Supporting care experienced students in English higher education: towards a more consistent approach

A report to the Office for Students by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers

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Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank:

- All those who participated in the survey, interviews and focus group
- NNECL regional representatives and trustees who contributed to the desk-based review and gave feedback on the study
- The Become charity for providing access to the Propel website data
- Rachel Wright and Adam Lambert at the OfS for their assistance and guidance throughout.

A note on definitions

Definitions on what constitutes a care leaver or care experienced person are complex and often open to different interpretations. Throughout this report, we have aimed to identify where differential levels of support may already be offered by higher education providers or are recommended for the future. Current key care leaver definitions in England are provided below along with NNECL's preferred definition of care experienced.

Care leaver	The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 amended the Children Act 1989 (c.41) to place a duty on local authorities to assess and meet the needs of young people who have been looked after by a local authority as they move from care into living independently. The responsible local authority is under a duty to assess and meet the care and support needs of eligible and relevant children and young people and to assist former relevant children, in particular in respect of their employment, education and training.
	Eligible child – a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is being looked after.
	Relevant child – a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16, but immediately before that were looked after.
	Former relevant child – a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Local authorities support this group at least until age 25.
Care experienced	This term refers to anyone who has been, or is currently, in care. This care may have been provided in many different settings, including: living with foster carers; living in a residential children's home; being looked after at home under a supervision order; living with friends or relatives in kinship care.

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Executive summary

Purpose

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) was commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS) in late October 2020 to undertake a short feasibility study on the potential development of a more consistent offer for care experienced students. The study focuses on the support offered by higher education providers in England across the areas of:

- Admissions and academic requirements
- Information, advice and guidance
- Pastoral support
- Financial support
- Accommodation.

The required output was a report to the OfS:

- Mapping out the current environment with regard to existing support by universities and colleges for care experienced students
- Setting out options for how a more consistent offer might be developed
- Informing the shape and scope of a second phase of work.

Access to higher education is much lower for people who have been in care. Latest widening participation data show that in 2018-19 only 13 per cent of pupils who were looked after continuously for 12 months or more entered higher education, compared to 43 per cent of all other pupils.[1] Care experienced students have often overcome significant barriers and challenges, and many are more mature entrants to higher education. Their education may have been disrupted, often leading to lower attainment, and many suffer from low self-esteem. The quality of support and guidance they receive may be variable and they may often feel uncertain about their options to progress on to higher education. The provision of a more consistent offer from universities and colleges may assist care experienced people both in making the decision to enter higher education and by supporting their progression and success.

Method

We used a mixed-methods approach to undertake the feasibility study, drawing on our regional and local networks of practitioners, as well as contacts within other cognate organisations, local authorities and Uni Connect partnerships.[2]

Our methodology comprised: a desk-based review of existing practice and research findings; an online survey of higher education providers; semi-structured interviews with a sample of higher education providers, senior leaders, experts, and representatives from other key organisations; and a focus group with staff from five higher education providers in the North West region to test our emerging findings.

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[1] See https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education

[2] For more information on Uni Connect, see https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/

This multi-layered approach was designed to navigate the complex issues which needed to be considered in seeking to identify the potential components of a consistent offer, given:

- The diversity of providers in the English higher education sector
- The variation in numbers of care experienced students within individual universities and colleges and the resources available to support them at an institutional level
- The fact that some elements of support might best be delivered by individual providers while others were already, or might potentially be, offered on a collaborative basis at a local level
- The potential costs, risks, barriers, and opportunities associated with developing a more consistent offer.

Our research instruments were structured to reflect the key areas of activity which the OfS had identified in the project specification, namely: information, advice, and guidance (IAG); admissions and the academic offer; financial support; pastoral support; and accommodation. We also explored whether a minimum level of bursary should be included in the baseline and the place of staff training as a potential requirement. Survey respondents and interviewees were asked about the benefits and challenges in developing a more consistent offer and for their views on taking this work forward into a second, pilot phase.

In relation to admissions, we included consideration of the commitment by Scottish higher education providers to guarantee care experienced applicants an undergraduate offer if they meet the minimum entry requirements for their course and the extent to which this might be supported by English institutions.

Key findings

Drawing on the analysis of survey responses, interviews, and desk-based research, we identified some elements of consensus emerging around desirable components of a more consistent offer:

- **IAG**: an accessible webpage with consistent information and links to it from other key pages; a named contact who provides proactive support and advice once an applicant ticks the UCAS box[3] or subsequently identifies as care experienced; the potential for Uni Connect partnerships to provide high quality, accessible and impartial advice to potential applicants and to co-ordinate targeted outreach.

- **Admissions**: the importance of taking a rounded view of applicants, with contextualised offers made, where appropriate; ensuring a smooth transition to HE, with opportunities for early induction and welcome events.

- **Finance**: providing access to some additional funding support, whether this is a specific bursary or priority access to funding for all disadvantaged students; advice on budgeting and managing finances; structuring the timing of payments to reflect times of greatest need (including at the beginning of the academic year and a late summer payment); providing additional funding support for study visits and enrichment activities; offering paid employment as a student ambassador; providing support for graduation costs.

- **Pastoral**: providing a designated contact throughout the student lifecycle; giving priority access to institutional support services including well-being/mental health provision; opportunities for

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[3] The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application form includes a box which care leaver applicants are encouraged to tick.

mentoring or peer support; enhanced careers guidance which continues for a period of time after graduation.

- **Accommodation**: year-round accommodation provided by institutions with their own residences; other universities and colleges to provide support in finding suitable accommodation; ensuring, as far as possible, that individual student needs are taken into account when sourcing accommodation; practical assistance with moving; providing emergency accommodation.

Further consultation as part of any phase 2 pilots would be needed around the issue of a possible minimum bursary level. While the majority of our respondents and interviewees supported the concept, concerns about affordability and what may be an appropriate level of support need to be explored in more detail. Several providers also expressed concerns about higher education potentially making up a local authority deficit. The recently-announced Care Review in England[4] may lead to changes in local authority support which would need to be taken into account.

There is a high level of support for training to be provided for staff in a variety of roles within universities and colleges. This could be developed further in phase 2 with a strand of work related to the development of some central online training resources and a repository of templates and materials for adaptation by providers. There is also a potential role here for those institutions with already high levels of expertise to share their knowledge and resources for the benefit of the wider sector. Mutual training and support between higher education providers and local authorities should also be further explored.

Any changes relating to admissions should be taken forward in the context of the various reviews already announced or underway. These include the paused OfS review[5], the current Department for Education consultation[6] and work by UCAS[7] to explore possible models of post-qualification admissions. The Universities UK (UUK) *Fair Admissions Review*[8] also reported in late 2020 and its report includes pertinent recommendations relating to contextual admissions and the guarantee of places to care experienced applicants. We understand that further work on these recommendations is to be taken forward via stakeholder consultation, led by UUK.

Conclusions

The feasibility study has confirmed that many higher education providers already offer a broad range of support options for care leavers and care experienced students. Despite variations often related to resources and/or the numbers of such students within individual providers, there is evidence of strong commitment to move towards a more consistent local offer. This does, however, require further detailed development and trialling before making any elements of support part of a guarantee to care experienced applicants and students.

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[4] See https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care

[5] See https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/consultation-on-the-higher-education-admissions-system-in-england/

[6] See https://consult.education.gov.uk/he-access-and-admissions/higher-education-admissions-reform/supporting_documents/PQA%20Consultation%20Document.pdf

[7] See https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/ucas-maps-reforms-higher-education-admissions

[8] See https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2020/uuk-fair-admissions-review.pdf

Recommendations

Many suggestions have been proposed for taking forward this work into phase 2. Taking account of these, and our own analysis of the issues, we would propose the following recommendations:

1. Phase 2 should involve several networks or consortia of higher education providers in taking forward further detailed work on a more consistent offer. These could operate at local, regional, or national levels. What would be important would be for consortia to involve a range of different types of providers at various stages in their support for care experienced students. Lead institutions should have an extensive track record of collaboration and expertise in working with care experienced students. Other partners in consortia might include local authorities and virtual schools[9], relevant sector bodies and organisations working directly with care experienced students and looked after children. In relation to local authorities and virtual schools, consortia might particularly wish to explore the potential for more consistent collaboration on outreach to care experienced applicants and carers, staff training and sharing of information.

2. Each pilot should also build in direct input from care experienced students and applicants to inform and shape its work.

3. Further consideration and development of national training and other resources should be considered. This could be the subject of a separate, but linked, project or an embedded element within each pilot.

4. Uni Connect partnerships could be key partners in disseminating high quality, accessible and consistent information about support for care experienced students and in co-ordinating the delivery of some targeted outreach activities.

5. Further consideration of admissions issues, including the possibility of guaranteeing places to care experienced applicants, should be taken forward in the context of the UUK *Fair Admissions Review* and other ongoing consultations as highlighted above.

6. Further consideration is needed on any move towards a minimum bursary entitlement to be given by HE providers. This should include exploration of a possible role for Student Finance England in centralised administration of such funding.

7. Phase 2 should ideally be a multi-year funded initiative to enable effective monitoring and evaluation over at least two to three academic years. Pilots would also benefit from having a small, national co-ordination team to assist with this aspect.

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[9] A virtual school acts as a local authority champion to bring about improvements in the education and outcomes of Looked after Children (LAC) and Young Care Leavers (YCL) and to promote their educational achievement in line with local authorities' statutory duty under the Children Act 1989.

1: Context for the study

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) was commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS) in late October 2020 to undertake a short feasibility study on the potential development of a more consistent local offer for care experienced students. The study focuses on the support offered by higher education providers in England across the areas of:

- Admissions and academic requirements
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The required output was a report to the OfS:

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Access to higher education is much lower for people who have been in care. Latest widening participation data show that in 2018-19 only 13 per cent of pupils who were looked after continuously for 12 months or more entered higher education, compared to 43 per cent of all other pupils.[10] Care experienced students have often overcome significant barriers and challenges, and many are more mature entrants to higher education. Their education may have been disrupted, often leading to lower attainment, and many suffer from low self-esteem. The quality of support and guidance they receive may be variable and they may often feel uncertain about their options to progress on to higher education. The provision of a more consistent offer from universities and colleges may assist care experienced people both in making the decision to enter higher education and by supporting their progression and success.

The OfS has previously noted variable commitments for this student group in providers' access and participation plans (APPs). Its analysis of APPs for the period 2020/21 to 2024/25 has highlighted that targets for care leavers were more heavily weighted towards access, which the OfS saw as 'reflecting the early stage of work with this group in many universities and colleges, and the imperative to make initial progress by improving access rather than student success'.[11] Out of a total of 171 providers included in the analysis, 33 had set access targets for care leavers, 13 had set success targets, and three had included progression targets.

Many higher education providers do, however, already offer a wide range of support for care experienced applicants and students. One source of information for this is the Propel website[12], hosted by the Become charity, which provides an opportunity for universities and colleges to set out the details of their offer for care experienced students. Table 1 shows the proportions of participating institutions in England providing support across the key fields within the website.

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[10] See https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education

[11] See *Transforming opportunity in higher education: An analysis of 2020-21 to 2024-25 access and participation plans,* OfS 2020.06, Para 144b.

[12] See https://propel.org.uk/uk/support/

Table 1: Support provided by English higher education providers on Propel

Support provided	/343 institutions
Careers advice and support after graduation	238 (69%)
Pre-application help	232 (68%)
Access to additional funding	231 (67%)
Financial advice	229 (67%)
A named contact for care leavers	228 (67%)
Personal guidance for transition into higher education	199 (58%)
Outreach session or activities	181 (53%)
Specific funding for care leavers	155 (45%)
A dedicated web page	139 (41%)
Help with finding somewhere to live	137 (40%)
365 days a year accommodation	110 (32%)
Notes: Data from Propel website as at 2 December 2020. Percentages rounded, as appropriate.	

As can be seen, the most popular areas of support, with over two-thirds of providers offering these services, are:

- Careers advice and post-graduation support
- Pre-application help
- Access to additional funding
- Financial advice
- A named contact.

As well as their own individual offers of support, many universities and colleges are often engaged in collaborative work particularly around outreach to this group of potential applicants. Some of this is co-ordinated via Uni Connect partnerships, although not all partnerships offer targeted guidance and activities for this group. Other collaboration is via local or regional initiatives and groups. Some indicative examples of these types of collaborative activity are summarised below:

- Collaborative events with virtual schools setting out post-16 options for a range of ages from year 7 upwards
- Outreach with foster carers and local authority staff to explain the higher education offer
- Study skills videos and online workbooks
- Joint summer school activities
- Brochures detailing the support for care experienced students across all institutions within a local or regional area
- Established networks of higher education providers, local authorities, and virtual schools such as the Greater Manchester Care Experienced Network and the Care Leaver Progression Partnership in Kent and Medway which jointly provide many of the activities described above.

The short timescale for our work has meant we have not been able to consult directly with care experienced students or applicants. To mitigate this, we have reviewed some recent research reports which include data from care experienced students on the support they have received from higher education providers and

what they have found of most value. A 2020 report commissioned by the Unite Foundation[13] highlighted the following points as key examples of what works for these students:

- Having an expansive classification of 'care leaver' or 'estranged student' so that financial support can be targeted, and a broader range of support is available to a wider number of students
- Access to a consistent, named, knowledgeable, 'single point of contact' who will advocate on behalf of students both internally and externally
- Support, which is holistic, relational, and characterised by knowledge of the support needs of care experienced/estranged students is regarded by students as crucial to enabling their on-going retention and success
- Support strategies which take a student lifecycle approach, allow for support to be consistent from pre to post-entry, minimise students' fears about their future, and enable the transition to postgraduate employment or further study
- Extending personal support networks by facilitating relationships within the institution to create safety nets to help reduce the negative emotional impact of relationship breakdown.

The first report of the *Pathways to University from Care[14]* project at the University of Sheffield draws on the views of 234 care experienced students and sets out 15 key recommendations for universities to improve their support for this group of students (Table 2).

Table 2: Recommendations from Pathways to Universities from Care, Report 1

Define who is considered a 'care leaver'	Offer training to Local Authorities, Personal Advisers, schools and colleges	Introduce alcohol-free accommodation options
Provide contextual admissions, where appropriate	Run pre-entry summer schools and homework clubs	Offer affordable 365-day accommodation
Have a designated, named contact	Offer support on arrival day	Train all student-facing staff
Be clear about the nature of 'support' on offer	Provide welcome packs for students in their accommodation	Fast track mental health support
Offer a care leaver bursary	Introduce early registration	Boost support for final year students

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[13] Positive Impact? What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for university students with a background of care or family estrangement?, 2020, A report to the Unite Foundation by: Jacqueline Stevenson, Zoe Baker, Neil Harrison, Becca Bland, Stella Jones-Devitt, Alan Donnelly, Nathaniel Pickering and Liz Austen. Supported by the Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research (STEER) project team at Sheffield Hallam University: Carolyn Fearn, Caroline Heaton and Louise Ward.

[14] K Ellis, C Johnston (2019) *Pathways to University from Care: Findings Report One*. DOI: 10.15131/shef.data.9578930

2: Method

We used a mixed-methods approach to undertake the feasibility study, drawing on our regional and local networks of practitioners, as well as contacts within other cognate organisations, local authorities and Uni Connect partnerships.

The main phases of our methodology comprised:

- A scoping phase, involving initial discussions with the OfS to confirm the key research questions and approach
- Desk-based review to map existing practice, networks, and collaborations
- A focused online survey of higher education providers
- Semi-structured interviews with a sample of 25 higher education providers, senior leaders, experts, and representatives from other key stakeholder organisations (including local authorities, Uni Connect partnerships and charities providing support to care experienced students)
- A focus group with staff from five higher education providers in the North West region to test our emerging findings.

This multi-layered approach was designed to navigate the complex issues which needed to be considered in seeking to identify the potential components of a consistent offer, given:

- The diversity of providers in the English higher education sector
- The variation in numbers of care experienced students within individual universities and colleges and the resources available to support them at an institutional level
- The fact that some elements of support might best be delivered by individual institutions while others were already, or might potentially be, offered on a collaborative basis at a local level
- The potential costs, risks, barriers, and opportunities associated with developing a consistent baseline.

Our research instruments were structured to reflect the key areas of activity which the OfS had identified in the project specification, namely: information, advice, and guidance (IAG); admissions and the academic offer; financial support; pastoral support; and accommodation. We also explored whether a minimum level of bursary should be included in the baseline and the place of staff training as a potential requirement. Survey respondents and interviewees were asked about the benefits and challenges in developing a more consistent offer and for their views on taking this work forward into a second, pilot phase.

In relation to admissions, we included consideration of the Scottish higher education providers' commitment to guarantee care experienced applicants an undergraduate offer if they meet the minimum entry requirements for their course and the extent to which this might be supported by English higher education providers.
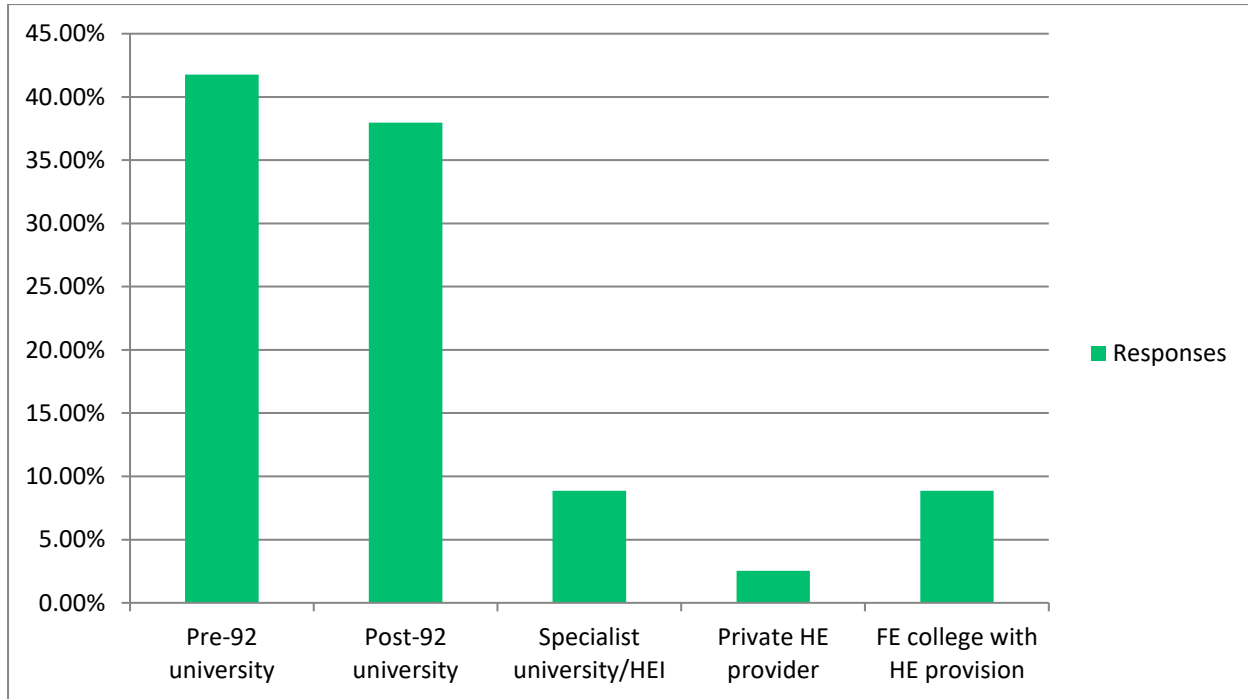
3: Analysis of findings

In this section, we analyse the findings from our online survey and interviews.

3.1 Type of institution

The survey received 81 responses from a range of different institutional types (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: What type of institution do you work in?

While there were some variations in responses according to institutional type, there was broad consistency within and between institutional types across many areas. Table 3 indicates those areas where particular types of respondent were more or less supportive of the inclusion of certain elements in a more consistent offer. Given the relatively small numbers involved, these variations are not seen as statistically significant.

**Table 3: Variations in responses by institutional type**

Institution	More supportive	Less supportive
Pre-92 university	Targeted outreach Offer confirmed if near miss Signposted to other courses if grades not met Mentoring	
Post-92 university	Targeted outreach Help with accommodation deposits	Contextual admissions Subsidised accommodation
Specialist university/higher education institution	Year-round accommodation Free accommodation	Named contact Guaranteed place if grades met Specific bursary Funding to support study visits, placements etc. Dedicated contact
Private higher education provider[15]	Contextual admissions Offer confirmed if near miss Signposted to other courses if grades not met Starter pack Study skills Graduation support IT & technical support	Named contact Dedicated webpage Specific bursary Dedicated contact
FE college with higher education provision	Targeted outreach Contextual admissions Funding to support study visits, placements Dedicated contact Mentoring Starter pack Graduation support IT & technical support	Guaranteed place if grades met Specific bursary Year-round accommodation Subsidised accommodation Minimum bursary level.

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[15] Defined by the Office for Students as 'a provider designated for student support by the Secretary of State and regulated by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2018-19 (sometimes referred to as an 'alternative provider').'

3.2 Respondents' role

The majority of respondents were designated contacts for care experienced students within their institution. Other respondents included senior managers with responsibility for this area, members of senior leadership teams and a small number of other staff mainly involved in widening participation and student support.

Figure 2: What is your role within your institution?
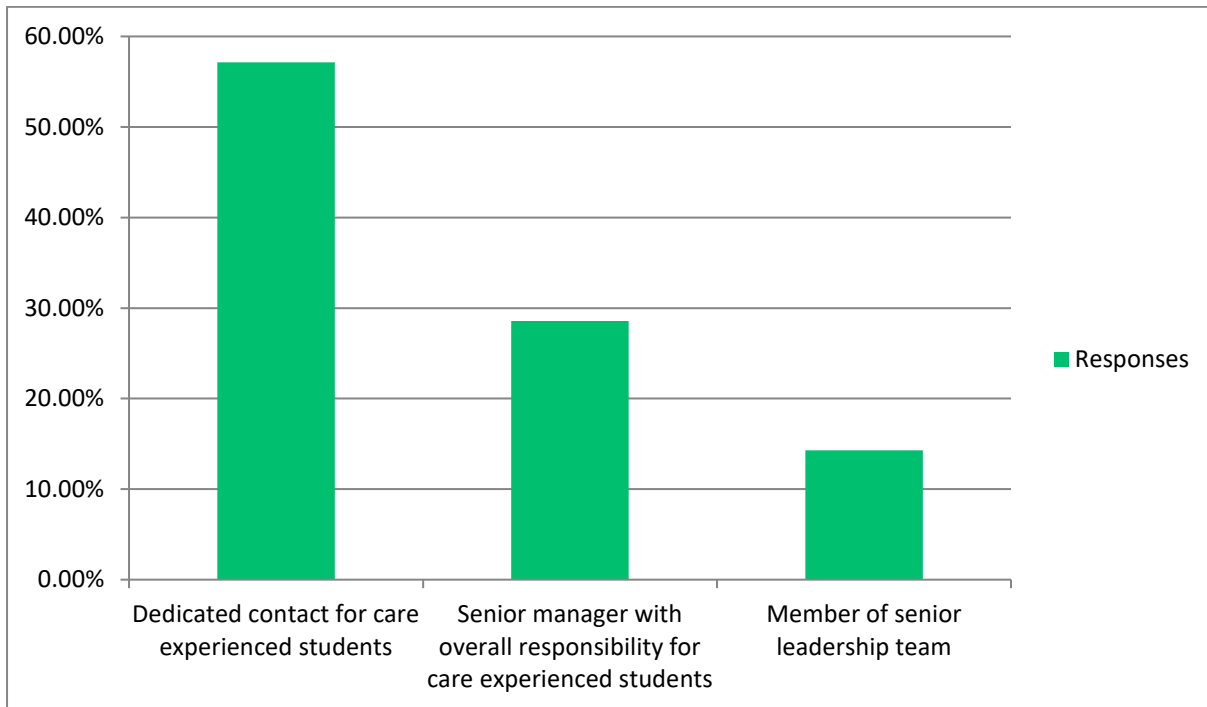
Cross-tabulation of responses by type of survey respondent showed that views were broadly consistent across most areas. Table 4 indicates those areas where particular types of respondent were more or less supportive of the inclusion of certain elements in a more consistent offer. As mentioned above in relation to Table 3, these variations are not seen to be statistically significant given the relatively small numbers of respondents involved.

Table 4: Variations by type of respondent

Type of respondent	*More supportive*	*Less supportive*
Senior leadership team	Contextual admissions IT equipment/technical support Year-round accommodation Free accommodation Subsidised accommodation Help with accommodation deposits	Minimum level of financial bursary

Type of respondent	More supportive	Less supportive
Senior manager	Guaranteed place if grades met Study skills support Subsidised accommodation	
Practitioner	Mentoring Help with accommodation deposits	

3.3 Regional areas

Respondents were drawn from universities and colleges across the English regions, with the highest levels of response from the North West, Greater London, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the South East (see Figure 3).
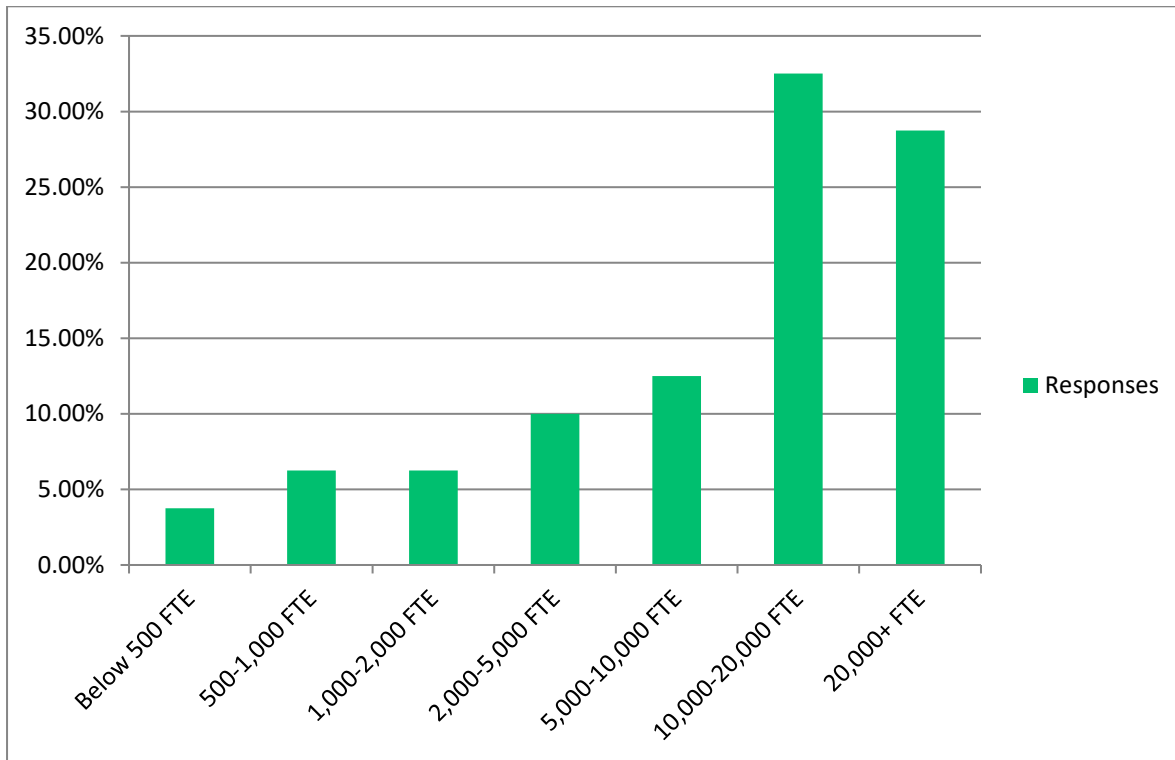
Figure 3: In which English region is your institution based?
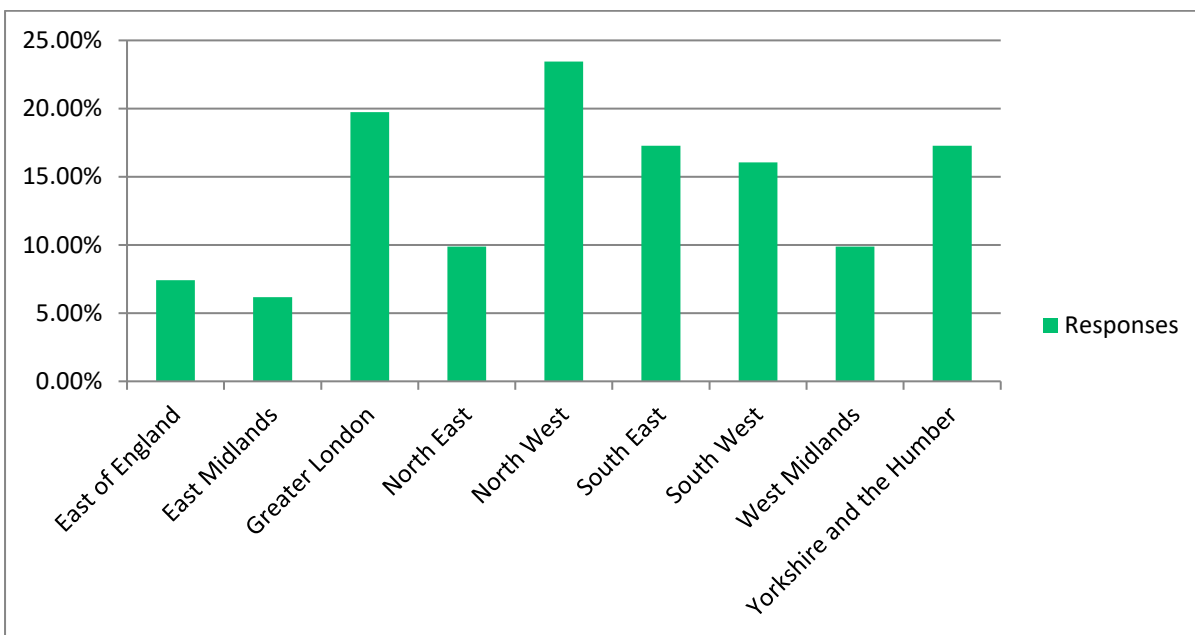
3.4 Size of institution

Responses came from different sizes of institution, with the majority coming from those with more than 10,000 full-time equivalent undergraduate student numbers (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: What is the size of your institution in higher education undergraduate student FTE numbers?

3.5 Numbers of care leaver and care experienced students

The numbers of care leaver and care experienced students per institution varied considerably, but the majority had below 60 students. Table 5 shows the numbers of care leaver and care experienced students per institution within particular ranges of student numbers.

Table 5: Numbers of students per institution

Headcount student number ranges per institution	No. of responses re. care leaver student numbers (67 responses)	No. of responses re. care experienced student numbers (37 responses)
0-5	8	10
6-10	7	6
11-20	5	5
21-30	13	2
31-40	7	-
41-50	6	1
51-60	5	-
61-70	4	4
71-80	4	1
81-90	-	1
91-100	3	1
101-110	2	1
111-120	-	-
121-130	-	1
131-140	1	1

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Headcount student number ranges per institution	No. of responses re. care leaver student numbers (67 responses)	No. of responses re. care experienced student numbers (37 responses)
141-150	-	1
151-160	1	1
200 and above	1	1

In the main body of the survey, we asked respondents to highlight which aspects of support they provided to care leavers and/or all care experienced students; which of these might form part of a more consistent offer; and, where relevant, which were provided collaboratively with other organisations such as Uni Connect, local authorities or with other local/regional higher education providers.

In each of the following sections, we present the quantitative findings and provide a summary of the qualitative comments made by survey respondents and interviewees.

3.5 Information, advice and guidance

Table 6: Information, advice and guidance support (79 answered, 2 skipped)

	Provided for care leavers	Provided for all care experienced students	Might form part of a consistent baseline offer	Where relevant, provided collaboratively	Total respondents per option
Dedicated webpage signposting support available	52	50	56	15	76
Named contact to support through the admissions process	48	48	55	9	78
Applicants who tick the UCAS care leaver box are contacted for targeted advice and support	53	43	54	4	76
Targeted outreach activities	50	37	45	29	78

Comments from survey respondents

Several respondents provided further details of targeted outreach activities, some of which were being provided collaboratively with local authorities, virtual schools, other local schools/colleges, Uni Connect partnerships or other agencies. Examples included bespoke sessions and campus-visit days (including ad hoc visits in some cases), meetings with the named contact (virtually or face-to-face), study support, help with the application process, advocacy with services, access to care-experienced mentors, foster family outreach

with looked after children of statutory school age, and CPD for key influencers of care experienced young people (including foster carers, children's home staff and leaving care advisors).

Two respondents mentioned the Progression Module Light, a Uni Connect online course designed specifically for students in further education (FE) colleges and sixth forms, which helps with preparation for higher education and employment. One of these respondents commented that this would be difficult to reproduce on an individual basis due to resource and team capacity.

The importance of a designated point of contact to work with students, pre-arrival, throughout their studies and on succession planning was highlighted in several comments. Other support provided by universities and colleges included priority referrals to key services such as welfare/counselling, personal support with budgeting, social activities, funding for campus visits, special induction and transition events and access to peer mentoring/buddying, if wanted.

The School of Education at one university is working with the National Association of Virtual School Heads to provide a stand-alone Masters' level module, 'The Education of Care experienced Children', from 2021. This module will count towards the institution's full MA Professional Practice course and will be a flexible part-time programme for professionals interested in the education of care experienced children.

Comments from interviewees

Comments from interviewees were broadly consistent with those of survey respondents. The importance of a clear, accessible webpage with consistent information was emphasised by many interviewees (see Table 6). Guidance on the content to be included on this webpage could usefully form part of the baseline. The page also needed to be linked to other key webpages which applicants and students were likely to visit, such as information on finance or accommodation.

Alignment with the information and advice provided by local authorities, schools and colleges was also seen as important. Several interviewees mentioned that many foster carers often had little or no experience of current higher education and a more consistent offer would help to clarify what students could expect. Making sure the language used in all communications was inclusive and enabling was highlighted by some interviewees.

3.6 Admissions and the academic offer

Table 7: Admissions and the academic offer (70 answered, 11 skipped)

	Provided for care leavers	Provided for all care experienced students	Might form part of a consistent baseline offer	Total respondents per option
Contextualised admissions	44	32	46	65
Offer confirmed if near miss on grades	22	13	44	51
Applicant signposted to other similar courses if grades not met	25	26	45	59
A guaranteed place if minimum course requirements are met	16	12	37	42

Comments from survey respondents

Comments in this section illustrated some differences between types of institutions and the offers they would typically make (see Table 7). The numbers of care leaver/care experienced applicants and the number of spaces on particular programmes may also affect practice in this area.

Care leavers were seen as a priority group for special consideration by many respondents. At one institution, care leavers were prioritised for places if minimum course requirements were met, but a place was not guaranteed. Similarly, another offered a guarantee of an interview (and pre-interview support) and an offer rather than a guaranteed place. Two respondents commented that their institutional offer was inclusive and special consideration was, therefore, not necessary. One respondent from a specialist institution highlighted that the requirement for interviews and auditions was an essential part of its process.

Near miss confirmation and signposting to similar courses were mentioned by several as options their institution would typically look at for widening participation applicants or, in some cases, all applicants. Support for care leavers entering via Clearing was mentioned by a couple of respondents.

Contextual admissions were offered by some providers. Examples of practice in this area included:

- Offers at one grade lower than standard entry
- A new scheme to provide advantageous grade offers upon completion of a pre-entry MOOC for all widening participation applicants
- Taking care experience into consideration with borderline applications.

Two respondents highlighted the relevance of Access courses and year 0 provision in supporting progression into higher education.

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Comments from interviewees

There was some support for contextual admissions from interviewees, although many acknowledged that this was not always appropriate, particularly when institutions already had flexible entry requirements. One interviewee highlighted the importance of factoring in GCSE performance in any contextual process. Several viewed the Scottish approach of guaranteeing a place if grades were met as attractive, but not always realistic when some courses had external professional body requirements to be met alongside academic achievements. Not setting up students to fail and support with transition were highlighted as important aspects by several interviewees.

3.7 Financial support

Table 8: Financial support (79 answered, 2 skipped)

	Provided for care leavers	**Provided for all care experienced students**	**Might form part of a consistent baseline offer**	**Total respondents per option**
Access to bursary/financial support alongside other target groups	58	46	47	77
Specific financial bursary/support	58	23	43	75
Additional financial support is provided to enable participation in study visits, work placements, study abroad, etc.	33	18	40	55

Comments from survey respondents

Many respondents offer a specific care leaver bursary and priority access to other hardship funds provided for all widening participation students. One respondent commented that, while a baseline offer might include the requirement for all higher education providers to offer a care leaver bursary, it would be difficult to place a precise figure on this as much would depend on institutional resources. Another mentioned provision of Unite Foundation scholarships[16] and bursaries for students who were currently living, or had previously lived, in supported accommodation or a Foyer Federation. (See Table 8.)

The situation for care experienced students was generally more bespoke and dependent on their individual financial circumstances and assessment against other widening participation criteria. One respondent mentioned an institutional decision to move to smaller awards for greater numbers of students.

Some institutions provided funding or other support upon arrival such as welcome packs, laptops, transport for moving into halls and accommodation deposits.

Financial support for study-related costs included bursaries for study abroad, work experience, summer enhancement activities (e.g. conference attendance) and foundation years. One respondent mentioned an

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[16] See Unite Foundation Scholarship = Unite Foundation (thisisusatuni.org)

Opportunity Fund where students could apply for up to £150 to fund an activity linked to their development. Some offered guaranteed paid employment as student ambassadors or priority for internships.

Several respondents provided further details on financial support for graduation (costs of gowns, photos etc.). In some cases, providers also made a post-graduation payment to support the transition to independent living and employment.

Comments from interviewees

Comments from interviewees echoed many of the points raised in the survey responses. All felt that greater clarity around the finances available would be a benefit for care experienced applicants and make it easier for them to decide to enter higher education. It would also help to ensure that choice of course or institution was less influenced by financial concerns. Most respondents supported the provision of a specific bursary for care experienced students, although definitional issues around eligibility were raised by some interviewees. Some were concerned at the potential overlaps and gaps between local authorities and higher education in providing financial assistance. Others emphasised that financial support was not always the biggest barrier to entering higher education.

3.8 Pastoral support

Table 9: Pastoral support (79 answered, 2 skipped)

	Provided for care leavers	Provided for all care experienced students	Might form part of a consistent baseline offer	Where relevant, provided collaboratively	Total respondents per option
Access to a dedicated contact person throughout course	55	53	50	3	77
Support from a mentor	26	29	42	6	61
Starter pack or voucher for household items	24	16	39	3	49
Study skills support package	24	27	47	4	62
Graduation support pack	36	22	49	4	64
Provision of IT equipment/ technology support	22	17	39	4	52

Comments from survey respondents

Access to a dedicated contact was mentioned by several respondents as central to the pastoral support offer (see Table 9). This person could provide effective signposting to other existing support such as study skills and mentoring opportunities. Several respondents mentioned that care experienced students were given priority access to their institution's pastoral support services, including mental health support and support for students with specific learning difficulties, physical disabilities, medical conditions, and autism. One institution provided a coaching tutor throughout the course. Another mentioned contact within department/faculty learning and teaching teams to ensure a suitable academic advisor was allocated.

While the provision of additional pastoral support was generally supported by respondents, some mentioned that uptake could be low. One respondent commented that it was important not to overcommit resources to provide support where there may be no uptake. Another commented that many of these elements were often the responsibility of the local authority and the institution would work with students and their local authority to identify gaps in provision and allocate support appropriately.

Others felt that pastoral support for care experienced students should be personalised and responsive to their individual circumstances. One respondent highlighted the importance of avoiding 'othering' by creating channels of support separate from the wider student population. So, for example, a study skills support offer package should be available to all students, although the dedicated contact may help to ensure uptake by care experienced students as needed. This same respondent, who worked for a charity, commented that mentors were found to be effective across a wide range of student groups but felt it was important to consider the value of an academic or discipline mentor alongside a status or role model one. The offer of a 'pick and mix' welcome pack was provided by this charity to enable choice and be respectful of different stages of entry (with many first years being older and/or with plenty of independent living items already).

One respondent mentioned providing a care experienced student support network where students could meet each other and support staff in an informal social setting. Care experienced students also received a newsletter for independent students which highlights opportunities, support and resources which may be of particular interest to this group. Another respondent highlighted its City Cares programme which provides 1-2-1 meetings, social events, and career/mentor support via an external charity partner. Using student ambassadors as mentors was mentioned by one respondent.

Several responses reiterated the provision of welcome/starter packs, induction/meet and greet, budgeting and graduation support similar to the comments made under financial support. One respondent mentioned the provision of a named, dedicated contact in the careers service to assist with progression. Other respondents highlighted the importance of dedicated and consistent careers support right through a student's university experience and, in one case, for three years after graduation. Housing fragility and the requirement to be self-sufficient were mentioned by one respondent as major barriers to longer-term outcomes.

In relation to IT provision, several respondents saw care experienced students as priority groups. One commented that the coronavirus pandemic had heightened the importance of prioritising these students. Another stated that any care leaver or care experienced student who was experiencing digital poverty as a result of the pandemic was fast tracked for support both on campus and in residential settings. Others commented that IT equipment was needs-assessed and not guaranteed, although one remarked that the majority of care experienced students would be eligible under these criteria.

One respondent commented that the baseline offer could comprise an evidence-based support plan based on the best examples of pathway plans, which mapped student needs against the institutional offer, with in-built monitoring and evaluation of progress and outcomes. Another highlighted their institution's interest in introducing new support options and being challenged to improve.

Comments from interviewees

The importance of relationship-building and the proactive support of a designated contact were seen as vital aspects of the pastoral support offer. The designated contact, or team, also needed to have the resources and capacity to deliver. Many interviewees highlighted that care experienced students should not have to make multiple disclosures to access the support they needed. A person-centred approach, tailored to the individual needs of each student, was favoured by many. This should also take account of intersectionality issues. Pastoral support was seen to be as important as the financial offer by many interviewees.

3.9 Accommodation support

Table 10: Accommodation support

	Provided for care leavers	Provided for all care experienced students	Might form part of a consistent baseline offer	Where relevant, provided collaboratively	Total respondents per option
Year-round accommodation	51	28	43	6	70
Subsidised accommodation	11	7	30	2	36
Free accommodation	4	1	15	5	22
Support with accommodation deposits or similar	25	20	39	6	56

Comments from survey respondents

Comments about accommodation support varied from those respondents whose institutions were able to offer free or subsidised accommodation through to those in institutions with no dedicated accommodation to provide. (See Table 10.) Some respondents said that their institution guaranteed year-round accommodation in university-managed residences, and one mentioned the Unite Foundation scholarship offer. Several of those without their own accommodation did, however, provide support in securing appropriate private accommodation. Two respondents commented that their institutions did not provide accommodation support: one offered totally online learning; the other was a centre geared to widening participation within its local area.

Subsidies included waiving of deposits for university accommodation by some providers or, in one case, taking an initial rental payment instead of a deposit (and adjusting subsequent rental payments). In another

example, while the institution did not waive deposits, they could be deferred until a student's maintenance loan came through. Several respondents said help with deposits was reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Another mentioned fully funded hall bursaries being made available to care experienced students due to the pandemic. Other options mentioned included: offering free accommodation during vacation periods; providing short flexible contracts to avoid students having to 'sofa-surf' between private rental contracts; and free emergency accommodation where a care leaver or other student might experience sudden homelessness for a time limited period. Priority room allocation and reservation was mentioned by one respondent for care leaver applicants who applied through Clearing. The same institution was currently piloting a 'Supported rent scheme' where care experienced students (alongside estranged students, student carers, refugees and asylum seekers) would have the opportunity for a 50% reduction in accommodation costs.

Rent guarantor schemes were considered to be an important, or essential, factor by several respondents. Some universities and colleges provided guarantor schemes for free, while others made a charge for this service. One respondent supporting a free rent guarantor service highlighted the importance of also providing a relationship-based support package that incorporated budgeting. Several others also mentioned support from a money advice team or similar to help with budgeting and paying bills. Another emphasised the importance for these students to be supported to choose which type of accommodation would work best for them. Alcohol-free accommodation was suggested by one respondent.

Further options for consideration included: a discount for full year rent (for any student who wished to take it up) alongside summer employment options for resident or commuter students; providing a specific package of support for postgraduate care experienced students; and help with deposits in London.

Some highlighted the challenge of making free accommodation part of a baseline offer. These respondents expressed the view that more wealthy universities, which probably also had higher entry tariffs and fewer care leaver students, could more easily afford this than universities which were less wealthy and probably had a higher share of care leavers.[17]

The role of local authorities in providing accommodation was also mentioned by several respondents. Some saw accommodation primarily as a local authority responsibility, which led one respondent to question whether free accommodation by higher education providers should be part of any more consistent offer. The potential of duplication of support was raised by a couple of respondents. Another recognised that there were inconsistencies in the financial support for accommodation provided by different local authorities.

Comments from interviewees

Interviewees recognised many of the same issues as survey respondents in relation to accommodation. All supported the provision of year-round accommodation, while recognising that not all institutions had their own accommodation. In those cases, interviewees suggested that universities and colleges could build relationships with private accommodation providers and assist care experienced students in finding the right kind of accommodation. Help with deposits or acting as a guarantor was mentioned by several, although others were concerned that it should be the role of the local authority to act as a guarantor. The crossover

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[17] While these are respondents' views, there is evidence from recent research that proportionately fewer care experienced students currently study at higher tariff providers. Data from Annex 2 of the *Positive Impact* report show that 9.6% of care experienced graduates studied at a Russell Group institution compared to 21% of all other graduates (see: http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Positive-Impact-Annex-2.pdf).

NNECL
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care experienced learners

with local authority provision of accommodation was also mentioned by some interviewees. One interviewee highlighted the option of pet-friendly accommodation.

3.10 Minimum level of bursary

Figure 5: In relation to financial support for care experienced students, would you support a minimum level of bursary to be provided by all higher education providers?
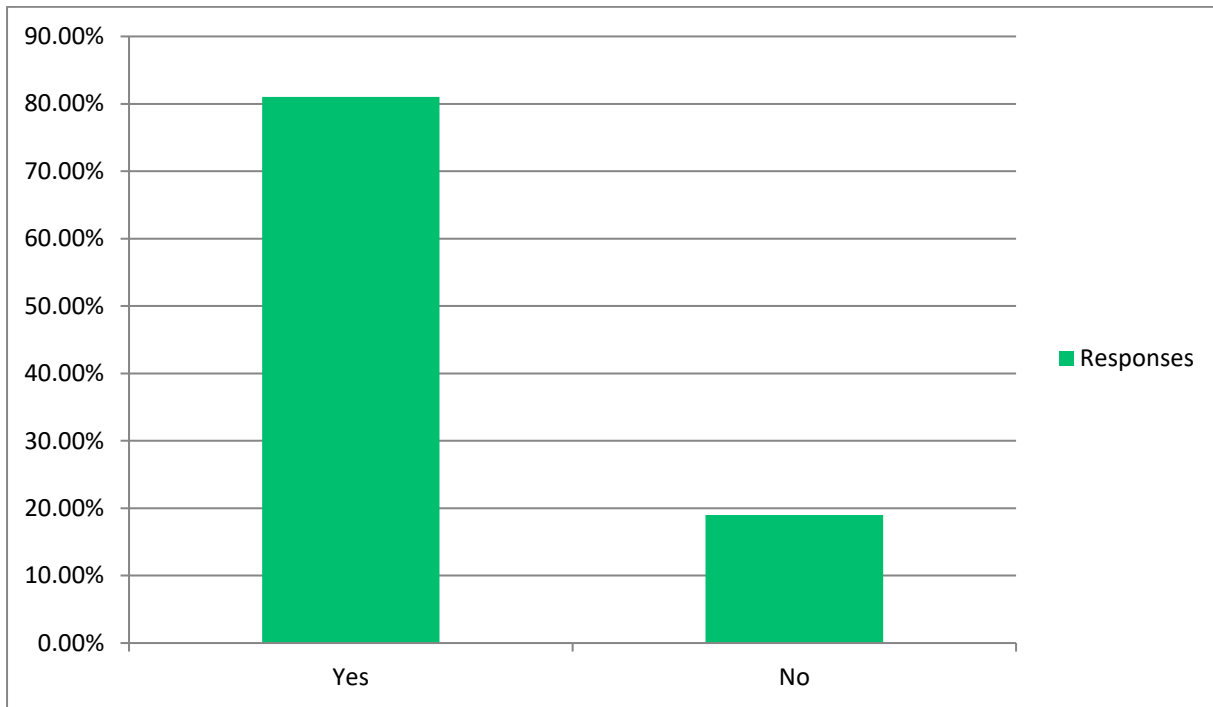
Comments from survey respondents

While 81% of survey respondents supported the idea of a baseline level of financial support (see Figure 5), there were differing views on the possible amount. The most popular option mentioned was for a bursary of £1,000 per annum (13 respondents), with £2,000 pa being the next most cited figure (9 respondents). Others suggested amounts ranged from £300-500 (3 respondents) to £1,200-1,500 (5 respondents). Two suggested a higher figure of £3,000 pa, although, in one case, this was only for the first year of study. In addition to a bursary payment, several mentioned a graduation payment of around £500 and one provided a £600 start-up payment. One respondent from an FE institution was not in favour of a minimum level as resources were constrained and only small bursary awards were possible. Another felt that what was being proposed was a deficit model and there should be a standard agreed maximum level of support.

Others who were supportive of the concept felt that universities and colleges were more likely to agree a flexible framework rather than a fixed level of financial support. Several commented that a tailored and personalised approach would help to target funding where it was most needed. In their view, the individual needs of care experienced students differed considerably, and support should be bespoke with priority access to services provided, when requested. One respondent suggested that setting a fixed amount might act as a constraint or disincentive for institutions to admit care leavers, while others stressed the need for more evidence or research. Other comments highlighted that variations in budgets and populations of care experienced students would make it challenging for all providers to commit to the same minimum level of support. If a minimum level of bursary were to be required, this would require significant lead-in time for

universities and colleges to plan and prepare. The potential negative impact on the availability of financial support for other disadvantaged groups was mentioned as a particular issue for those higher education providers which recruit a high percentage of students from these groups. The need for some additional centralised funding to support institutions was also emphasised.

Some respondents gave practical suggestions on how to determine the value of a financial bursary. One proposed that the sum should be the equivalent of providing an accommodation deposit, travel pass, welcome pack, and IT starter package. Other suggestions from respondents included linking the sum to the equivalent of the parental contribution gap in student finance, taking account of local rents/cost of living and the provision of course materials, equipment, and study visits. One respondent saw the handing out of bursaries as a blunt tool, particularly given the financial support provided for care leaver students by local authorities, and felt it would be better to use financial incentives to encourage students to engage with activities or support that would improve their chances of retention and success. The same respondent commented that the support needs of this group of students were not always linked to financial hardship and that funds, especially when limited, may be more effectively used in ways that have more of a direct impact on the student.

Comments from interviewees

Interviewees also recognised the challenges of setting a minimum amount for a care experienced bursary. As mentioned earlier, some definitional issues were raised in relation to who would be eligible for this support. Where interviewees specified a figure, it was between £1,000 and £2,000 per annum. Others argued for a more fundamental rethink of financial support for these students with proposals including: free tuition; higher bursary funding to cover the costs of tuition and accommodation; and additional premium funding for this group of students. Another suggestion was to link the level of the bursary to a percentage of the tuition fee charged, recognising that not all providers charged the maximum fee. Other comments highlighted that a guaranteed level of financial support from higher education should not be seen as a replacement for local authority support. Others commented that some care leavers received higher levels of local authority support already and suggested that bursaries should be means-tested and targeted according to individual need.

3.11 Training

Figure 6: Would you support a minimum level of training for staff supporting care experienced students?
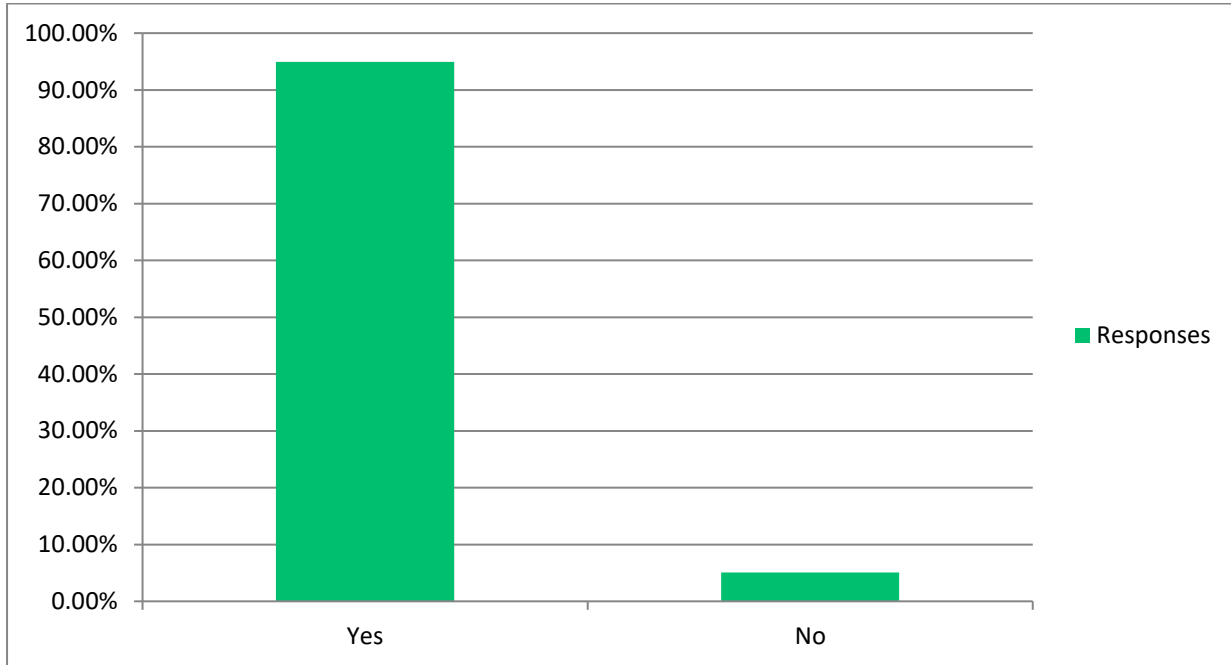
Comments from survey respondents

Support for a minimum level of training was extremely high, at 95% of survey respondents (see Figure 6).

Several respondents made the link to safeguarding training and saw the need for this training to be embedded across the whole institution. One respondent commented that training should encourage inclusivity and promote inclusive language not only in the classroom but in marketing and communications and across all professional and academic services. Suggested topics included understanding care definitions/legislation, pathways through the care system and the barriers for this group of students to access and progress in higher education. While some felt that care experienced students might play a part in such training, others felt that this placed too much of a burden on them as individuals.

The need for differential levels of training for staff in different roles was highlighted by several respondents. Many suggested a level of basic awareness training to be provided for all staff, with more in-depth courses for those directly supporting care experienced students including the named contact, mentors, money advisers and mental health and disability teams. Mental health training that included understanding of childhood trauma and complex family needs was seen as important. Other suggestions included at least level 2 safeguarding training and courses on student voice, attachment, unconscious bias, stigma, and discrimination. One suggestion was for annual mandatory training for personal tutors within departments. Others supported regular CPD to enable direct staff to keep abreast of research learning for this population of students as well as to nurture the professional networks that contribute and add value to the individual or collective student experience. One institution had developed in-house training run by academic social workers who were experienced in working with children, young people, and families.

Some universities and colleges had accessed training from virtual schools, local authorities and educational psychology teams which looked at areas such as developing inclusive classroom practice and dealing with

challenging behaviour. Others mentioned training and support provided by NNECL or other sector organisations including AMOSSHE, Stand Alone, HELOA and NASMA. One had found the Kate Cairns Associates training modules helpful[18]. Several respondents supported the central development of online training materials by experts which could bring a level of consistency to the sector and help to improve outcomes for care experienced students. This content could then be added to and tailored by institutions for their own in-house training. One respondent highlighted a competence gap and the need for greater consistency of performance by dedicated contacts. Two respondents mentioned that one of the Uni Connect partnerships, Go Higher West Yorkshire, was currently developing an e-learning training module to help staff in higher education to understand the needs and experiences of care experienced (and estranged) students which should be available in early 2021.

Some respondents supported best practice recommendations around training rather than any specified annual requirement. Resource and time constraints could make it challenging for designated contacts to attend lots of external conferences and meetings, especially when supporting care experienced students was only part of their role. More online options to attend training and workshops would help to alleviate this problem. Another commented that there was no quick fix to complex issues and years of underfunding for the care system more generally. A third highlighted that requiring minimum levels of training for staff might limit the pool of staff available to recruit from and divert resources from other disadvantaged groups.

Comments from interviewees

Interviewees were all supportive of the need for staff training at different levels to support care experienced students. The potential to develop more shared training with local authorities and virtual schools (via the National Association of Virtual School Heads) was mentioned by several. One interviewee highlighted the benefits of clinical supervision support for designated contacts to assist them in dealing with challenging and upsetting issues.

3.12 Engagement with local authorities

Comments from survey respondents

Many respondents provided examples of their engagement with local authorities across the areas of IAG, admissions, finance, pastoral support, and accommodation. These ranged from ad hoc or needs-based interactions through to extensive programmes of collaboration and mutual training.

Several provided examples of IAG and CPD activities involving social workers, foster carers, personal advisers, and virtual schools. Some of this work was being delivered collaboratively with other institutions via local or regional networks or via Uni Connect partnerships. One respondent commented that working collaboratively with local authorities should be further strengthened to ensure all local authorities receive information, advice, and support from a national spread of universities.

Engagement with local authorities once students were enrolled included liaison on accommodation needs, helping students to access the financial support they were entitled to receive and sharing data (but only when the student had given clear consent).

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[18] See https://kca.training/?service=training

Comments from interviewees

The importance of building good, two-way relationships between higher education and local authority contacts was a theme running through many of the interviews. This covered a range of areas including:

- collaboration on IAG for care experienced young people and their carers
- joint staff training and knowledge-sharing
- data-sharing (when students had given permission)
- ensuring students were effectively supported throughout their time in higher education and beyond into work or further study.

3.13 Potential benefits and challenges

Survey respondents were asked to select from a list of potential benefits and challenges in developing a more consistent offer (see Table 11 below). The most supported potential benefits were greater transparency and a clear pathway for care experienced applicants followed by the guarantee of a consistent minimum level of support. In relation to challenges, the most cited option was the insufficiency of current data. Overall, 96% of respondents felt the benefits outweighed the challenges.

Benefits and challenges

Table 11: Potential benefits or challenges

	%	No.
There would be greater transparency and a clear pathway for care experienced applicants.	88	66
All care experienced students would be guaranteed a minimum, consistent level of support from higher education providers.	85.33	64
Care experienced students would feel more supported by their institutions.	81.33	61
Care experienced people would be more encouraged to apply for higher education study.	80	60
Current data are insufficient to identify all care experienced students.	73.33	55
Retention and success of care leaver students would improve.	72	54
Applicants would be less constrained by financial issues when choosing institutions and courses.	68	51
Institutions prefer to make their own distinctive offers in line with their mission.	42.67	32
A baseline offer might be a disincentive to offering higher levels of support.	40	30
A baseline offer would cost too much.	18.67	14

Comments from survey respondents

Data and definitional issues were highlighted in other comments by respondents. The need for clear and consistent definitions on what constitutes a care experienced student was mentioned by several people. We note that work is currently underway to develop new HESA definitions which may assist with some of these

challenges when they are rolled out in 2021/22. Others commented on the differences between care leaver and care experienced and whether the offer should be consistent across both groups. Some mentioned the challenges of identifying care experienced students early enough in the process as some applicants and students did not want to disclose their status. The potential for challenges from other similarly disadvantaged groups, such as estranged students, was also raised.

Some respondents reiterated concerns about whether a baseline financial package would really be appropriate or workable. Staffing and resource implications for smaller institutions or those with higher numbers of care experienced students were raised. The costs of rolling out a baseline offer may not be well received by institutions at a time of severe budget restraints due to Covid-19 and an unclear recruitment landscape. Alternatively, having an England-wide baseline could help to persuade senior leadership teams that funding should be targeted at this group. The possibility of a tuition fee waiver for those leaving care was suggested by one respondent. Variations in the support provided by local authorities was also raised as an issue which needed addressing if higher education providers were to be expected to offer their own more consistent level of support.

If certain institutions were having to allocate a larger proportion of their APP funding towards a baseline offer, then the OfS would need to take this into account when evaluating performance against other targets. Some were concerned that if the baseline were too low, it could slow down progress or inhibit good practice; one suggested having both a minimum and a best practice baseline. Others highlighted the benefit in raising the profile and importance of supporting care experienced students in helping prospective students to feel validated and encouraged to apply. It could also enable higher education providers to develop a clearer understanding of the needs of this cohort of students.

Whether institutions would accept the imposition of admissions criteria was flagged as unlikely by one respondent. Another felt that any wider involvement of Uni Connect was not so straightforward. While the partnerships had a clear role in outreach activities for younger age groups, or in talking more generally about options for progression, the details about institutional provision should remain the responsibility of providers.

Support for a baseline of pastoral and academic support was welcomed by some respondents who emphasised pro-active monitoring of academic progress and early intervention to address gaps in knowledge or study skills that may have been caused by disrupted learning in the past.

Comments from interviewees

Interviewees particularly highlighted the importance of greater transparency for care experienced students and those who support them. Clearer and more consistent communication would help carers, local authorities, and young people better to understand the choices available. Barriers included the high turnover of personal advisers in some local authorities, as well as similar concerns to survey respondents about resources and funding.

3.14 Pilot phase

Comments from survey respondents

Survey respondents were asked what they thought would be the most effective ways to develop and trial a more consistent offer at a local level and what factors would need to be taken into account. Responses highlighted some differences of view between those who supported local or regional pilots and others who

felt that a national baseline called for national pilots. Others suggested that there needed to be further consultation and agreement with institutions on what a baseline offer might cover before moving to a pilot phase. Setting a timescale of several years for the development and roll-out of a baseline was mentioned by some, with review built in after, say, three years. The importance of strategic buy-in from senior leadership was emphasised and some felt that this would only take effect if there were a top-down requirement or strong encouragement from the OfS. Ensuring sufficient funding to buy out staff time to support pilots was seen as critical.

Utilising existing partnerships, including Uni Connect, regional NNECL groups and the Care Leaver Progression Partnership, was mentioned by several respondents. Involving other key partners, such as local authorities, and building in student perspectives were also regarded as important. Incremental development of a baseline was seen as a way to encourage support, sustainability, and commitment, with the possibility of further improvement and enhancement over time. One respondent suggested having regional champions to help to embed a baseline and provide support. Developing a website or platform with shared resources, templates and 'how to' guides would also be helpful.

Those favouring a national pilot saw merit in trialling across the country with a range of different higher education providers. One respondent suggested choosing the care leaver cohort for an initial pilot phase as this group was more well-defined. If successful, the pilot could then be expanded to care experienced, and potentially estranged, students. The desirability of administering any financial component centrally via Student Finance England was seen as beneficial as there would be administrative savings and institutional consistency. Another saw merit in developing a sample baseline and the consulting further on whether institutions would find it practical.

The importance of in-built evaluation and evidence of impact was mentioned by many respondents. Pilots should draw on research and evidence-based good practice. They should involve reasonably large groups of students to ensure that findings are more representative. Input from care experienced applicants, students and graduates on their own experiences should also be a core part of any pilots, with payment provided, as necessary. Other comments on this issue included the need for an ethical framework, being alert to unintended consequences and the possibility to build in comparison/control groups. Designing the programme with expert input, including psychologists specialising in this area, was mentioned by one respondent. Some longitudinal work, including a financial analysis of the difference made to continuation and success, would also be helpful. One respondent felt that there should be a small number of high impact baseline criteria.

Comments from interviewees

Interviewees also saw value in the pilots engaging a range of different institutions whether on a local/regional or national basis and with in-built monitoring and evaluation. Several commented that local authorities, Uni Connect and other key players, such as UCAS and Student Finance England, should be engaged as part of any pilot phase. Consortia of institutions with a track record in collaboration, and with good linkages to other partners, should be encouraged to bid for this phase of work. The inclusion of training and the development of a library of shared resources within the phase 2 work were highlighted as important by several interviewees.

4: Conclusions

The feasibility study has confirmed that many higher education providers already offer a broad range of support options for care leavers and care experienced students. Despite variations often related to resources and/or the numbers of such students within individual institutions, there is evidence of a strong level of commitment to move towards a more consistent offer. This does, however, require further detailed development and trialling before making any elements of support part of a guarantee to care experienced applicants and students.

5: Glossary

Term	Definition
AMOSSHE	The Student Services Organisation which informs and supports the leaders of student services
APP	access and participation plan
CPD	continuous professional development
FE	further education
Foyer Federation	A network of learning and accommodation centres which provide a home, a holistic development plan and a nurturing community for young people
HEI	higher education institution
HELOA	A professional association of staff in higher education who work in student recruitment, outreach, marketing and admissions
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Association
HE	higher education
IAG	information, advice and guidance
NASMA	National Association of Student Money Advisers
NNECL	National Network for the Education of Care Leavers
OfS	Office for Students
Uni Connect	A programme funded by the OfS, comprising 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners which offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college
Unite Foundation	An independent registered charity offering accommodation scholarships for care leavers and estranged young people at university
UUK	Universities UK

Annex A: Survey questions

1: What type of institution do you work in?

2: What is your role within your institution?

3: In which English region is your institution based?

4: What is the size of your institution in HE undergraduate student FTE numbers?

5: How many care experienced students do you currently have in your institution? Please provide as headcount numbers and break down into those who are defined as care leavers and others with care experience, if you have that data available.

6: Please indicate in the following table which of these options related to information, advice and guidance is provided by your institution and whether, in your view, it might form part of a consistent baseline offer of support for care experienced students. Where relevant, please also indicate where activities are provided collaboratively via Uni Connect or other local/regional partnerships.

- Dedicated webpage signposting support available
- Named contact to support through the admissions process
- Applicants who tick the UCAS care leaver box are contacted for targeted advice and support
- Targeted outreach activities
- Please provide details of any other information, advice and guidance provided by your institution which you think might form part of a consistent baseline offer.

7: Please indicate in the following table which of these options related to admissions/academic offer is provided by your institution and whether, in your view, it might form part of a consistent baseline offer of support for care experienced students.

- Contextualised admissions
- Offer confirmed if near miss on grades
- Applicant signposted to other similar courses if grades not met
- A guaranteed place if minimum course requirements are met
- Please provide details of any other support related to admissions/academic offer provided by your institution which you think might form part of a consistent baseline offer.

8: Please indicate in the following table which of these options related to financial support is provided by your institution and whether, in your view, it might form part of a consistent baseline offer of support for care experienced students.

- Access to bursary/financial support alongside other target groups
- Specific financial bursary/support
- Additional financial support is provided to enable participation in study visits, work placements, study abroad etc.
- Please provide details of any other financial support provided by your institution which you think might form part of a consistent baseline offer.

9: Please indicate in the following table which of these options related to pastoral support is provided by your institution and whether, in your view, it might form part of a consistent baseline offer of support for

care experienced students. Where relevant, please also indicate where activities are provided collaboratively via Uni Connect or other local/regional partnerships.

- Access to a dedicated contact person throughout course
- Support from a mentor
- Starter pack or voucher for household items
- Study skills support package
- Graduation support pack
- Provision of IT equipment/technology support
- Please provide details of any other pastoral support provided by your institution which you think might form part of a consistent baseline offer.

10. Please indicate in the following table which of these options related to accommodation is provided by your institution and whether, in your view, it might form part of a consistent baseline offer of support for care experienced students. Where relevant, please also indicate where this support is provided in partnership with others.

- Year-round accommodation
- Subsidised accommodation
- Free accommodation
- Support with accommodation deposits or similar
- Please provide details of any other accommodation support provided by your institution which you think might form part of a consistent baseline offer of support.

11. In relation to financial support for care experienced students, would you support a minimum level of bursary to be provided by all HE providers? If yes, please indicate what that minimum level should be? If no, why not?

12. Would you support a minimum level of training for staff supporting care experienced students? If yes, please indicate what that minimum level should be and provide details of any particular training modules you use. If no, why not?

13. Please provide brief details of your engagement with local authorities to support care experienced students in relation to any of the following areas.

- Information, advice and guidance
- Admissions
- Financial support
- Pastoral support
- Accommodation
- Other areas (please specify)

14. What would you see as the potential benefits and challenges in developing a consistent baseline offer of support for care experienced students? Please select all that apply.

- All care experienced students would be guaranteed a minimum, consistent level of support from HE providers.
- Applicants would be less constrained by financial issues when choosing institutions and courses.
- Care experienced people would be more encouraged to apply for higher education study.
- Care experienced students would feel more supported by their institutions.
- Retention and success of care leaver students would improve.

- There would be greater transparency and a clear pathway for care experienced applicants.
- Institutions prefer to make their own distinctive offers in line with their mission.
- A baseline offer would cost too much.
- Current data are insufficient to identify all care experienced students.
- A baseline offer might be a disincentive to offering higher levels of support.
- Other benefits or challenges (please specify)

15. Do you think the benefits of a consistent baseline offer would outweigh the challenges, or vice versa?

- The benefits would outweigh the challenges.
- The challenges would outweigh the benefits.

16. What would be the most effective ways to develop and trial a consistent baseline offer at a local level? What factors would need to be taken into account in setting up local pilots?

Annex B: Interview aide-memoire

1. Tell me about your/your organisation's role in relation to care experienced students.

2. Do you support the idea of a consistent baseline offer to be provided by HE institutions? If yes, why? If no, why not?

3. If there were to be a consistent baseline offer, what would you see as key features to be included under any/all of the following areas?

- Information, advice, and guidance (pre- and post-entry)
- Admissions
- Financial support
- Pastoral support
- Accommodation.

4. Are there other areas of support which you think might be included in a consistent baseline offer?

5. Should an initial consistent baseline offer be quite minimal and able to develop/evolve over time? If so, what would you see as critical components in this initial phase?

6. Would you support a minimum level of financial bursary for care experienced students? If yes, what should that level be? If no, why not?

7. Should a consistent baseline offer include an expectation of training to a certain level for those directly involved in supporting care experienced students? If yes, what level should that be? If no, why not?

8. What do you understand from your practice/research about the views of care experienced students on the support they receive from institutions? What do these students most value and how can that be best reflected in a consistent baseline offer?

9. In developing a consistent baseline offer, what would you see as

- The main benefits?
- The main barriers and obstacles? How might these be overcome?

10. What would you see as the most effective ways to develop and trial a consistent baseline offer? What would be important factors to consider in the commissioning of one or more local pilots?