

Quality Mark Guidance: June 2021

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Introduction

Welcome to the NNECL Quality Mark for the inclusion and success of care experienced¹ students. The Quality Mark submission process has been designed to empower and support institutions to achieve the best outcomes for their care experienced students. This guidance accompanies the Quality Mark submission form which is a separate document available from NNECL.

Before an institution can engage with the Quality Mark, it must already have undertaken several basic steps with regard to care experienced students. For example, you should have started to collect data about your care experienced students and your institution should be engaged in strategic conversations about the support available to help these students succeed.

Please complete the expression of interest document before preparing your submission to check your institution is ready to participate in the Quality Mark. Please also read through the application form and the full guidance document before starting to complete your form. This will save time and ensure you provide the right information in the right section of the form.

The Assessment Process

Self-Assessment and NNECL Review

Before your assessment begins, you will have a consultation with NNECL to ensure your institution is ready to participate in the Quality Mark. This will cover issues such as how your institution monitors (or intends to monitor) the success and progression of care experienced students, what support you have in place already and your institution's capacity to develop this further. Once it has been established that your institution is ready to undertake the Quality Mark, the assessment is a two-stage process. The first stage of the process is an institutional self-assessment which is completed over a period of several weeks, with support from a NNECL assessor.

A successful strategy for care experienced students requires the engagement of a range of staff across your institution. NNECL strongly recommends that your Quality Mark submission is overseen and approved by an existing committee or a specially convened working group to ensure the appropriate engagement across and beyond your institution.

The institutional self-assessment is followed by a review from NNECL which will evaluate the evidence submitted by your institution and compare it with national practice. Proportionality – the size of your institution and the resources available to it – will be taken into account. It is essential that care experienced students themselves have a say in your institution's strategy and the assessment will be looking for evidence of how you have garnered and responded to the voices of these students.

As the Quality Mark is intended to function as a developmental tool, the assessment process should also produce an institutional Action Plan. This can be a simple list of actions that are developed during your self-assessment and are confirmed as an Action Plan when the Quality Mark is awarded.

¹ For information about how care experienced people are defined please see <u>statement 1.3.</u>

To assist a meaningful evaluation, the self-assessment process invites institutions to rate themselves for each of the seven sections of the Quality Mark.

In this rating, you are asked to choose one of three levels for each section:

- Satisfactory: meets minimum quality requirements
- Enhanced: effective practice /consistently exceeds minimum quality requirements
- Exceptional: excellent practice/consistently outstanding quality

This guidance document is designed to help you determine which level you have reached for each section. When NNECL reviews your submission, the rating you have given your institution will either be agreed or amended.

Quality Mark Award

Successful institutions will be awarded the Quality Mark for three years which will entitle them to display the Quality Mark logo. There will be a light-touch review of progress against action plans at the midway point.

All evidence provided for the Quality Mark submissions will be stored securely and in accordance with data protection legislation (GDPR). In the interests of promoting effective practice, NNECL will ask institutions for permission to share examples of areas where their practice has been rated as enhanced or exceptional.

Strategic Positioning

NNECL recognises that institutional work towards the success of care experienced students will sit amongst the strategies your organisation has developed for all its students. This is as it should be, and the Quality Mark does not require institutions to devise new interventions where existing strategies are proven to work. However, there will be instances where specific actions are required for care experienced students, for example to ensure they engage with what is available to them.

The Quality Mark is intended and designed for institutions throughout the UK. Recognising that the four countries within the UK have differing approaches to student access and inclusion, institutions should reference the appropriate strategic documents (see section 2.2 below) in their submissions. Please reference these strategic documents rather than attaching them to your submission.

Evidence

It is important to provide evidence about how your institution meets the criteria of the Quality Mark. Evidence should also be a key component of your evaluation strategy, and this should be information that helps you improve your work (see the <u>Continuous Improvement section</u>).

The submission form provides opportunities for you to insert links to relevant websites or online documents. You may also, on occasion, wish to submit documents with your form but, for administrative purposes, please keep this to a minimum. The guidance for some statements provides suggestions about the kind of evidence you may wish to submit but please build on this and submit anything you believe is relevant.

The Submission Form

Please bear in the mind the following points when completing your form:

- a) Adhere to the word limit for each section. A concise overview containing the salient facts is preferable to a lot of detail and additional evidence can be submitted via links to websites or online documents.
- b) Use plain English and explain any acronyms you use.
- c) In your written response for each statement, indicate why you have rated your institution at the level you have chosen.
- d) Keep your action plan lean and focussed so it does not create an undue burden for your institution. You will not necessarily need an action for every statement.

Submission Sections and Statements

1. Your Institution's Culture and Leadership

1.1 There is evidence of strategic commitment to welcoming and ensuring the success of care experienced students

Word limit: 250

Outline your institution's approach to welcoming and ensuring the success of care experienced students. Evidence might include an institutional policy or strategy, with clear accountabilities, expressing the institution's commitment to care experienced students. Documents should be easily accessible for care experienced students and written in language everyone can understand.

You may also choose to demonstrate strategic commitment through a statement of support from your senior lead (see 1.2). Other evidence of strategic commitment might include participation in an initiative such as being a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant or membership of NNECL.

1.2 There is a senior person in the institution with strategic oversight of the support for and outcomes of care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Indicate the name and role of the senior person responsible for care experienced students. This person should be a member of the institution's executive board. In HE, examples of senior roles include an Academic Registrar who sits on the Executive Board and leads a working group for care experienced students or a Pro-Vice Chancellor with decision-making and budget-setting authority. In FE, examples include a Director of Learner Services who is a member of the Senior Leadership Team or a Vice Principal Student Services and Registry.

If there is more than one senior lead, please explain the relevant responsibilities of each person. Your senior lead may choose to include a statement in support of your submission and/or indicate how they ensure that care experienced students and the practitioners who work directly with them are able to help shape your institution's strategic direction (see also 2.2).

1.3 There is clarity in the definition of what a care experienced student means, and this is understood through the institution

Word limit: 250

To set the parameters of the support you offer to care experienced students, it is important to have clear definitions which everyone can understand. That said, NNECL recognises that these definitions are constantly changing. We have listed some current definitions below and acknowledge that these may evolve and extend in the future:

'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. This is NNECL's preferred definition.

'Estranged'

Estranged students are those aged 18 to 24 who are not communicating with either of their parents due to an irreconcilable breakdown in the relationship with them. Estranged students often also lack the support of their wider family. Individuals may be estranged and are living independently before entering higher education or may become estranged during their studies.

NNECL understands that work in most institutions will include both care experienced students and estranged students. We encourage this and, if it is the case, would ask you to include estranged students in your Quality Mark submission. Please differentiate what you offer to each group (if it is different) or stipulate that your provision applies to all CEES students (see definition below).

'CEES'

Anyone who is care experienced and/or estranged.

'Care Leavers'

The level of state support young people receive depends on their status as care leavers. Definitions of status and terminology vary to some extent across the four countries of the UK and a summary of these is provided here, with links to relevant legislation.

Country	Care Leaver Definitions & Links	
England	The main purpose of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 is to help young people who have been looked after by a local authority move from care into living independently in as stable a fashion as possible. To do this it amends the Children Act (c.41) to place a duty on local authorities to assess and meet need. The responsible local authority is to be 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. Key definitions are: 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 (NB: the Children & Social Work Act 2017 removed the requirement to be in education or training beyond age 21). Persons qualifying for advice and assistance – any young person under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who ceases to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order. Young people who return home — a young person's status as a care leaver can change if they leave care and return home to live with their birth family. A 16 or 17-year-old who has lived for a continuous period of six months with a parent or someone with parental responsibility will not be a relevant child, even if they fit the criteria above. However, if this arrangement breaks down before they turn 18 and the young person ceases to	
Scotland	The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (as amended) sets out that local authorities have a legal duty to: prepare young people for leaving care or ceasing to be looked after; provide advice and assistance to young people who have ceased to be looked after on or after their 16th birthday. Local authorities are legally required to provide aftercare support until the care leaver turns 19, and to assess any eligible needs for aftercare support until they turn 26 (or beyond for access to the Care-Experienced Bursary for further and higher education students where the upper age limit of 26 was removed in 2020).	

Country	Care Leaver Definitions & Links
	These duties are set out in the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003. The Scottish Government published guidance on services for young people leaving care in March 2004. This was adjusted by The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 and also the Aftercare (Eligible Needs) (Scotland) Order 2015. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 sets out the legal requirement for public
	bodies – including colleges and universities who are defined as 'corporate parents' – to support care experienced students in higher education.
Wales	As well as the <u>Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000</u> , Sections 105-115 of the <u>Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014</u> place duties on a local authority to provide support for children and young persons who it has looked after when they cease to be looked after (care leavers). The support provided is intended to be equivalent to that which a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from his or her parents.
	The purpose of this provision is intended to assist young persons who have been looked after to move from being looked after to living independently. The advice and support that care leavers receive depends upon their age and care leaving status.
	In order to receive support from a local authority as a care leaver, the young person must have been looked after by a local authority for the prescribed period of time within the prescribed age range (Regulation 47 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 currently sets the criteria at a requirement to be looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 years).
	Section 104 of the 2014 Act restates the different categories of young people who are or who were being looked after by a local authority for the purposes of the Act. Each category is entitled to differing types or levels of support. Section 104(2) contains a description of the six different categories, as follows: category 1 (eligible child); category 2 (relevant child); category 3 (former relevant child); category 4 (persons who qualify for further assistance to pursue education or training); category 5 (a young person who is 16 but not yet 21 in respect of whom a special guardianship order is in force (or if the person is 18 or over, an order was in force when he or she reached 18); category 6 (a young person who has not yet attained the age of 21; is residing in Wales; and who, whilst not currently being looked after, accommodated or fostered, has been looked after, accommodated or fostered for a period when they were between the ages of 16 and 18).
Northern Ireland	The provision of aftercare services for people leaving care is set out in The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002, and The Children (Leaving Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

Please be clear about any differential levels of support you may provide to different categories of care experienced students.

1.4 Continuous Professional Development for staff is used strategically to improve outcomes for care experienced students

Word limit: 300

There are many ways in which professional development can improve people's understanding of care experienced students. Examples might include running training sessions specifically focussed on care experienced people, or, introducing information about this group into training which covers all students. The most important thing is that, in line with your continuous improvement strategy (see section 2), you have identified what your institution needs to achieve through its professional development programme in relation to care experienced students.

Depending on the size and nature of your institution, you might wish to consider some of the following types of options:

 Developing a bespoke session or an online tool for your institution which draws on recent studies and resources such as the video accompanying <u>a study</u> by Sheffield University.

- Reviewing your institution's Mental Health and Wellbeing programme to ensure it incorporates the needs and experiences of care experienced students.
- Working with your care experienced students so that they can help shape the training you offer or be directly involved as in Halesowen College's Raising Aspirations from Care Experience (RACE) project.
- Focussing on training and support for Personal Academic Tutors who are often key points of contact for students.
- Supporting staff to attend national conferences or other events so they can keep up to date with latest effective practice.
- Working with local partners, such as a Virtual School or Leaving Care Team, to share knowledge and enhance practice.
- Using free resources such as The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) training, an online session which takes 50 minutes to complete and which develops understanding of the impact of traumatic experience in early years.

Your Plans for Continuous Improvement 2.

The institution can demonstrate how its monitoring and evaluation have generated evidence to inform the design of what it does for care experienced students; to measure the impact of this; to inform the development of future activity and the development of future evaluation

Word limit: 300

Outline your evaluation strategy to improve the experience and outcomes of care experienced students. This will probably be a subset of a broader evaluation strategy for all students but please specify elements that are particular to care experienced students. This might include, for example: featuring the voices of care experienced students and/or staff who work directly with them; or involving care experienced students in the oversight of evaluation. Please highlight any changes that have been made or are planned following review and evaluation.

Institutions should reference their Access and Participation Plan/Outcome Agreement/Fee and Access Plan/Widening Access Participation Plan or equivalent document (see 2.2). Where relevant, please refer to other strategic documents such as Self-Assessment Reports, Quality Improvement Plans, Safeguarding Reports, Corporate Parenting Plans etc. The Office for Students has developed evaluation guidance for English HE providers which you may find useful.

2.2 The institution's relevant strategic documents and plans demonstrate a commitment to care experienced students

Word limit: 200

Where you have included commitments to care experienced students in your Access and Participation Plan/Outcome Agreement/Fee and Access Plan/Widening Access Participation Plan or equivalent strategic documents, please provide a summary of these commitments. Institutions in Scotland may also wish to reference progress with their corporate parenting plans.

2.3 The institution monitors the recruitment, success, and progression of its care experienced students

Word limit: 200

It can be challenging to collect accurate data about care experienced students, and it may take time for some institutions to develop mechanisms to do this. Explain what you know about your current and past cohorts of care experienced students (how many recruited if known, academic outcomes if known, progression outcomes if known). If you currently have limited data about your care experienced students, outline your plans for data collection in future.

Where monitoring has become established, institutions are recommended to set targets in relation to the recruitment, success, and progression outcomes of care experienced students. This could include collaborative targets working in partnership with other institutions to achieve outcomes, which will be in addition to any institution specific targets. For HE this may be as part of widening participation activity, for FE this may include joint targets with the local authority.

You may wish to reflect on the evidence base to reach informed decisions about which elements of your support package come with an age restriction and, where relevant, to co-ordinate closely with any activity or targets for mature learners.

3. Before Your Students Join You

3.1 There is a named person/s responsible for managing liaison with care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Indicate the name and role of the designated member(s) of staff who may: act as first point of contact for care experienced people; provide pre-application support; signpost to other services; build and maintain relationships with the local authority and virtual schools. The same member(s) of staff may also be responsible for managing the ongoing support for care experienced students (see 5.1)

You may wish to include examples of any promotional materials (for example webpages) confirming the name and role of the key contact(s) for care experienced students. You may wish to indicate how the institution ensures this person has the time and skills to fulfil this role. It would also be helpful to indicate how you manage succession planning when designated staff move on to other roles.

3.2 There is effective pre-entry information advice and guidance to support transition decision making

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution provides impartial pre-entry guidance on FE/HE study, financial advice and information on support services available to care experienced people. There may be an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

policy, Statement of Service and IAG Action Plans and records to refer to. You may also wish to provide examples of activities such as open days, taster days, interview sessions, individual tours, and collaborative work (see section 7). Include links to website where relevant.

Your institution may wish to consider participating in the Department for Education's <u>Matrix Standard</u> for ensuring the delivery of high quality IAG.

3.3 There is effective promotion of the academic and pastoral support offered to care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution ensures that information about the range of support offered to care experienced people is readily available and easily accessed. This could include, for example, information about the pastoral, financial, accommodation and academic support available.

There may be a range of promotional activities in place such as: outreach presentations, information presented at open days, information provided to local authorities, carers, and foster parents. You may also wish to review and include the information your institution provides to the <u>Propel website</u> which promotes HE to care experienced people.

3.4 There is ongoing communication between first point of contact and enrolment

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution ensures that care experienced people are supported for effective transition in HE. Where possible include evidence of ongoing communication leading up to enrolment. This could, for example, be an email sent to all students who declare on application that they are care experienced, or a mentoring programme involving existing care experienced students. You may wish to refer to the Department of Education's 2019 policy paper: 'Principles to guide HE providers on improving care leavers access and participation in HE'.

4. Your Admissions Process

4.1 The institution can demonstrate how its Admissions process is inclusive of care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Explain how your Admissions process takes account of the needs of care experienced students and the barriers they may have faced to succeed. If you have an Admissions Policy, this or other relevant documents may refer to care experienced students. This could include a recognition that care experienced students may not arrive at HE via a traditional route. Where relevant, please include details of any postgraduate admissions support for care experienced applicants.

Depending on your Admissions criteria, it may be appropriate for concessions to be made for care experienced people, sometimes referred to as a 'contextual offer'. If you require additional information from applicants for this purpose, please be mindful of the burden this may place on care experienced applicants and only ask for information if it is absolutely essential.

Depending on the resources of your institution, you may also wish to consider ways of support care experienced applicants such as providing funding to attend interview if required.

4.2 Effective support is provided for care experienced students to navigate the admissions and clearing/post results processes

Word limit: 150

Explain how support is provided, where needed, to complete the application process, for example support with personal statements. This may include a focus on 'CV enhancing' activities such as work experience or volunteering. It may also include working with the Virtual School or School Careers Advisers to support the application process.

Explain also what information and support are available to those care experienced students who apply via clearing or in the period following exam results

4.3 Effective support is provided for care experienced students who do not achieve their admissions offer

Word limit: 100

Explain how your institution communicates with care experienced students who do not achieve their admissions offer. This might include the support provided to demonstrate the options available to them to make informed decisions on their next steps. For example, 'Results Day' events may be available to provide support to those whose results were not as expected or to facilitate course changes.

5. Your Students' Wellbeing

5.1 There is a named person(s) responsible for managing the support for care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Indicate the name and role of the designated member(s) of staff who are responsible for managing the support for care experienced students. The same member(s) of staff may also be responsible for managing liaison with care experienced students before they arrive at your institution (see 3.1).

You may wish to include examples of any promotional materials (for example, links to webpages) confirming the name and role of the key contact(s) for care experienced students. You may also wish to indicate how the institution ensures

this person has the time and skills to fulfil this role. Where different individuals/teams are involved in support pre- and post-entry, please include information on how handover arrangements are managed.

5.2 Care experienced students receive effective and timely support for their physical and mental wellbeing

Word limit: 150

Explain how your wellbeing services are tailored for, and promoted to, care experienced students. This may include services such as mental health first aid, safeguarding, mentoring, pastoral wellbeing, financial management and academic support (but see also 6.3).

Recognising that the support for care experienced students will be part of what your institution offers to all students, the focus should be on demonstrating how the offer is promoted to care experienced students and how their needs are highlighted to staff. This could, for example, include 'fast track' options for care experienced students and/or liaison with external agencies.

5.3 Financial support appropriate to the needs of care experienced students is provided

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution ensures that financial support is appropriate to the needs of care experienced students. This might include: evaluating bursary schemes to ensure they are fit for purpose; consulting with care experienced students about the timing of payments and to identify gaps; or providing guidance to care experienced students on how to manage finances.

Depending on your institution's resources, you may also wish to consider the additional types of funding you are able to provide. Examples from other institutions range from a full fee bursary to payments for specific items such as moving in costs or attending an interview. Where relevant, please also include any financial support provided for postgraduate study.

5.4 Support with accommodation is provided appropriate to the needs of care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Explain how accommodation provided your institution is tailored the needs of care experienced students. For example, you may wish to consider: providing a guarantee to care experienced students that accommodation will be available to them 365 a year; minimising disruption/unrequested changes in accommodation; providing assistance moving in and out of accommodation and/or welcome packs for care experienced students; the institution acting as a guarantor for a private landlord.

If your institution does not provide accommodation or your care experienced students do not use your accommodation you may wish to consider other ways in

which you can support your care experienced students such as, for example, assisting care experienced students who commute.

6 Your Students' Success

6.1 Learning, teaching and assessment strategies, including curricula, take account of the experiences of care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Responding to differences in academic outcomes for different groups of students, most institutions have developed policies and activities based on the concept of an inclusive curriculum. There are many definitions of an inclusive curriculum, but broadly it refers to academic programmes which provide all students, regardless of background and personal characteristics, an equal opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes. This approach may be underpinned by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion impact assessments.

Explain how your institution's approach to its curricula takes account of the experiences of care experienced students. This might include: how awareness of care experienced students is built into courses and/or fellowships for teaching staff; how your personal tutoring framework takes account of care experienced students (for example, how do personal tutors know which care experienced students they have?); how academic support is promoted to care experienced students; any support that is made specifically available for care experienced students, for example to participate in field trips.

6.2 Care experienced students are encouraged to develop their social capital

Word limit: 150

Explain how your care experienced students are encouraged to broaden their horizons, involve themselves with activities and events that develop their personal interests and take full advantage of student life. This might include: how you promote student engagement activities to care experienced students; how your Students' Union or other relevant organisations engage with care experienced students; how care experienced students are encouraged to widen their employment opportunities or engage with volunteering. Personal academic tutors may play a key role in promoting activities to care experienced students and peer mentoring schemes may also be relevant in this regard.

6.3 Strategies are in place to identify and support care experienced students at risk of withdrawing or not reaching their academic potential

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution identifies and supports care experienced students at risk of withdrawing or not reaching their academic potential. This might include how your institution monitors student engagement and whether there is some kind of early warning system to identify indicators that may mean students do not achieve their academic potential. Personal academic tutors may again play a key

role in monitoring students' engagement and academic performance and your institution may have evidence of monitoring reports and internal data sharing.

6.4 Care experienced students receive effective information, advice, and guidance to make informed decisions about their progression from their current programme

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution provides impartial information, advice, and guidance about progression into appropriate and relevant employment or further education to care experienced students. There may be an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) policy, Statement of Service and IAG Action Plans and records to refer to. Include links to website where relevant.

You may wish to consider the <u>Gatsby Benchmark</u> of good career guidance for schools and colleges and/or consult the <u>Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services</u>. If you have engaged with either of these or any other national framework, include this in your submission.

7 Collaborative and Partnership Working

7.1 There is effective external collaboration to support care experienced students to make informed decisions about their future education

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution works with external organisations to assist care experienced students to make informed decisions about their future education. This might include how your institution makes effective links with local authorities, virtual schools, schools, colleges, universities, care providers and other partners. You may wish to include examples of collaborative activities or documents which demonstrate the effectiveness of partnerships such as minutes of meetings and/or communications.

7.2 Effective external partnerships are developed to improve educational outcomes for care experienced students

Word limit: 150

Explain how your institution works with external organisations to improve educational outcomes for care experienced students. This might include providing educational and training opportunities across a range of providers as part of widening participation activity. You may wish to cross reference your Access and Participation Plan, Access and Participation Statement or Fee and Access Plan (see 2.2). You may also wish to reference Outreach delivery plans, school-college partnership agreements or other relevant documents.

You may also wish to consider the <u>Gatsby Benchmark</u> of good career guidance for schools and colleges and/or consult the <u>Association of Graduate Careers Advisory</u> Services (see 6.4).

7.3 Effective internal partnerships are developed to ensure there is a whole institution approach to the NNECL Quality Mark

Word limit: 150

Explain the mechanisms that are in place in your organisation to ensure a whole institution approach to the inclusion and success of care experienced students. This might include details of a working group for care experienced students with representation from across the institution or information about other groups or committees which take care experienced students into consideration. You may wish to include examples of how communication between different departments/sections of your institution have been effective in providing support to care experienced students.