**
- **Review, monitoring, ensuring quality and progress**
- **The importance and benefit of Collaborative Partnerships**
- **Sustainability.**

The specific education policy environments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland allow, enable, and have driven different approaches for their own institutions. Although this Guide primarily focuses on English universities we are able to reflect on this national diversity through our visits to universities in Wales and Scotland.

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*AonA* has deliberately employed a discursive style for this Guide that incorporates a key set of reflective questions at the end of each of the middle sections which can be used to review, evidence and develop the work in any higher education institution. We encourage all those working with Looked after Children in higher education providers to utilise this.



8. Buttle UK website: <http://www.buttleuk.org/areas-of-focus/quality-mark-for-care-leavers/quality-mark-documents>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“You know it’s a scary thing (for a care leaver) coming up to 21...”**

Roseanna, student, University of Strathclyde.

Throughout our research for this Guide - in conversations with the universities (and their students from a care background); examining institutional annual reports submitted to Buttle UK over the last four or five years; surveying the dedicated web pages of UK universities detailing care leaver support - the conclusion we can draw is that this particular group of disadvantaged young people in their contacts with HE will encounter a coherent, consistent yet versatile set of activities, events and interventions buttressed with an expert, enthusiastic and empathetic personalised support.

Thorough-going support to care leavers pre-entry, and to care experienced students post-enrolment, is not only continuing as the Buttle Quality Mark finishes but is thriving. We found solid support for this evidenced in all the universities we visited. These universities:

- **prioritised and promoted care leavers as a target group within activities in widening participation outreach programmes and bespoke activities and programmes**
- **embedded bespoke support in whole institutional strategies.**
- **embraced responsibilities for care leavers by staff in roles across the university.**
- **established an expert Named Contact/ Designated Member of Staff in permanent roles both pre-entry and post-enrolment. (We will use the acronym DMS throughout the Guide to refer to the Designated Member of Staff or Named Contact as both these descriptions are used by universities for the role.)**
- **offered bespoke bursaries and entitlement to hardship funds with identified additional funding opportunities.**

- **gave preferential access to Compact and other (for example, mentoring) schemes to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students.**
- **clearly incorporated student feedback and voice in review and delivery of support services, ensuring pre-entry care leaver identification with students already successfully enrolled at the university.**
- **worked in vigorous partnerships with other universities and a wide range of stakeholder organisations.**
- **had practice and strategy in place to ensure progression, often with bespoke career advice arrangements and students going forward into postgraduate study, and supported to access postgraduate scholarships.**

All the above attest to the energy, commitment and sheer hard work of the Designated Members of Staff and Care Leaver teams, supported by the universities in which they work to ensure that care leavers will not get left behind in aspiration, access and achieving success in higher education. There is no indication that this commitment will falter, diminish or fade away.

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As we have observed elsewhere in the Guide, early intervention is key as is the support of the Designated Member of Staff. Previous negative experience of authority, alongside a personal experience of continual disappointment, may militate against seeking help and make it more difficult to trust. As one student told us, “The experience of authority has been not so good for many (of us) – most have been let down, often.”<sup>9</sup> The first thoughts of a care leaver may not be to approach advisers or tutors for help. High levels of engagement with care leavers in outreach programmes and practiced reaching

9. Jake, student, Sheffield Hallam University.

out of the DMS through the applications, enrollment and induction, builds this trust, providing assurance that their needs will be recognised and met and their voices heard.

Students from a care background are likely to experience complications with the following:

- **coping with minimal or no family support**
- **struggling financially**
- **moving to a new place and environment**
- **struggling with accommodation, especially shared accommodation**
- **overwhelmed by the complexity of university and course expectations**
- **settling in to student life and sustaining this**
- **difficulties in forming attachments / trusting relationships with peers and staff.**

Higher education providers were already aware of this group of disadvantaged young people within the widening participation cohort before Buttle UK's groundbreaking report *By Degrees: Going to University from Care*, (first published in 2005) captured the attention of the sector and raised this as a national issue that needed to be addressed urgently. The Buttle Quality Mark was pivotal in that it promoted and rooted in the Framework all the essentials of a standard. As one university explained the QM acted as a good stick and a really good carrot. For practitioners and their managers it enabled a required and developed reflective practice.

Achieving the standard meant that the work with care experienced students is now held in high regard throughout the university and particularly among senior managers and university leaders for its own virtue; and externally, in evidencing institutional social responsibility. The Office for Fair Access

strongly encourages universities to highlight access and retention activity for care leavers throughout access agreements and in their targets and milestones. The additionality that the QM brought to universities was continual support from dedicated Buttle UK staff and annual monitoring, reporting and action planning offering a systematic approach to institutions by which they could ensure that care leavers now have improved opportunities and bespoke support for their student journeys.

Our final assessment, certainly at the universities visited, is that the sustainability of these policies and this practice to ensure that improved opportunity and success for Looked after Children in higher education continues through systematic general and bespoke support is assured. The practices and indicators, instituted and recognised in the framework of the Buttle Quality Mark are now firmly operational and embedded. This is clearly evidenced in the existence of the following:

- **written institutional strategies**
- **established Designated Members of Staff posts**
- **bespoke programmes of events and interventions**
- **bespoke bursaries**
- **effective collaborative partnership delivery**
- **care experienced student voices heard and included in programme activities and reviews of institutional procedures**
- **evaluation in place to improve effectiveness of programmes with Looked after Children (accepting that there is room for improvement in accessing resources and increasing expertise in data collection and analysis)**
- **the acknowledgement by universities of the business case for attracting and retaining care experienced students.**

**“It’s nice to know that I have not lost that safety net at 21; I can focus more and not worry as much. I couldn’t say any nicer things about them. They could not have done more.”**

Roseanna, student, University of Strathclyde.

# THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK FOR CARE LEAVERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A BACKGROUND

**“For us the Quality Mark was so instrumental in getting this work up and running: in starting those networks and meeting so many people and understanding the complexities of the issues... but we almost feel that it’s moved on, it’s done its job and definitely for us feels like a natural progression, it’s so embedded in the institution nine years on...”**

Cassie Joicey, Senior Outreach and Widening Participation Officer, Schools and Colleges Liaison Manager, Sheffield Hallam University.

A Buttle UK-commissioned five-year research project looking at the experiences of the small number of care leavers studying in higher and further education resulted in the publication in October 2005 of *By Degrees; Going to University from Care*. This revealed a stark under-representation of Care Leavers in further and higher education and what Buttle described as “a systematic underestimation of the ability and potential of care leavers” – an underestimation only overcome by the individual student’s own aspiration, motivation and strength.

The Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education was Buttle UK’s response to this lamentable state of affairs. Utilising the research findings and working with others (including Action on Access), a framework was devised that allowed universities, and later on, further education colleges,<sup>10</sup> to develop their support for children and young people who had experienced care. The recommendations in *By Degrees* also informed Government policy, in particular the 2007 *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*<sup>11</sup> White Paper, much of which is now incorporated in legislation.

The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers has been implemented and the work developed over nine years (2006 to 2015) during which a total of 112 universities and 84 colleges achieved the award. In order to be awarded the QM, universities had to offer a minimum level of support to care leavers but also demonstrate a commitment to improving

their provision further - and this improvement and development is one of the things that this Guide seeks to draw out.

By 2014, it was clear to Buttle UK that Looked after Children as care leavers were recognised more adequately within the student cohort and were better provided with bespoke support by many institutions; and this was reported through the activity and monitoring reports to Buttle UK, especially from those institutions demonstrating exemplary support for this group of young people.

It is indicative of the esteem in which the QM was held and the recognition of its great utility that several institutions and organisations (at the time of writing) were independently considering how to replace it with a similar standard or framework - among these the National Union of Students, the Virtual Heads Service, the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers, and by policy makers in Northern Ireland.

**“The ambition ‘post-Buttle’ is to maintain a quality standard through peer support and challenge at a local level linked into a new national standard. So far, we have over 30 Virtual Schools nationally signed up to ensure we maintain the ‘best of Buttle’ in this way.”**

Tony Clifford, Head of Virtual School, Stoke-on-Trent, June 2014

10. Buttle UK later asked NIACE (now the Learning and Work Institute) to produce a QM for Care Leavers on Further Education: a Guide to Good Practice in Colleges Achieving the Buttle UK Quality Mark (NIACE, 2015): [http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/sites/niace\\_en/files/resources/Supporting\\_Care\\_Leavers\\_in\\_FE\\_Full%20Report\\_November\\_2015.pdf](http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/sites/niace_en/files/resources/Supporting_Care_Leavers_in_FE_Full%20Report_November_2015.pdf)

11. *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*. A summary of the White Paper can be read or downloaded at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/6781-DfES-CM%20Summary.pdf>

# RAISING ASPIRATION AND PRE-ENTRY SUPPORT

**“Just the email and telephone call from my named contact at Strathclyde was nice. I knew I would be alright, I wasn’t worried about starting.”**

Roseanna, student, University of Strathclyde.

It is beyond the scope of this Guide to describe fully the enormously varied amount of outreach activity that institutions are currently delivering. This Guide can only identify and highlight what have emerged as some of the more critical factors, and offer some institutional examples, regarding pre-entry best practice.

In their outreach, institutions seem to target care leavers in two ways; as one amongst a number of groups of learners targeted by generic outreach programmes; and also as a specific group of young people who will benefit from directed bespoke activities. Both are seen to have benefits. The generic WP schemes give opportunities to identify learners or for them to self identify for the bespoke activities.

The generic programme approach respects the feelings of care leavers not to feel stigmatised or be perceived as different and gives them the opportunity to experience generic outreach events and activities alongside other young people from a varied widening participation background. Bespoke events give the opportunity to directly address what might be their particular needs and to facilitate relationships with other care experienced young people. Care leavers may be given prior access and entry to summer schools, Compact schemes or other parts of the programme. The issue of embedded and bespoke activities will be explored later in this section.

## **Identification of Care Leavers**

Invariably institutions identify learners who have an experience of being in care in a number of ways. The most common mechanism is one of self-identification through

the tick box on the UCAS application forms that asks all candidates to identify to disclose care experience.

Identification may be by other means: the student either self-identifies or is identified by the school or college when on a generic outreach activity; the student applies (or is put forward) for a bespoke activity; the student applies to the university for care leaver financial support; the student is referred from a local mentoring programme or through a feeder course; the student self identifies when already on course after seeing internal publicity, speaking to other care leavers or university staff.

## **Designated Member of Staff**

Perhaps the most important (and critical) factor in the outreach work for aspiration, encouragement and support is the existence of a Named Contact or Designated Member of Staff. Time and time again this has been found to be key. (Either title may be used by institutions, with ‘Named Contact’ more usual in outreach work and ‘Designated Member of Staff’ more usual in post-enrolment work.) Research with the institutions revealed that this critical role might be sited variously in widening participation teams, as part of the student services team, in recruitment and marketing teams, or in financial support teams. Often there are two separate roles, with two separate people - a Named Contact for preentry work within outreach programmes and a separate Named Contact to work with students post-enrolment. When this is the case they liaise closely to ensure smooth handover of support. They both have same importance: being a visible, accessible, knowledgeable, signposting, supportive and reliable individual

representing the institution's care leaver support and offering one-to-one conversations and assistance as well as coordinating, developing (and evaluating) outreach activities and interventions.

In this way (and crucially for a care leaver with frequent experience of being let down) a young person with experience of care is able to access personal, dedicated support and advice during the information-seeking and application process. The DMS acts as a university contact not only for learners but also for schools, for colleges, for local authorities, fosterers and any other stakeholder organisation. For the care leaver the person in this role is the gatekeeper to bursaries and other financial support; to relevant bespoke outreach events and workshops; to Compact schemes; to extra application and/or admissions support; to securing suitable accommodation; and as a guide through the often Byzantine university organisation and processes faced by someone who is very likely to possess family and little or no consistent school advice and support.

### **Information**

Another important mechanism of support for both care leavers and those who work with them is the importance and the quality of the information prepared, displayed and disseminated by the universities. We found that webpages on the university website and separate leaflets on the programmes of outreach, Compact schemes and guides for care leavers covering everything in a step by step format (finance, support, accommodation) tend to be very clearly written, informative, and comprehensive.

### **Care Leavers and Outreach Programmes**

Care leavers are always a target group within Widening Participation Outreach strategies, plans and programmes. These programmes have essentially evolved into an offer or

entitlement of a common and systemised set of activities, events and interventions aimed at addressing the disadvantage that many young people face in their progression from school or college. The offer is usually to schools and colleges rather than directly to individuals. The programmes aim to raise aspiration and encourage progression and applications to higher education. Some are delivered exclusively by the university, many jointly with in regional partnerships.

Designed to work in schools and colleges; scheduled appropriately and aimed at young people from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds (including care experienced young people) these programmes of multiple events and activities are likely to comprise some or all of the following:

- **University visits/Open days**
- **Master classes and lectures**
- **Mentoring programmes**
- **Compact schemes**
- **Information sessions on finance or applications**
- **Subject specific activities and workshops**
- **Summer schools**
- **Homework clubs**
- **Themed events**
- **Taster days**
- **Ambassador visits supporting activity**
- **Personal statement sessions**
- **Careers Events**
- **Subject Choices Event**
- **Applications workshops**
- **Roadshows**
- **Educational games and fun aimed at younger pupils.**

As a part of working towards the Buttle UK Quality Mark, many universities have designed specific outreach programmes for care leavers which may be delivered within and as part of generic widening participation outreach programmes or may be completely

separate programmes. In either case they are designed with specific regard to the particular experiences, needs and perspective of care leavers but will resemble the generic programmes described above with extra targeted activity such as:

- **an annual residential**
- **workshops or information sessions for foster carers**
- **bespoke University tours**
- **care leaver ambassador visits**
- **talks and supported activities**
- **information sessions on care leaver bursary application**
- **details of reduced offers**
- **extra admissions support**
- **introductions to key university staff**
- **specific mentoring offers**
- **money management sessions**
- **bespoke mentoring programmes**
- **buddying programmes**
- **individual help with accommodation**
- **writing personal statements**
- **careers guidance session**
- **HE Experience Days.**

The universities visited by *Action on Access* offer variations on the bespoke outreach programmes as described above. All remarked on the value and effectiveness of university student ambassadors and representatives who have actual experiences of the care system speaking to and working alongside care leavers in these programmes.

### **Universities' Blended Approaches.**

All the universities took a blended approach combining generic Widening participation and bespoke programmes. For instance, the Care Leaver team at Greenwich are involved in generic outreach work within the university Compact scheme, and at Open Day stands where they have found it useful to make contact with care leavers in an informal way. The Greenwich HeadStart<sup>12</sup> Compact summer

school sessions are for all pupils but include a workshop for care leavers only where issues more pertinent to them will be explored.

Additionally, Greenwich also organises care experienced student ambassadors attendance at Homework Clubs throughout much of the year where they work often with the same care experienced Homework club attenders; establishing relationships and encouraging aspiration to higher education; and advising them on accessing the Greenwich Friends mentoring scheme.

At Kingston, as with most universities, one of the entry criteria for the Compact scheme is experience of care: many care leavers are channeled to the Compact scheme due to the effective relationships developed by the Named Contact with colleges, social workers, and Virtual Heads. There are a number of similar but different Compact schemes in operation at all universities visited. Compact activities add greatly to Care Leaver team resources by increasing the number of staff and different roles available to work with these students. The Sheffield Hallam Compact, for example, offers on a case-by-case basis a lower offer opportunity and provides workshop preparation for interviews and applications particularly for health courses and education courses. It offers personalised support from a member of university staff and linked access to other student support services in the university - finance and welfare, career mentoring, focus group, student ambassadors.

Newcastle delivers an extended outreach programme, the Partners Programme<sup>13</sup>, a supported entry route for pupils in the UK who have experienced care for a period longer than three months. The Compact includes a lower offer. It also provides the additional support of their Assessed Summer School which offers an experience of living in a hall of residence. Choices Together<sup>14</sup> run by the

12. For HeadStart programme: <http://www.etrust.org.uk/headstart/whatisheadstart>

13. Partners programme at Newcastle: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/schools/partners/>

14. Choices Together programme: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/information-for-schools-and-colleges/raising-aspirations-partnership/choices-together/>

North-East Raising Aspirations Partnership<sup>15</sup> is a fully bespoke programme for care leavers (increasingly fed into by Virtual Heads) which offers a summer school each year from which looked after pupils can be fast-tracked onto the mentoring programme.

Sheffield Hallam has a Realising Aspirations specific outreach programme for looked after young people which the students deliver with a core programme of presentations, summer schools and activities which the university reviews and renews every year in consultation with existing students to keep the activities fresh.

Sheffield Hallam's pre-entry work includes, in conjunction with the University of Sheffield, an annual 3-day summer school around the theme of Theatre and for care leavers only. Sheffield Theatre delivered important elements of the summer school - visits, presentations and performance - and the event culminated on the final day with a debate on the summer school theme. The whole 3-day event finished with a 'graduation' ceremony to which fosterers, carers, and social workers were invited. This event helps care leavers build and develop relationships with other people; make relationships with university staff; find out more about higher education and university life as well as thinking about their career personal planning. The leaving care team gives feedback to pupils afterwards on what they had achieved which helps to cement a relationship with the university Care Leaver team.

Strathclyde care leavers are always invited onto the general Widening Access activities as well as to join the Glasgow city MCR Pathways<sup>16</sup> (mentoring) scheme. The university also offers the discrete 'Accelerate' summer schools for care experienced learners offering subject specialist sessions and which links to the Glasgow city MCR Pathways programme;

and a summer school focused on science and engineering.

As part of their Buttle UK Quality Mark commitment, the University of East London arranged for first year Social Work students to mentor Looked after Children from the London Borough of Newham as part of their academic programme. The undergraduates are trained and supported by mentoring professionals from the Newham Virtual Service team as well as staff from the university's Social Work department and Schools and Colleges team. Evaluation showed the many positive impacts the mentoring scheme had on Looked after Children. Particularly highlighted were the raising of self-confidence and change in attitude and behaviour noted by virtual school staff, foster parents and the mentors. This illustrates how a university can use its academic and professional resources and its links with the local authority to produce an embedded and sustainable initiative which is helping, with other stakeholders, to improve the life chances of Looked after Children.

**"You can actually see the power of someone saying 'yes, I grew up in care and I'm here at Kingston University', and the children thinking, 'Wow that is just like me'...and providing the safe space to talk about growing up in care specifically."**

Jenni Woods, Head of Widening Participation, Kingston University, London

15. The North-East Raising Aspirations Partnership programme: <http://www.raisingaspirations.org.uk/>

16. MCR Pathways: <http://mcrpathways.org/>

## Reflective Questions

1. Are care leavers clearly stated as being a core target group in the outreach programs of your institution; how are they prioritised?
2. What events, interventions and activities does your bespoke strand, whether in, or alongside, your outreach programme, comprise. Are they appropriately scheduled?
3. Do the two strands complement each other?
4. How does your outreach programme work collaboratively; and which other institutions and stakeholder organisations are active partners?
5. What are the mechanisms by which you identify and make contact with care leavers for, and within, outreach programmes or one-to-one advice?
6. How do your programmes incorporate current enrolled students to work with care leavers?
7. How does your institution work effectively with those who are working with care leavers; colleagues in schools and college; the virtual heads service; local authorities care and children's services?
8. Are there data-sharing protocols and mechanisms for the effective collection of relevant information?
9. How are issues of disclosure dealt with?
10. Does your university have a permanent, experienced, supported person in the role of Named Contact / Designated Member of Staff?
11. How well is that role, and the outreach with care leavers, supported in your university?
12. Are the outreach activities embedded in institutional strategies?
13. How is Information, Advice and Guidance incorporated in your outreach work (and the bespoke outreach in particular)? Is this presented in clear, effective information and marketing materials?
14. How are the needs of a particular care leaver identified so that they can receive the most appropriate and effective support from the outreach programme or one-to-one counselling?
15. How do care leavers get to know about the outreach and support offered by your institution (including bursaries and one-to-one support)?
16. What progression and transition schemes are in place, for example, Compacts, reduced offers and so forth?
17. What mechanisms are in place to ensure effective transition of support pre-entry to postenrolment for individual care leavers?
18. What are the mechanisms for ensuring that what you do is effective and that this continues to develop and improve?

# APPLICATION

**“I know from (previous application to Manchester Met) that if you tick the UCAS care leaver box the support kicks in.”**

Roseanna, student, University of Strathclyde.

Conversations on, and information about, applications for many disadvantaged young people, including care experienced pupils, usually occur in the relevant part of the university outreach programme, or more likely as part of its bespoke activities. Direct conversations with Designated Members of Staff, mentors, student ambassadors; bespoke summer schools or other university-based events; Applications sessions or workshops; Personal Statement sessions; or Compact schemes – these are all essential parts of outreach programmes designed to assist and advise successful applications. However, for the looked after young person who has experienced or is experiencing a highly disrupted schooling/academic and care/family background this may not be enough. In these cases the DMS is able to intervene and offer personal guidance.

The named DMS through conversations with schools, virtual heads, social workers, or fostering organisations may have identified care experienced pupils who are thinking of, or applying to, higher education - often from their participation in Compact schemes. The DMS will start liaising with them, advising on university applications and application for bursaries as well as discussing any other issues (e.g. disability or accommodation) facing that young person. The DMS continues to have an important role in ensuring a smoother path for the care leaver into an institution but also to support and guide the young person to the institution or course likely to be the best for them. The DMS does not have a marketing or direct recruitment role.

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Most student applications will come through the UCAS System, with a smaller number of

direct applications sometimes from feeder courses in local colleges (where the university should have procedures in place to identify care leavers), and from occasional referrals from Admissions staff.

The UCAS application procedure effectively provides the primary mechanism for institutions to identify and contact care leaver applicants.<sup>17</sup> This form, encourages applicants to self identify whether they have been in care; both in a direct question and in their Personal Statement. This is the point at which a flag is raised prompting universities to engage in conversation with the applicant. In most cases appropriate university systems to support care leavers are activated and these will be described in the next section of the Guide. All the universities visited reported that this was their primary means of identifying and making contact with care leaver applicants.

Rather than using the statutory definition of a care leaver, the UCAS application form leaves it as open as possible to encourage as many candidates as possible to self-identify. Because of this some applicants self-identify erroneously and the Care Leaver team needs to investigate further and sensitively. It is worth indicating at this point that Care Leaver teams and admissions staff generally work to the accepted or most used definition that: ‘A care leaver is a young person aged 16 or over who has been looked after by their local authority for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday<sup>18</sup> but may be able to apply this definition flexibly given the often fractured life and experience of the applicant.

UCAS also provides information on its website for care leavers and those that work with

17. UCAS Care Leavers website pages: <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/gettingstarted/individual-needs/care-leavers>

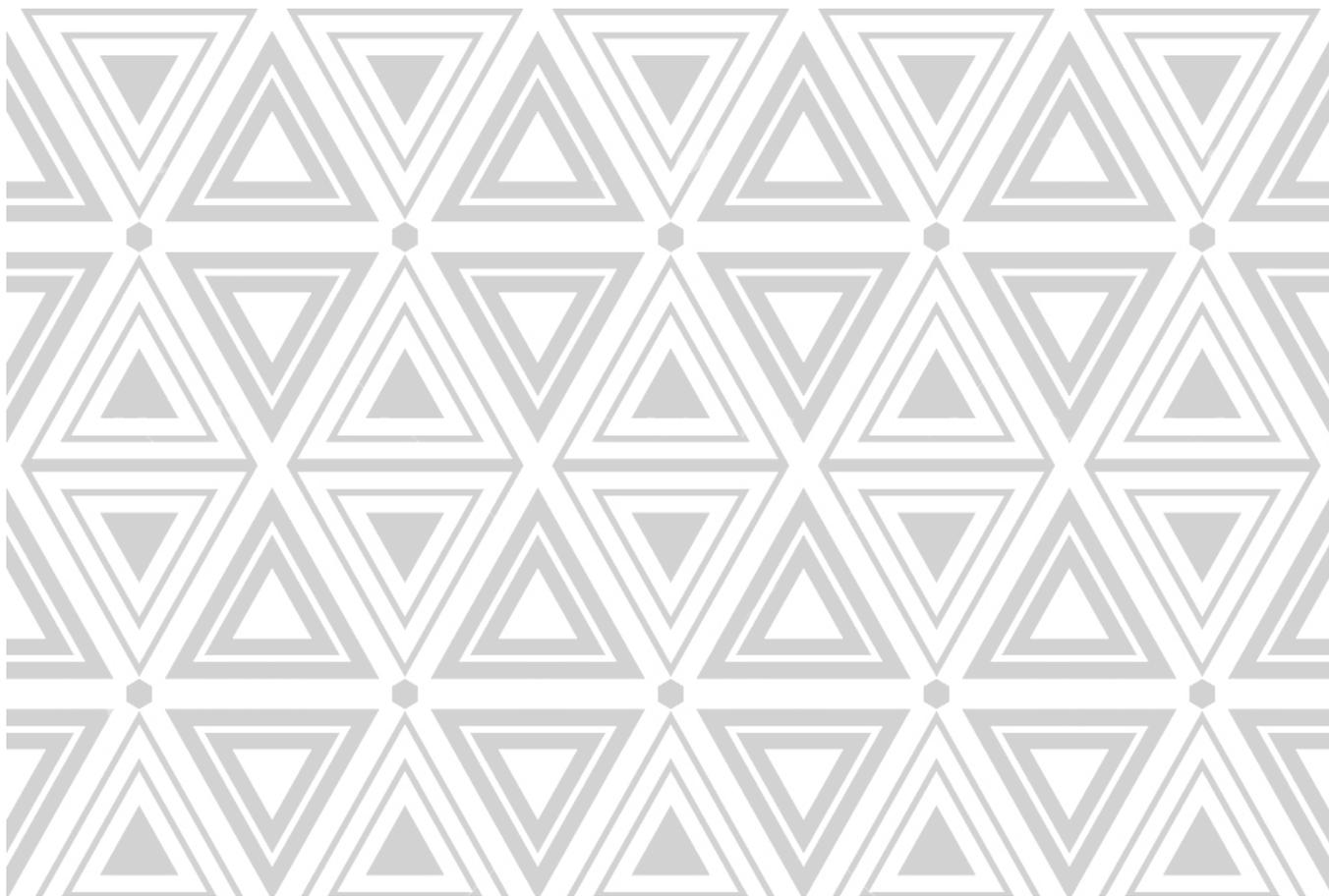
18. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_4058600.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4058600.pdf)

them about the support available to them from institutions. UCAS outlines the financial support on offer to care leavers, pointing them to specific websites for information such as Buttle UK and The Who Cares? Trust. The UCAS website also hosts a video with firsthand accounts from students and gives a list of institutions that have gained the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of applications, it is interesting to note here that Care Leaver teams are successfully supporting care experienced students into postgraduate study; by providing information on courses and application support; as well as lobbying successfully for students with a care background to be made a priority for the Higher Education Funding Council for England Postgraduate Scholarships (England).<sup>20</sup>

**“I am interested to go onto post grad level as bursaries are automatic.”**

Danni, student, University of Newcastle



19. UCAS website: <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/individualneeds/care-leavers>

20. Postgrad scholarships: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/pss/>

## **Reflective Questions**

- 1.** What is being delivered within outreach activities which give assistance in improving the ability of care leavers to make success applications?
- 2.** Who in your institution delivers this advice?
- 3.** Are those who work in schools and colleges advising care leavers on making applications properly advised and supported?
- 4.** How do you ensure that Information, Advice and Guidance on making applications is impartial and properly recognises the career needs of the care leaver?
- 5.** In what ways are care leavers needing help with applications identified and assisted with regard to, for example, help with completing Personal Statements and is the purpose of the UCAS tick box explained?
- 6.** How are related issues on care leaver applications dealt with, for example, financial support and bursaries, accommodation, benefits of a Compact scheme, and so on?
- 7.** Does your institution offer appropriate bursaries, accommodation and Compact offers to a care leaver?
- 8.** Who is responsible for ensuring confirmation of the care leaver's status with the local authority?
- 9.** Is Information, Advice and Guidance on application and on related university support components (bursaries, accommodation etc.) made available to care leavers and those helping them apply? Do you have clear, effective information and use marketing materials such as leaflets, the university website and outreach information workshops and sessions?
- 10.** What mechanisms are in place for any handover from pre-entry Named Contact to postenrolment Named Contact to ensure effective transition of support for individual care leavers?
- 11.** What are the mechanisms for ensuring that what you do is effective and that this continues to develop and improve?

# INDUCTION AND POST-ENROLMENT SUPPORT

**“The difference with care leavers is that they don’t trust people or have been continually disappointed so they often won’t go to them (advisers/tutors) for help.”**

Frazer, student, University of Strathclyde.

Even a cursory examination of the information on UK university websites shows that each one makes special provision for young people with a care background with an explicit statement of advice and support. All follow a similar pattern to that which is described in this section of the Guide; and support the view that this work is enthusiastically embraced across the higher education sector.

We have already asserted the crucial role of the Named Contact or Designated Member of Staff who establishes a relationship with care leavers, acts as gatekeeper to services and as a general troubleshooter. This role acquires even more importance once the care leaver becomes a student at the institution.

## **A Designated Member of Staff**

The service delivered by the DMS has at least two elements. One is the personal one-to-one relationship they build with the care experienced student. The other is internal networking to function as a focus for other staff in the institution as an accessible, knowledgeable, expert reference point for them to turn to; as a communicator on the existence and potential needs of a care leaver. Admissions staff, Accommodation Managers, Finance Department staff, the Student Union officers, mentors and tutors are particularly targeted for internal networking through internal visible communications.

Post-enrolment, the central role of the DMS is to offer one-to-one advice and support, contacting and monitoring students (as described below) and through drop-in advice sessions, preferably with an accessible office (often within student services) where students can go to contact the DMS on all course or

personal matters. The DMS should have the experience and contacts such that when a problem presents itself or in a crisis situation they can look at holistically at the event and liaise or advocate as necessary with academic, support or domestic university staff to achieve a resolution.

Given the care leaver background, there is a general acceptance by Care Leaver teams not to ‘push’ the care leaver service at them and to respect their right to privacy and anonymity. One DMS commented that they “were sensitive and not going to action-plan them to death.” The student may arrive with strong relationships, personal advisers, stable fostering circumstances and so on in place; others will need to talk to the Care Leaver team. The inconsistency of local authority support makes it hard for a DMS to presume a person’s circumstances and each individual’s needs will be different. Universities reported a regular engagement with varying proportions of care experienced students (one quarter to one third) while the rest remained quite self-sufficient.

## **Post-Enrolment Programmes of Support**

Universities offer very similar programmes post-enrolment commencing at the offer stage. A number of arriving students with a care background particularly local students will have been identified as described in the previous section of this Guide so the university Care Leavers team (and their Finance team) may well already be aware of them. First interventions might be a letter or email from the Care Leaver team sent directly to the young person when their UCAS form comes in with a ticked Care Leaver box. This may see the creation of a confidential file. In some

institutions this initial contact letter may be sent by the Student Services department with the care leaver information contained within it. If this is the case, then the Care Leaver team is likely to send an email with all relevant information and a personal introduction with a follow-up phone call within a few weeks.

At the offer stage, a letter or email (sometimes automatically generated; sometimes directly from the DMS) is sent to the holder of an offer congratulating them and providing advice; primarily on applying for appropriate university scholarships and other relevant support, explaining accommodation options and offers as well as highlighting application deadlines. Well-resourced Care Leaver teams might contact those students who were unsuccessful in securing a place offering feedback, help and advice. Often there will be a follow-up in the case also of non-application, or an unsuccessful application to bursaries.

At some point in the process, the university will seek confirmation from the appropriate local authority of the applicant's genuine care leaver status and if this is not forthcoming the DMS may well pursue the matter. As soon as confirmation of a place is received there will be a welcoming letter or email from the DMS that usually reiterates the support on offer to care leavers and includes detailed information leaflets as well as a personal introduction to the DMS. Universities with smaller numbers of successful care leaver applicants may make contact by phone - particularly in cases where no reply has been received.

Some Accommodation and Finance departments hold leaflets and information about care leaver support services that they pass on to students who have not ticked the UCAS box but who only identify as such on application for accommodation or assistance.

Alternatively these departments may notify the Care Leaver team directly for further action.

### **Inductions**

Several of the universities visited told Action on Access that there was a general reluctance on the part of care experience students to attend a bespoke induction and therefore these were not being offered within the university induction period. Three of the universities spoke of operating a pre-Freshers week experience to give care experienced students a 'feel' for the university and to make contact with support services (especially the Care Leaver team) before the main body of students arrive. The DMS will also create opportunities for new students to make individual contacts by attendance at Fresher's Weeks, registration days, university inductions, Departments / School inductions, offering drop-in sessions, and through reminders and notifications on the university website. The induction period, usually thought of as the first three or four weeks is an important period where the DMS makes every effort to create and build strong relationships with students.

### **Bespoke Bursaries**

Care Leaver teams are also able to begin to foster a relationship with these new students as they make applications for Care Leaver bursaries. The DMS will make contact, informing them of the location of the Care Leaver team and how to meet for advice on bursaries and bursary application. While not a pre-requisite, Care Leaver teams strongly advise students that in order to make the most successful application they should meet with the DMS.

### **Some issues and crisis points for the care experienced student**

As Kate Cowell describes overleaf, these issues are more likely to apply to someone with an experience of care, although it is worth

reiterating that one person's experience of care will never be exactly like another; and that a care leaver may not face any of these issues on their journey through higher education. The specific structures of support described in this section of the Guide shed light on how universities are assisting students facing these challenges.

Returning to study in January after the Christmas break is often difficult for the care experienced student; some do not return. Care Leaver teams told Action on Access that this is a crisis familiar to them. This period is a good point anyway at which to reinforce the relationship already built between the university and student. Some universities provide a Welcome Back letter in January and a reminder of the DMS and of opportunities and other supports available. Some universities allocate resource for a keep-in-touch phone call at this point in the student's first academic year.

### **Further Ongoing Support**

Some Care Leaver teams will dispense with any further keep-in-touch activities, confident that monitoring progress on attendance; on academic achievement; on mentoring programmes; through pastoral staff or tutor meetings should identify potential issues and that contact will then be made with the Care Leaver team or other university teams as appropriate. The DMS may receive reports of non-continuation in which case those students will be contacted and offered support. Better-resourced institutions may have time to monitor regularly assessment and general academic progress reports; to monitor returning students up to the second or third year of study; and if appropriate, undertake to make contact and follow-up work. As students from care leaver backgrounds may not settle at their university as easily as other students, Care Leaver teams will advocate for bursaries to

repeat a year given that a student is very unlikely to have any other financial support.

### **Internal Networking**

An important part of the work of the Care Leavers team and the DMS is internal networking – liaising with other parts of the university to ensure that all staff have a strong awareness of care leavers in the university and are able to refer them on effectively.

Care Leaver Forums or Steering Groups (these have different titles according to different universities), originally provided a structure to ensure the Buttle Quality Mark core business was put in place. These are a useful focus for assuring that care experienced students are supported throughout the university. As both students and staff are represented on these forums they can serve a useful purpose in revealing how that support is being experienced and perceived by the care experienced student. Care Leavers Forums are often now less active as the Quality Mark processes are no longer being applied. The DMS's role increasingly is to continue networking with colleagues who were forum members; for example those in Mental Health teams, Disability teams, the Chaplaincy, other pastoral staff, Finance, Accommodation, and so on.

**“Issues which care leavers may bring (some of which are common to all students) tend to focus around challenges with settling in to student life and sustaining this. These may include coping with minimal or no family support, moving to a new city, feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of a university and the expectations of their course. Some care leavers may have difficulties in forming attachments / trusting relationships with peers and staff, if this has been an issue for them in the past. They may be struggling financially and also with sharing accommodation.”**

Kate Cowell, Student Wellbeing Adviser,  
Sheffield Hallam University

Student Unions are an important part of the internal networking to support care experienced students. Student Union officers may receive annual awareness raising training on issues faced by care experienced students. At Liverpool John Moores, the DMS meets with Student Union officers every month for a reflective practice session to exchange information. The Student Union is represented on appropriate committees. This relationship shares information both ways; to and from the Care Leaver team and feedback to the Care Leaver team on student issues. At Greenwich, it has been agreed in the Student Union articles that all student union officers must undergo training in order to better recognise and support care experienced student issues; and a planned jointly-delivered care experienced student awareness campaign/ event backed by posters and leaflets which they intend to make a regular event.

#### **Student Ambassadors and Advocates**

Care experienced students are encouraged and receive priority to join university activities. They are invited to sit on the Care Leavers Forum and other groups and committees with student representation (including those of the Student Union) and invited, with a guaranteed interview, to join the university Ambassador scheme to help deliver outreach or act as advocates or mentors, which in many cases is paid work.

Care experienced students are frequently given support in completing their applications for Ambassador and student advocate programmes. Where possible, and agreeable, these students are employed to directly work with looked after pupils at local authority events, speak at appropriate national events, as well as, for example, being involved in internal and external training and raising awareness of staff.

In terms of engagement, of confidence building and of personal validation it is just as valuable to the student ambassadors themselves.

**“Early intervention is key, after which we continue with a termly interview through the life cycle.”**

Christine Farley, Widening Participation Officer and Designated Member of Staff, Kingston University, London

**“There should be more care leavers who have success stories and who can be role models, going into schools and into colleges... to inspire. There should be a better focus on young people in schools, that they can succeed.”**

Roseanna, student, University of Strathclyde

**“I have worked on lots of things: Raising Aspirations, the Mentoring programme, the summer schools. I would do it without being paid. I want to give... I recently did a session to 200 care leavers speaking at the Open Day.”**

Danni, student, University of Newcastle

## **Financial Support**

All universities offer specific care leaver bursaries: the amount of the award varies, often as a result of practical issues such as the number of care leaver students enrolled in a university. Students are encouraged to apply also for other supplementary grants and awards. At Sheffield Hallam, a UNITE Foundation<sup>21</sup> scholarship offers £3,000 per year. Students at Strathclyde can access a Care Leavers Bursary of £1,500 each year plus the UNITE bursary and the Hardship (Student Support) for which care leavers are a target group. Newcastle offers a generous £9,000 per year Care Leavers Bursary. Strathclyde offers a specific Strathclyde Cares bursary and students are also put forward for the Robertson Trust<sup>22</sup> scholarships which matchfund the bursary from the university. Through their partnerships with the UNITE Foundation several universities are able to offer both scholarships and subsidised accommodation.

## **Accommodation**

Universities offer year-round accommodation for students from a care background but the universities visited by Action on Access observed that frequently students were more keen to retain their precious local authority organised housing. In this regard, a bursary can be crucial in keeping their homes – an important source of psychological security. Some local authorities will not continue supporting students when they get into university accommodation - even if they encounter difficult circumstances - considering them to have disappeared off their housing list. This persuades many students in their first year particularly, to elect to stay in their local authority accommodation.

## **Examples of Post-Enrolment Support**

### *Greenwich*

Greenwich offers a staff mentoring scheme to care-experienced students with a staff mentor

as first point of contact for any questions about study, living independently or university life in general. The staff mentor advocates on the student's behalf where necessary or advises on where to go to find other sources of information. The amount of contact between the student and mentor is negotiated as it is in a different borough-wide mentoring programme Greenwich Friends. This peer mentoring programme introduced in Autumn 2011 offers new students the opportunity to be mentored by second and third-year student Ambassadors to provide initial support and signposting during their first term at university.

### *Kingston*

The university Compact scheme supports students in preparing curriculum vitae, making applications, searching graduate opportunities and so on, and care experienced graduates can (and do) return after graduation if they need this sort of help and advice. There are a number of initiatives in the university aimed at developing career potential and supporting students into employment. For example, KU Talent<sup>23</sup> provide careers support to Kingston University students and recent graduates through hands-on, practical training and events to build relationships with major and local employers and alumni. Links with the alumni schemes mean that the Care Leaver team can raise funds for deserving cases and secure direct help in offering placements for care experienced students. A good number of employers and organisations (mainly across London) offer placements and internships. All the above is actively promoted to care experienced students and others doing disproportionately badly in the employment market, including students from particular ethnic backgrounds.

### *Liverpool John Moores*

The university care leavers team moves into high gear at the application offer stage. As soon as it receives a UCAS form with the

21. The UNITE Foundation: <http://www.unite-group.co.uk/responsibility/the-unite-foundation>

22. Robertson Trust: <http://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/what-we-fund/scholarship-award>

23. KU Talent: <http://www.kingston.ac.uk/careers/>

care leaver box ticked, the Care Leaver team sends out an eNewsletter for all Widening Participation students which has a note to Care Leavers. On the Before You Arrive page of the university website there is a page of specific information for care experienced students and the Care Leaver team also post to the university's Facebook and Twitter account. Each hall of residence has a Facebook page and the Care Leaver team has plans to post key messages aimed at care leavers, pre-entry.

Liverpool John Moores has a programme in place, heavily used by students, where the careers team is linked with students through the student life cycle, with students achieving credits and a certificate for each stage finishing with a mock interview with a graduate employer. After graduation, students can use the careers service for as long as they need. The DMS spends time in awareness raising sessions with the university careers service and is advocating to have a named careers contact for the university's vulnerable students. The Widening Participation team scans the Destination Survey looking for those students experiencing difficulty accessing employment opportunities and offer continuing support or keep in touch by email if supplying reference requests for individual students.

Care Leavers are given priority in many university Postgraduate Scholarship Schemes and in 2015-16, the DMS at Liverpool John Moores was working with two students on their postgraduate applications, having given scholarship information to all Widening Participation students in their final year.

#### *Strathclyde*

Descriptions of support programmes; of welcome, monitoring and intervention; and of one-to-one help can seem rather dry and dull. Conversations with Care Leaver teams brought to life what might otherwise be flat description of 'support', as the next two examples illustrate.

The Strathclyde DMS, together with her Head of Finance, advocated for a 22 year-old care leaver to get the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to treat her as a Scottish home student for the purpose of fees which made it possible financially for her to attend Strathclyde university. As the student enthused:

**"It's nice to be treated as a person not a number. I do appreciate it as well. It makes me less worried about being up here by myself... I have got no worries of suddenly finding myself completely broke or homeless or not able to pay my rent. It's nice to know that I have not lost that safety net at 21; I can focus more and not worry as much. I couldn't say any nicer things about them. They could not have done more."**

Roseanna, student, University of Strathclyde

#### *Swansea*

The Care Leaver team offers continuing practical assistance and support to students through the whole student life cycle. In her final year, one student was helped by the provision of a much-needed suit for her interview for pupillage at the Bar. This one time care experienced student is now a barrister and provides a great example and role model to other students.

**"It is only with greater engagement with this group of students that we begin to gain their trust that their 'voice' will be heard. Unfortunately, too many negative experiences from the past influence their participation in the present."**

Christine Colson, Care Leavers Support Officer,  
Named Contact, University of Greenwich

## Reflective Questions

1. What is the institutional approach to induction for care experienced students?
2. Do you have effective welcoming, identifying, supporting and monitoring interventions for students from a care background?
3. What activities are provided by the institution for care-experienced students; and what more general events, programmes and schemes could they benefit from?
4. What progression and transition schemes are in place, for example, Compacts, reduced offers, etc.?
5. Does your university have a permanent, experienced, supported person in the role of Named Contact / Designated Member of Staff?
6. How well is the role of the DMS and the work of the Care Leaver team supported by senior staff in your university?
7. Does your institution have a Care Leaver Forum or (equivalent group) and are care experienced student members of this?
8. How effective is the internal networking such that awareness of Looked after Children is raised across all staff; and that people in particularly relevant roles support, advise, and refer care experienced students where necessary?
9. Which university departments across the institutions are more directly involved in supporting care experienced students?
10. How does your institution encourage and incorporate currently enrolled care experienced students to work with care leavers in outreach programmes?
11. How does your institution invite care experienced students to be involved in the institutional process of review; contributing their care experience perspective and helping the university develop its work with care leavers and care experienced students?
12. How is Information, Advice and Guidance on the support and opportunities for care experienced students made available to this specific group within the university?
13. How are care experienced students made aware of where and how to make contact with the DMS or Care Leaver team? How accessible are these services?
14. Have you identified and put measures in place to intervene at potential crisis points?
15. How does your institution ensure the retention and success of care experienced students?
16. How does your institution support care experienced students in progression including careers advice, preparation for application to employment and possible postgraduate study?
17. What post-university support do you offer for care experienced graduates? Do you monitor Destinations Surveys, assist with job references and job applications?
18. Are the needs of, and the support for, care experienced students delineated clearly in institutional strategies? Which strategies?
19. What are the mechanisms for ensuring that what you do is effective and that this continues to develop and improve?

# STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERNAL ARRANGEMENTS

All the universities visited reported and gave examples of statements, policies and practice on pre-entry and post-enrolment activity with the support for care leavers and care experienced students written into whole institutional strategies. Typically they are written into Widening Participation strategies and Access Agreements. This may mean little more than the inclusion of these students as a named and specific target group within the wider whole institutional strategies but often, and increasingly, a more extensive insertion as a separate strategic strand of policy and practice can be found.

In some institutions, statements about activities and programmes to support these students are also to be found in related institutional strategies: Financial, Learning and Teaching, Admissions, Accommodation, Student Retention, Student Support, and in strategic statements of their Student Unions. This part of the Guide aims to indicate how the universities visited were embedding support for these vulnerable young people in their strategies.

In all the institutions visited Designated Members of Staff felt entirely supported by their managers and both parties were clear in their conviction that senior managers gave their full support. Several specifically mentioned their Vice-Chancellor as understanding and supporting the issues facing Looked after Children in accessing and succeeding in higher education. (One clear expression of that arose in the discussion with Sheffield Hallam where the Vice-Chancellor undertook a sponsored bike ride that resulted in funding for a new bursary - the Vice-Chancellor's Bursary for Care Leavers.) As the quotation at the beginning of this section indicates, simple inclusion in strategies is not enough on its own; to be truly effective the needs of the care experienced young person must be understood, taken on board and

acted on by all staff - academic, administrative, support, domestic. The university Care Leaver teams were united in their belief that the more staff in all type of roles that believed in and implemented the strategic policies about care leavers (and all vulnerable students) the better the student experience.

Care Leaver and Widening Participation teams consistently and regularly deliver awareness raising and information session about these students (and students in other vulnerable groups) and the various support services available in their institution - most usually with finance, careers, library staff and accommodation. Staff will also ensure that university-wide days dealing with, for example, Learning and Teaching, incorporate a session specifically on care leavers. In Scotland, the demand of Corporate Parenting legislation gives this an added weight as it means that all staff have to recognise and embrace their own responsibility for care experienced students; and play their part in the university mission to enhance the care experienced student journey their engagement and their retention.

## **Institutional and Strategic Implementation** *Newcastle*

Looked after Children entitlement and support is written into Access Agreements and the Widening Participation strategy; and is embedded throughout outreach programme statements - very specifically, in the university's Choices Together charter. The student lifecycle is recognised and is reflected in support to students through to postgraduate study and including access to scholarships. The university Looked after Children work strategically sits under Learning and Teaching.

## *Greenwich*

Looked after Children work is written into the Widening Participation Strategy, the Access

**“The Quality Mark was useful in that it ensured all elements of a good and proper standard are in place. Getting the information to other people, all staff in the university (including, for example, cleaners and porters) that care leavers might have additional needs arising for their background and that there is all this support around has changed attitudes of staff to Looked after Children and therefore to all more vulnerable students. And discussing looked-after students with staff improves their knowledge of other vulnerable groups.”**

Andrea Mateo, former Head of Student Support Services, Swansea University, now College Manager/Rheolwr y Coleg, College of Law and Criminology/Coleg y Gyfraith a Throseddeg

Agreement, the Students Union Strategy and the Finance and Accommodation Strategies. In Greenwich, the original cross-institutional committee which implemented the QM and gave structure to the core business of monitoring accommodation, staff mentoring (now peer mentoring), bursaries, and other student support has left a more informal network and sounding board for the Named Contact and Designated Member of Staff. The on-going Welfare Forum provides a single meeting point where the DMS can meet colleagues from Mental Health, Disability, Chaplaincy, Finance and Accommodation.

#### *Sheffield Hallam*

The Care Leaver team has always recognised and valued senior management commitment. When visited, Sheffield Hallam was undergoing a re-structure which would result in outreach and widening participation services being brought closer together and with a proposed new Directorate of Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research, within which it was intended to ensure a continuing profile for care experienced students. University strategic aims include the participation of Widening Participation students (and therefore care leavers) providing a supportive challenging and inclusive learning experience for all learners (again, therefore, including care experienced students).

Sheffield Hallam has an Access Agreement commitment to develop proactive retention interventions to support all vulnerable students and to maintain the existing three year annual Care Leaver Bursary. The new Student Transition and Progression team work with targeted groups explicitly including care leavers as well as the monitoring of the impact of interventions by a Learner Enhancement Manager with responsibilities that include, initiating and developing transition support for care leavers and estranged students.

#### *Liverpool John Moores*

The Student Recruitment and the Wellbeing Teams who look after care leavers and care experienced students respectively are separate but meet regularly to ensure smooth transitions of support for the care leaver into the university. These teams are sited under Student Recruitment and Admissions (Student Services) and the Care Leaver service is written into both strategies as well as in the Access Agreement - sometimes generically within Widening Participation policies and practice, sometimes specifically for these students. They all report to the same person on the Strategic Management team and link into the Access Agreement monitoring in detail. (For instance, all reports to Bursary sponsors are also copied to the senior management team). The work with care experienced students is held in high regard throughout the university. The Marketing department, for example, places great value on being able to profile and publicise the work externally as part of evidencing institutional social responsibility.

#### *Kingston*

The implementation of the strategies has resulted in very effective internal links after a lot of development work: with student support officers in each faculty; effective cross referrals; and money advice, credit control and accommodation staff proactively referring to the DMS if they recognise an issue concerning a care experienced student.

# REVIEW, MONITORING, ENSURING QUALITY AND PROCESS

**“It was the QM that helped Kingston in all those internal conversations about the type of support these students needed - they are relatively small numbers across the university and it helped to be able to say the support was part of the QM and this is why we are doing it. But now we have made those links and are able to sustain them. For example we have been able to negotiate a policy where it was agreed that hall deposits can be waived. We are continuing to find new ways to help students.”**

Jenni Woods, Head of Widening Participation, Kingston University, London

Data collection, assessment, monitoring, reviewing and deriving impact and outcomes are functions of evaluation. Essentially evaluation is to identify what is working and what is not. The extent of evaluation should reflect the strategic significance of the activity and whether it is likely to yield rich evidence. Then decisions have to be made about what evidence will be collected, the timescales for delivery, the research questions which will be asked, the outcomes which will be anticipated, the intended audience for review and report. It should facilitate targeted resource allocation, promote improvement through good intelligence and provide a retrospective analysis which shows distance travelled at the end of a project or process.

All the universities made rigorous use of evaluation sheets mostly for pre-entry and outreach but also for post-enrolment events to identify what is working and what is not, collecting and analysing information to assess the effectiveness and impact of their work on attitudinal change; numbers, statistics and characteristics on attenders at outreach activities; care leaver applications and enrolments; and the take-up of bursaries. This information has in the past been supplied to Buttle UK as part of annual monitoring and evaluation reports.

Institutions have established a person (or persons) with primary responsibility for care experienced students (usually the Designated Member of Staff) together with someone in a senior position, to manage the evaluation process and support the work at the

institutional level – including the use of data and evaluation. The best databases contain pre-entry outreach information and connect to institutional records on, for example, attendance or marked grades and, if not, the Care Leaver team will access these separately in other databases. Databases might also be used to account for typical persistent patterns around issues such as culture shock, academic work progress, loneliness and isolation, poor engagement and any crisis points. To help evaluate any work they are doing, many Care Leaver teams have established their own relevant databases to monitor a range of factors such as:

- **numbers and characteristics of students**
- **retention and progress**
- **students course choice**
- **interventions with the students**
- **linkages to records of qualitative information**
- **possible additional needs of the care leaver or care experienced student.**

## Reporting

Care Leaver teams at the universities visited by AonA report usually through a Looked after Children Group or Committee into senior management teams and Access Agreement or other institutional forums. By this process they are held to account, ensure that knowledge about their work be more widely known through the institution, and be able to advocate for more resources.

At Kingston the Access Working Group oversees the distribution of all care leaver Access Agreement funding and the Care

Leaver team report back on their activities and interventions, including evaluation, statistics and targets for care leavers and students. At Strathclyde a Care Leavers Committee acts in a similar capacity and gives an independent internal validation to the reviewing and action planning of the Care Leaver team.

Universities routinely collect and use case studies of work supporting care experienced students and student success stories. At Liverpool John Moores, for instance, the Corporate Communication team will ask for case studies for a brochure aimed at corporate sponsors, for example, the Yoko Ono Spirit Foundation for bursaries.

### **Evaluation with Students**

Universities utilise, or have explored, they use of focus groups composed of care experienced students but with mixed success. As one university explained, “Students continue to wish to remain anonymous and to leave their labels in the past.” Other students, however, will not have these concerns and will volunteer for focus groups, particularly in their second or third year of study as they gain confidence and trust. Effective engagement is needed with this group of students: many universities recognise this issue.

Focus groups and surveys do produce meaningful information. Liverpool John Moores conducts a value and impact assessment every year with students. This is a Bristol online survey; anonymous and not mandatory. In 2014-2015, students responded commenting on the general support and advice they experienced; on what they would like to see more of and less of; and on activities that were not useful. The overwhelming message from the survey is that for care leaver students having the personal contact is most valued. Financial support came a close second.

Universities routinely ask care experienced students to join their Care Leaver working groups/committees and other relevant committees to give feedback and to ensure that their voices are heard. They also seek feedback (and involvement) from their Student Unions. Additionally, Student Ambassadors are useful conduits for incorporating feedback into the improvement of programmes, interventions and events.

### **Wider Evaluation**

Liverpool John Moores is one of the active partners in the Greater Merseyside Care Leavers Alliance which annually surveys local authority care services responsible for the care leaver progression and transition. This aims to determine which aspects of the service they value, focusing on the work of the DMS and the bespoke outreach activities and interventions that are on offer.

Institutions are evaluating effectively and demonstrate intelligent analysis, improvement, outcomes and targets met, student characteristics, numerical data on events and interventions, attitudinal change, retention, and can identify repeat issues and crisis points. However, evaluation and the availability and use of data continue to vex institutional staff.

### **Collecting and Using Data and Information**

The most significant problem for some universities lies in the small number of students involved. All the universities interviewed remarked on the difficulty in being able to identify and collect (particularly) the more statistics-based data and information - sometimes within their own institution, but more so from other sector suppliers: certainly for national comparison. And all explicitly recognised more should be done. Evaluation of pre-entry or outreach activity was felt to be more straightforward and more successful.

Some frustrating and complicating factors:

- **the small numbers of care experienced students involved compared to the institutional student body numbers as a whole.**
- **work capacity - there would usually be only one or two staff with responsibility to this area of work and frequently these staff may have more than one role.**
- **the difficulty in identifying individual activity within generic Widening Participation interventions and activities unless the student had already identified as a care leaver. Those universities able to now use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT)<sup>24</sup> programme expect to be able to disentangle the experience of care experienced students experience from Widening Participation students in progression programmes.**
- **identifying useful comparator groups and then knowing what use to make of these comparisons**
- **the difficulty of quantifying one-off individual contacts or interventions by Student Ambassadors, for instance, at homework clubs, or at one-off events.**
- **the small numbers of care experienced students in institutions make it difficult to establish meaningful drop-out patterns from specific courses or departments.**

### **Developing Evaluation**

In terms of developing evaluation methods those who work directly with the students stress the value they see in being able to better collect and analyse progression rates; demographics; continuation rates; reasons for withdrawal; levels of degree achieved; employability; and to be able to monitor the effect and impact of their interventions and

activity. Institutions mentioned improving data collection, trying to allocate more resources to evaluation (though scarce resources will inevitably be devoted to front line support), and taking expert advice on what evaluation would give most added value.

One solution that several institutions reported is the recent acquisition by their university of the HEAT, as mentioned previously. This software is used to track learners through widening participation events and interventions, producing neat, real and usable data reports. At Newcastle tracking has become a development priority cross sectors and with the inclusion of HEAT they are looking forward to being able to monitor all WP through progression and transition and will be able to focus down on data from their bespoke care leaver programmes such as the Choices Together programme. Sheffield Hallam has taken an additional step in developing this evaluation potential by securing a short-term member of staff as a dedicated resource on data and evaluation using the HEAT service for Widening Participation students. It is early days yet to see the benefits and value HEAT can bring to evaluation but it should make for a step change.

### **Most effective interventions revealed through evaluation:**

#### *Liverpool John Moores*

For the Care Leaver team it is not a particular specific activity or intervention that is most effective but the whole package - a pick-and-mix menu which reflects the heterogeneous nature and differing needs of this group of students. Having a dedicated, accessible office as a permanent drop-in and focus for the ongoing work is a much-needed asset.

#### *Kingston*

The Care Leaver team considers the most effective intervention to be financial support,

24. The Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) is a monitoring and evaluation service, for subscribing Higher Education Institutions, tracking engagement in outreach activities and building evidence of future student achievement to prove the value of outreach: <http://heat.ac.uk/>

followed by the supporting and building of emotional confidence which leads to better engagement. An effective peer group is vital, balanced with effective peer group and tutor support. The Designated Member of Staff, the advocacy, is key especially in offering a stable support especially in the first year.

#### *Newcastle*

The Care Leaver team considered that summer schools, homework clubs and anything that incorporates the student input or voice to be highly effective. For example, having care experienced Student Ambassadors and reps, as these are the people with whom care leavers can identify (even when these ambassadors and reps are other disadvantaged Widening Participation students). At Newcastle, a 'Care Leavers Panel' plays a valuable role in assessing the effectiveness, the operation and development of the university's Choices Together programme.

#### *Sheffield Hallam*

The university reflected that early access to care experienced learners and enrolled students in order to build aspiration and give accurate and useful information is key. That students engage with the university is crucial as is the financial support to students.

#### *Greenwich*

The university stressed the importance of physically meeting one-to-one with the student. Evidence lies in the fact that there was 100% retention of first year students (in 2013/2014) who had engaged with the support offered; and 100% of the students who left the university before the end of the first year had not engaged with any of the services.

### **The student opinion on what constitutes effective interventions:**

#### *Fraser*

- **Care Leaver teams to encourage a care leaver to see that identifying yourself to the university opens up opportunity and won't cause problems**
- **financial support**
- **the value of having a named dedicated person (DMS) to talk to and easy access to that person**
- **the varied support mechanisms, primarily financial but also wider student support and mentoring. Awareness from, and supportive attitudes from all staff (in Scotland, Corporate Parenting will help with this).**

#### *Roseanna*

- **ticking the UCAS box to initiate communications and to be informed about funding**
- **the DMS as contact and wider supporting team**
- **feeling valued, being treated as a person, an adult, an individual**
- **reassurance that there is a safety net**
- **care leavers talking to care leavers. More care leavers who have success stories who are role models going into schools and into colleges to inspire.**

#### *Danni*

- **self disclosure on the UCAS application form**
- **financial support**
- **immediate and early response from the DMS**
- **having the opportunity to give back, to be an ambassador, to speak as a care leaver to care leavers**
- **care experienced ambassadors as role models for care leavers in outreach.**

#### *Jake*

- **ticking the Care Leaver UCAS box so university finance teams and designated member of staff can contact the applicant**
- **the on-going email contact is useful to keep you in the loop**
- **knowing there is always someone you can go to**
- **helping the care leaver to understand it is about the chance for a new start.**

# THE IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

**“The QM provided a drive for new partners and added value to other networked relationships and activities directly within partnerships.”**

Nicola Rawlins, Director of Admissions and UK Recruitment, Sheffield Hallam University

Each university *Action on Access* visited had delivered programmes, particularly with regard to their pre-entry work, through differing collaborative partnerships and networks. Many partnerships existed prior to Buttle QM; some were generic aimed at the whole widening participation cohort but grew to include the care leaver cohort; and some were new, bespoke and aimed exclusively at care experienced learners and students. They operated differently within their particular national and regional contexts and were shaped by existing relationships with other universities, with colleges, with schools, with local authorities.

Therefore, partnership is a complicated landscape complexified further by the fact that all the universities were in some way involved with their regional National Network for Collaborative Outreach network and the relatively new National Collaborative Outreach Programme operating in each region. Discussion with all the institutions underscored this complexity. What we can describe here are some interesting, illustrative and very different collaborative and partnership stories.

**Higher Education Access Rewarding Transforming** better known as **HEART** is a partnership of twelve higher education providers in West Yorkshire formed to support collaborative approaches to both higher level skills for economic development and more traditional access and widening participation activities. One strand of HEART’s work has been to develop stronger support for young people in care and care leavers by working with the professional intermediaries. This has resulted in the establishment of a network comprising local authority Looked After

Children teams, social workers, independent fostering agencies and colleagues in partner institutions. From this a range of activities has grown focusing on supporting foster carers and residential care teams in the knowledge and understanding of the support available from the universities and colleges and how to best signpost this information to those in their care.

**Greenwich** describes (and values) the London and South East London Designated Member of Staff for Looked After Children and Care Leavers Group which has representation from the boroughs of Greenwich, Bexley, Lewisham, Southwark, Wandsworth, Lambeth and Bromley and within which Greenwich strenuously championed the Buttle QM - with a consequent uptake among the colleges in the region. The wider Designated Member of Staff Group South East enables university and college members of staff to review current and new or innovative effective practice when their busy roles and focus on the core work with care leavers and students reduces opportunities to keep up with fresh and innovative information.

It is a highly active forum for generating information share and new work developments between universities, colleges and local authority leaving care and fostering teams. Greenwich, through the DMS group, feeds into the regional National Network for Care Leavers (NNECL), the AccessHE group, and the Kent and Medway Care Leaver Progression Partnership<sup>25</sup> across which dissemination and networking proves invaluable to all, especially people newly in post. This intricate, interwoven set of relationships therefore, comprises universities, many colleges, schools, local

25. The Kent and Medway Care Leaver Progression Partnership: <http://clpp.eastkent.ac.uk/>

authority childrens' services and Virtual Heads services, the local regional NNECL groups and the pan-London AccessHE.

**Newcastle's** Choices Together programme<sup>26</sup> (run by the Raising Aspirations Partnership) is the bespoke collaborative programme aimed at care leavers and delivered together with Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teeside universities and their respective local authorities. Activities take place at the different university campuses over a six-week programme during February and March. Each activity is supported by one or more Designated Member of Staff and Student Ambassadors from the participatory universities, with local authorities promoting and coordinating the Year 10 and Year 11 pupils into the programme.

In 2014 **Northern Ireland** established a Pathways into FE/HE for Looked After and Care Experienced Young People Aged 16-21 Regional Group. The membership of this group consisted of: the Health and Social Care Trusts; the Universities and FE regional Colleges; the (then) relevant Government Departments (Department of Education and Department for Employment & Learning); the Fostering Network<sup>27</sup> ; and a charitable organisation VOYPIC<sup>28</sup> (Voice of Young People in Care).

**Kingston** holds an Annual Forum each year for external and internal stakeholders which is well-attended by local authority staff and staff from other universities. Here, participants discuss current and critical issues such as estrangement, local authorities inspection by OFSTED and sharing good practice. Kingston is actively involved in a number of networks - the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers, Access HE, Aimhigher London South, Linking London, HELOA.

**Strathclyde** is actively involved with the Scotland Care Leavers Forum (West of

Scotland). The Forum, comprising universities and colleges, meets every two months and provides a forum for sharing, discussion, joint training, hearing presentations, exploring issues such as those facing young people with care and asylum/refugee experience. The forum is developing regional monitoring and evaluation procedures and has established a shared webspace.

At a more local level, Strathclyde is one of the founding partners of MCR Pathways a mentoring programme for vulnerable young people in schools in the east end of Glasgow.

The partners are: the university; Glasgow City Council; CELCIS (the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland); and the MCR Foundation. The university accesses the programme to provide mentors for learners and students. The university also provides staff volunteer mentors coordinated by the Widening Access team (who also organise Social Work student marketing support to the programme and undertake coordinating and operational activity). The MCR Foundation has been working alongside five schools for a number of years with a significant impact on their looked after young people: MCR now mentors and works with more than 250 care leavers.

**Liverpool John Moores** Care Leavers team has played an important part in maintaining the operation of the Greater Merseyside Care Leavers into HE collaboration and it continues to share good practice and invite guest speakers for a wider discussion of current and national issues as well as local practice. Liverpool John Moores also actively contributes to the NNECL regional group, NCLASS, another very useful networking resource particularly for sharing practice of outreach work.

In common with other colleagues in the universities Action on Access visited, Liverpool John Moores present and deliver sessions

26. Choices Together programme at: <http://clpp.eastkent.ac.uk/>

27. The Fostering Network: [https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/?gclid=CjwKEAju7qi7BRCvsr3N58GvsTkSjAA3UzLvRrwVdXuoe0cAQC\\_wngrBVhxJ8EUhpWcwfmlmYWifKhcFbjw\\_wcB](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/?gclid=CjwKEAju7qi7BRCvsr3N58GvsTkSjAA3UzLvRrwVdXuoe0cAQC_wngrBVhxJ8EUhpWcwfmlmYWifKhcFbjw_wcB)

28. VOYPIC, voice of young people in care (Northern Ireland): <http://www.voypic.org/>

on work with care experienced students at many relevant conferences and working meetings, such as the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education and National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA).

**Sheffield Hallam's** Looked after Children and Care Leaver Project has as one of its stated roles the sharing of best practice across the local area. The project has a very specific commitment to work closely with Sheffield University and beyond with the area-wide Higher Education Progression Partnership (another continuing longterm commitment building out of the local Aimhigher partnership); with local colleges; local employers and employer organisations; charities; and Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley local authorities.

Care leavers are one of the generic target groups of Sheffield Hallam's main programme the Associate Schools and Colleges Partnership<sup>29</sup>. The whole programme operates as a dispersed but focused access and Widening Participation outreach programme to schools and colleges within a 50 mile radius (the Partnership's definition of 'local' students). The programmes are delivered not just in South Yorkshire but also across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. The Associate Schools and Colleges Partnership network and linkages are so strong that it has created wider, invaluable, informal networking activity between all the partners. Sheffield Hallam is actively involved with both regional NNECL network groups, MCLASS and NCLASS.

**Swansea** has a different context in which to work. Outreach is networked across Wales, including Looked after Children as a discrete target group, within the Reaching Wider Partnership<sup>30</sup> (which is jointly funded by HEFCW and all other regional universities and

colleges, some schools and local authorities). Swansea deliver outreach through the South West Wales Regional Reaching Wider Partnership (SWWRRWP) with a discrete member of staff dedicated to this networked joint programme. The university itself is the lead partner and the SWWRRWP is based in Swansea University. The other partners are the University of Wales Trinity St David, The Open University in Wales, Cole Sir Gar, Neath Port Talbot College Group, Pembrokeshire College, Careers Wales, and local authorities and schools in South West Wales. The ethos of the programme is encouraging wider participation and access to any or all higher education institutions. The Partnership is linked also to the Fostering Group and to the Wales Leaving Care Forum which is particularly useful for dissemination of the Partnership's news, events and interventions.

An unusual and interesting feature at Swansea is that the DMS is based in the university's Money Advice and Support Office. Discussions at regional NASMA (National Association of Student Money Advisers) meetings gave staff from the regional universities the realisation that they were all dealing with and supporting care experienced students - this awareness brought forth a NASMA group with a remit to focus solely on vulnerable students and as a network for shared knowledge, experience, contacts and expertise in supporting looked after young people. As the Quality Mark work developed, this group expanded to involve college financial advisers. At Swansea this practice of locating the DMS in the Money Advice and Support Office is unusual (outside Wales) but proved to be highly effective as it is here, in the Money Advice and Support Office, that many first contacts with care leavers are made. At Swansea, the staff have the knowledge and expertise to deal not just with financial problems but also, if necessary, to refer them on to other student support service colleagues including the careers advice service.

29. The Associate School and College Partnership: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/schoolsand-colleges-liaison-office/activities-and-support-for-teachers-and-advisers/the-associate-schooland-college-partnership>

30. The Reaching Wider Partnership (South West Wales): <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/reachingwider/>

# SUSTAINABILITY

**“I don’t think the QM finishing will make any difference... it’s done its job and it’s well embedded, totally... we got exemplary status...to get that was amazing and hopefully it inspired other universities to get the same as we were getting, a ripple effect I think around everybody.”**

Dr. Stephanie McKendry, Widening Access Manager, Student Experience and Enhancement Services, University of Strathclyde

At the time of research, all the institutions *Action on Access* visited were very positive about the sustainability in their institution of the pre-entry and post-enrolment activity that had been developed to encourage and support care experienced young people and students. We saw many indicators that the processes led by the Buttle Quality Mark are now firmly embedded. Embedded, for instance, in institutional strategies; in Widening Participation and Access Agreements but often also in Accommodation strategies, Finance strategies, Retention strategies, Wellbeing strategies, and Students Union strategies. All the universities had established Designated Members of Staff posts; some in widening participation, recruitment, (finance, at Swansea) or student services teams. The universities all ran bespoke programmes of events and interventions; had bespoke bursaries; are working within external collaborative partnerships; and most had flourishing, ongoing Looked After Children groups or committees. Care experienced students as a specific group are embedded, and their voices heard, in programme activities and in internal groups and institutional procedures.

Despite the optimism caused by policy and practice enshrined in institutional strategies, some concerns were expressed about the medium-long term future as (in common with other kinds of widening participation activities) continuation, support and success was often felt to be to a greater or lesser extent dependent on the individuals in posts – with all the concomitant uncertainties that this might bring. Two of the universities noted concerns around the potential impacts of current and

threatened cuts to students’ financial support, including hardship funds being cut. More positively, the business case for universities with the additional income generation by attracting and retaining (careleavers and care experienced) students had been made in the universities; very clearly offsetting ‘costs’ of bursaries and the staff that support students with the fee revenue they bring in.

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## Views of the Care Leaver Teams

**Greenwich** has presented a business case within the university arguing that in the event that any of the different strands of access, widening participation or hardship funding were to disappear a financial case can always be made for the income generated against the post’s salary and retention of these students remaining in the university. The work of the Care Leaver team has the continuing strong support of senior managers in the institution.

**Kingston** reported that the strategic commitment to this area of work remains strong and that the university has invested more funding since the announcement of the Buttle UK QM finishing. It is a fixed strand of work across the institution and continues to be so. There was no problem in sustaining the work as it is embedded in the Access Agreements and will continue at Kingston. The challenge as described by the Care Leaver team is more about the development of the Care Leaver service and discovering ways to improve and better the collection, organisation and maintenance of data on the care leaver and care experienced student experience.

**Liverpool John Moores** reported that their care leaver work will not diminish. A developed framework remains in place which will allow them to reflect on and improve their practice each year; and they have put the annual Quality Mark fee towards another bursary for care experienced students. The longer term danger for their continued work may lie in university and staff changes – letting the QM slide as key staff move on and as new priority target groups emerge. Embedded strategies and policies are pivotal in safeguarding this important work.

**Newcastle** reported that their work with care leavers is firmly entrenched; woven into the fabric of other institutional funding and programmes which mitigates it being seen as a separate piece of work to be targeted for termination. It will continue. The Vice Chancellor has a strong civic mission, is aware of Looked after Children as a target group, stands firmly behind both widening participation and believes strongly in attending to the needs of looked after children - because it is right to do so.

**Sheffield** stated that the QM gave their work with Looked after Children a huge boost and drive to seek work with new partners as well as giving added value to other networked relationships and activities delivered by partnerships which will sustain the continuation of work with care experienced students. The university has a strong Student Support Framework covering activity from pre-entry to graduation that works in partnership across its teams to ensure students have seamless support; and have a new Student Transition and Progression Team.

Although the QM has finished, **Swansea University's** commitment to this work is strong, the funding remains and is fully expected to continue. Work to ensure care experienced learners are not disadvantaged with regard to

access and success in Welsh higher education is embedded with, and funded by, the wider South West Wales Regional Reaching Wider Partnership and will persist. They regret the passing of the Buttle Quality Mark that has helped to keep the profile of their work high: an important priority.

**“The partnership approach we have developed around Buttle has increased the engagement and accountability of social care, careers and the Virtual School for ensuring good multi-agency working: if we expect FE and HE to do well for our young people we must ensure the support is in place and is holistic.”**

Tony Clifford, Head of Virtual School,  
Stoke-on-Trent

# THE IMPACT OF THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK ON INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR PARTNERSHIPS

**“The Quality Mark was a great starting point for the University - it gave us the impetus to pull things together in a coordinated way. Now our work with care leavers is so embedded across the University that it will continue to develop, even without the Quality mark itself.”**

Gemma Kirkbride, Student Recruitment Manager, Newcastle University

First, we should recognise the impact of the groundbreaking research by Buttle UK which resulted in *By Degrees: Going to University from Care* which brought the attention of the sector – policy makers, funders, and higher education providers – to the inequitable and unjust situation facing care leavers who were, and still are, proportionally extremely underrepresented in higher education. Buttle UK raised this as a national issue that needed to be addressed with urgency. This was followed by the development of a Framework and a Quality Mark, a practical device that institutions could work with to improve both the student numbers and the quality of the care leavers’ journey into and through higher (and later, further) education.

Many HE providers were already aware (pre-Buttle) of this group of disadvantaged young people within the widening participation cohort and recognised them as part of outreach target groups; the continual support from a dedicated Buttle UK staff, the annual monitoring, reporting and action planning offered a systematic approach to institutions by which they could ensure care leavers have improved opportunities and bespoke support to enable access, pre-entry, success and progress, postenrolment, through their student journeys.

A Quality Mark is a powerful tool for evidencing and celebrating the work; instrumental in influencing senior leaders and institutional strategies; in introducing a competitive element with other institutions; and focusing of attention and support on these disadvantaged learners.

Buttle UK’s annual conferences were always an excellent opportunity for those working with this group of vulnerable young people “to share and learn”. The central impact of the QM, however, clearly lies in its effect on the lives and student journeys of the Looked after Children who have benefited from the programmes the QM has underpinned<sup>31</sup>; all of which is documented through the Buttle QM monitoring reports and action plans. Equally, the raising of the issue nationally; the effects of a Quality Mark in establishing a standard for institutional strategies and staff involvement as well as on external partners; the bringing together of institutions and of collaborative partnerships to address the issues; the impact and effect on the journeys of other vulnerable students - these are all important to recognise.

**“As outreach and support were already in place before the launch of the QM it was relatively straightforward for us to reach required standards. Nevertheless, the award has helped to focus our work and bring together more coherently the services which surround care leaver students, including Admissions, Housing, Student Services, Widening Participation team and Student Finance, leading to incremental improvements.”**

Dr Terri Sandison, Director of Lifelong Learning and Staff Development, University of Winchester

31. Between the start and the end of the QM, the proportion of care leavers progressing to university has risen from 1% to 6% (and is climbing) ; although this improvement has currently stalled nationally, the number of care leaver students at the QM-exemplary universities continues to rise).

## Summary of the impact and significance of the Buttle Quality Mark:

- originally and initially provided a sounding board for the use of terminology, for programmes of activities, for effective ways to work with external partners and provided an informed, encouragingly fresh perspective.
- helped initiate closer working with other institutional support services within the institutions, resulting in a better all-round support to students. This support and the internal exchange of information has proved to have changed the attitudes of staff to care experienced students and has improved their knowledge of other vulnerable groups too.
- prompted straightforward changes to practice such as the development of a bespoke page on websites; the suitability and quality of bespoke leaflets; the internal marketing of the care leaver service and of the resources provided by the Care Leaver teams amongst all university staff.
- prompted practitioners working with young people with a care background to establish new or strengthen existing collaborative arrangements and relationships. Local and regional groups of universities and colleges joined with other key players which collectively enabled them to better share and support care leavers. The South East local colleges worked together and achieved the QM partly through the support of the area Designated Member of Staff Group. This endeavour also improved and enhanced wider institutional relationships between universities and with local partners as well as improving the scope of those partnership arrangements.
- encouraged institutional staff enthusiastically to take up the banner of the QM and deliver training, information on practice, and personal support to other institutions. For instance, staff at Kingston worked with three new staff who had been appointed into the same role at King's, Queen Mary's, and the City of London - boosting their understanding and sharing information on practice as they developed their roles within their institutions.
- most universities have lobbied for care experienced students to be an automatic target group for postgraduate awards and have ensured that all their current students with a care background are informed of this opportunity.
- by continually increasing numbers of care leaver students and persistently improving retention figures, Care Leaver teams have been able to present the business argument to senior managers for the financial value of this work not only offsetting the cost of a Care Leaver service but increasing institutional income.
- raised the profile of institutions delivering this work with key supplier stakeholders both in local education authorities and children's services.
- the QM being independently verified, scrutinised and reported through fee and Access Agreement plans has bestowed an authority and given encouragement to staff to get fully onboard with institutional practice, ensuring that it is embedded and monitored for compliance through institutional strategies.

## Examples of Impact at Specific Universities

All the universities visited by *Action on Access* evidenced significant percentage increases year-on-year in the number of care leavers accessing and succeeding in higher education.

All the universities visited said they were exploring the provision of programmes of support for estranged young people, for young adult carers and in some areas for asylum seekers, built on the programmes and interventions they had developed for care leavers. Developments include calling for the institution to identify them as unique groups; making contacts to identify who they are and what they might need from support services; inviting and opening up events and interventions to them, as well as facilitating networking and sharing.

**Strathclyde** decided to put in place a mentoring programme for their care experienced students. In excess of 200 staff volunteered to give up their time and get involved. The initial idea grew into a much bigger project than envisaged, capable of responding to a wider and greater number of vulnerable students. Training will be delivered by university staff that work with care experienced students, by the Who Cares? Trust Scotland and with students involved in the delivery of input on the issues faced by those from a care background. Training on Corporate Parenting responsibilities and other effective practices will be included.

**The Liverpool John Moores** Care Leavers Forum (a university working group which set up and developed the work under the QM) no longer meets but has established very effective links and networks which have facilitated effective dialogue across the university. The Care Leaver team has a development plan that employs

estranged and care experienced students as student advocates delivering roadshows. Recently they put a proposal to their Senior Management Team for work with young adult carers, modelled on their approach to care experienced students.

Both **Newcastle** and **Sheffield Hallam** are building on their expertise in evaluation and improving their ability to track students from first contacts onwards, having adopted and implemented the system provided by HEAT. Sheffield Hallam has employed a short-term member of staff as a dedicated resource on data and evaluation in the Widening Participation team using HEAT to look at impact and evaluation.

**Sheffield Hallam's** Leaving Care team, encouraged by the AGCAS Working with Care Leavers<sup>32</sup> which focused on student employment destinations, persuaded the Careers and Employment team to assign two named careers advisers for bespoke work with care experienced students; and have developed a Year 12 activity with Sheffield University which involves both university careers and student services working closely together.

**“Most usefully (the QM) has enabled, required and developed reflective practice.”**

William Calver, Access and Partnerships Manager, and Designated Member of Staff, University of Greenwich

32. AGCAS Working with Care Leavers; A Good Practice Guide for Careers Professionals: [http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas\\_resources/315-Working-with-Care-Leavers-A-Good-Practice-Guidefor-Careers-Professionals](http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/315-Working-with-Care-Leavers-A-Good-Practice-Guidefor-Careers-Professionals)

**“It was a great catalyst to raise awareness, get us working together and definitely brought different players round the table.”**

Lynne Condell, Student Funds Manager, Liverpool John Moores University

**“The Buttle QM has been absolutely crucial in driving up those standards and encouraging universities and colleges to put those supports in place and raise the profile of widening access for care leavers – even before the new legislation on aftercare and Corporate Parenting in Scotland came into effect, a lot of work had been done and the support had been increased.”**

Ewan Ross, Through Care and After Care Associate, Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland

And a final word from a student:

**“I consider myself to be in a lot better position than a regular student because the support offered by the council has been excellent. I get a full amount student loan and I get grants from the university to help with my financial situation... it turned out really good.”**

Jake, student, Sheffield Hallam University

# RESOURCES

This listing of resources is not comprehensive but focuses largely on England and highlights some of the more useful and informative existing publications, policy documents, organisations and training provision.

## PUBLICATIONS

### ***By Degrees: Going to University from Care (Institute of Education, University of London, 2005)***

The original report which captured the attention of the sector and raised the parlous state of care leaver participation in higher education as a national issue which needed to be addressed urgently.

<http://www.buttleuk.org/research/by-degrees-going-to-university-from-care>

### ***Buttle UK Quality Mark Documents***

<http://www.buttleuk.org/areas-of-focus/quality-mark-for-care-leavers/quality-mark-documents>

### ***The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark: A Practice Guide (Action on Access, 2010)***

At the time of writing the first six higher education institutions had achieved the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Care Leavers. Provides a guide of good practice both for those institutions who wished to apply for the Quality Mark as well as those who had already gained the award.

[http://actiononaccess.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/franbutpdf.pdf](http://actiononaccess.org/wp-content/files_mf/franbutpdf.pdf)

### ***Care Leavers Topic Briefing (Office for Fair Access, 2015)***

This briefing gives a brief overview of the current challenges around access, success and progression for care leavers and how, through their Access Agreements, universities and colleges are working to support students who have previously been in care. It also suggests questions that institutions might wish to consider when developing their work in this area; and highlights the effective support of using evidence-led, focused approaches.

<https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance-and-useful-information/topic-briefings/topic-briefing-care-leavers/>

### ***Good practice on Using Admissions to Bridge the Gap for Care Leavers (Supporting Professional Admissions, 2016)***

Supporting Professional Admissions (SPA) is committed to the care leaver agenda and to supporting higher education admissions to redress the challenges that those coming from care are faced with when applying to higher education. It aims to embed consideration of care leavers into all relevant aspects of its work. During National Care Leavers' Week (November 2014) SPA launched a call for evidence asking the sector for specific good practice examples on how applicants in and from care are supported through the admissions process. Their Care Leavers website page contains their Good Practice Guide as well as numerous university case studies.

<https://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/care-leavers>

### ***Supporting Care Leavers to Achieve in Further Education (Learning and Work Institute, 2015)***

Buttle-sponsored review of the work of their Quality Mark in Further Education produced and published by the Learning and Work Institute (formerly NIACE).

[http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/sites/niace\\_en/files/resources/Supporting\\_Care\\_Leavers\\_in\\_FE\\_Full%20Report\\_November\\_2015.pdf](http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/sites/niace_en/files/resources/Supporting_Care_Leavers_in_FE_Full%20Report_November_2015.pdf)

## Other relevant Learning and Work Institute publications are:

### ***Voices of Care Leavers (Learning and Work Institute, 2013)***

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-resources/life-and-society/voices-care-leavers>

### ***How pathway planning helps care-leavers to learn (Learning and Work Institute, 2014)***

Presents findings from research on how Personal Advisers support care leavers to make choices about education/work with particular focus on the Pathway Planning process.

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-thinking/blog/how-pathway-planning-helps-care-leaverslearn>

### ***Giving Care Leavers more control over their futures (Learning and Work Institute, 2014)***

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-resources/life-and-society/giving-care-leavers-morecontrol-over-their-futures>

### ***UCAS Supporting Care Leavers Toolkit***

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/individual-needs/care-leavers#>

## POLICY DOCUMENTS

### ***Keep on Caring. Supporting Young People from Care to Independence. (HM Government, 2006)***

This government strategy document sets out a vision for the further reform of support for care leavers based on innovation, system reform, and the embedding of corporate parenting responsibility across society.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf)

### ***Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care (Department of Education and Skills, 2006)***

This Green Paper sets out a package of proposals for change included amongst which was the introduction of the Virtual Heads Service and an expansion of fostering provision.

<https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/6781-DfES-CM%20Summary.pdf>

### ***Care Matters: Time for Change (Department for Education and Skills 2007)***

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change>

### ***Care Matters: Time to Deliver for Children in Care (Department for Education and Skills 2008)***

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120106145215/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/dcsf-00279-2008>

Both these documents build on responses to the government's document Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care to frame how policy might improve; to mark a shift from developing policy nationally to delivering change locally; and suggesting that statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations can and should work together locally to offer work experience and employment opportunities to young people from care.

### ***Children and Young Person's Act 2008***

Builds on the duties laid out in the Children Act 1989 introducing a duty for local authorities to provide further assistance to young people who are in care or who have recently left care for education and training, including the requirement to carry out an assessment of their educational and training needs.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents>

### ***Care Leaver Strategy: a cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care (Department for Education, 2013)***

This government strategy also builds on the Children's Act 1989 and stresses the importance of working together across central and local government together with voluntary agencies. It emphasises the need for changes building on the best local practice and the importance of a longterm, sustained approach to supporting care leavers. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/266484/Care\\_Leaver\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf)

### ***Skills Support for Care Leavers (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014)***

This booklet (split into two parts with one section providing information for professionals; the other tailored at care leavers) is a short guide to the many learning resources available to care leavers to gain new skills and open up new opportunities for work. It includes initial information on the support available and useful links to further information.

<http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/58de5a665207be91b6d682d6f67bb251.pdf>

## **ORGANISATIONS**

### ***National Network for the Education of Care Leavers***

The website for practitioners working with Looked after Children features news, events, publications, details of the NNECL annual conference and contains the NNECL National Network for Collaborative Outreach Single Point of Contact service. The NNECL Handbook is available from the website.

<http://www.nnecl.org/>

### ***The Who Cares? Trust***

Delivers the Brighter Futures programme; regular sessions for young people who want to get involved in influencing policy and practice to improve the lives and outcomes of children in care and care leavers; and a Care Advice Line.

<http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/>

Their 'propel' website (the online replacement for their respected Handbook for Care Leavers) can be found at <http://propel.org.uk/>

### ***Care Leavers Foundation***

The organisation extends support, encouragement and financial assistance to care leavers and gives grants to care leavers aged 18-29. The Foundation established and hosts the National Care Leavers Week.

<http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/>

[http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/About\\_NCL\\_Week](http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/About_NCL_Week)

### ***Catch22***

Its wide ranging provision delivers holistic support to Looked after Children and care leavers whilst in care; and once they have left care, to improve their life chances. They also run the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, ensuring that they are at the forefront of best practice.

<http://www.catch-22.org.uk/offers/looked-after-children-and-care-leavers/>

Their publication, Know your rights, know your benefits (2014)

<http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/d3594e3253fd70c10cc775851aad823c.pdf>

### ***CoramVoice***

CoramVoice deliver high quality advice, advocacy and support; seek out the hardest-to-reach and most vulnerable young people; provide training and resources for staff in agencies who will be in direct contact with these young people; campaign to improve and 'fix' the system; provide and share expertise to support and encourage children's service departments to improve practices: and CoramVoice engage young people in all aspects of their work.

<http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/>

### **Rees Foundation**

This organisation offers: a signposting service responding to individual need; unique learning resources including direct training experiences; interactive spaces where people with care experience can share their knowledge and experience, make new connections and learn from one another; and financial support.

<http://www.reesfoundation.org/>

### **Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland**

A multi-agency, collaborative approach whose work touches the lives of Looked after Children and young people and works to break down barriers and forge new paths to change thinking and ways of working.

<https://www.celcis.org/>

Information on the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant appears on the CELCIS website

<https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/spotlight/corporate-parenting/>

## **TRAINING**

### **LASER Level 3 Award in Supporting Young people Leaving Care in Post-16 Education (QCF) (LASER, 2014)**

This qualification was developed from good practice in the Kent and Medway Progression Federation. This qualification will enhance and recognise the skills and knowledge of staff working to support young people leaving care and continuing their education in sixth-forms, further or higher education. The qualification will promote and assess: communication skills within a helping role; knowledge of support frameworks for young people leaving care; regulatory requirements; and understanding of the role of the Designated Member of Staff role within an organisation that is responsible for the support of young people leaving care.

<http://laser-awards.org.uk/content2.asp?id=191>

### **The Who Cares? Trust**

The Trust offers young person-led bespoke training for professionals. The young facilitators involved all have experience of care and are supported by specialist staff at the Trust to design tailor-made workshops and training sessions and then deliver them. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering, the Fostering Network, London South Bank University, Sunderland University, Timebank, and the Prince's Trust have all benefited from this training.

<http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/pages/training-led-by-young-people-in-care.html>

## **CARE LEAVER STATEMENTS** - for these, please see individual university websites.

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