

**University of the Highlands and Islands**

**Corporate Parenting Plan**

**2018-2021**

**Report – April 2021**

1. **Introduction**
   1. The University of the Highlands and Islands is identified as a corporate parent under Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. At present, many looked after children and care leavers experience some of the poorest personal outcomes of any group in Scotland. Low levels of educational engagement and achievement feed into high levels of poverty, homelessness and poor mental health.[[1]](#footnote-1) Barriers to education which care experienced young people face include lack of funding, disrupted schooling, an unstable home environment, and accessing further and higher education at a later age than their non-looked after peers.
   2. The university is a collegiate institution based on a partnership of 13 colleges and research centres, and over 70 local learning centres spread across the Highlands and Islands, Moray, and Perthshire. The university plan specifically focuses on collaborative work across the partnership and the coordination of actions which will encourage care experienced young people to apply to the university, and enhance the support available to them as our students. Each college and research institution has its own individual Corporate Parenting Plan, reflecting its distinctive, local context, working in conjunction with the overarching university plan.
   3. The university and locally specific plans therefore form the totality of the partnership’s approach to meeting the duties, and as part of this the university will be alert to matters which might adversely affect the wellbeing of care experienced young people.
   4. The first university plan was approved in October 2016.
2. **The University Vision**
   1. The university are committed to ensuring care experienced young people are fully supported during their time with us, to enable them to successfully complete their course and undergo a worthwhile experience throughout their student journey. This support also extends past graduation with further assistance offered to enhance their career development and ambitions, for life.
   2. In addition to supporting care experienced students, the university also ensures staff across the partnership are provided with training opportunities and materials which will both raise awareness of the difficulties these students may face, and enable them to provide direct practical support.
3. **Corporate Parenting Plan: Consultation and Preparation**
   1. In 2013 the university established a Care Leavers Group, with representation from each academic partner college. Since then, the group has evolved and was renamed as the Priority Groups Forum, with a remit to cover all vulnerable groups including those students who are care experienced.

* 1. In addition to consultation and sharing of ideas and good practice with academic partner staff, university staff regularly attend training events and conferences hosted by CELCIS, Who Cares? Scotland, and the College Development Network, for example. These have been invaluable and provide significant opportunity for discussions with staff from across the FE and HE sector in respect of both care experienced students and Corporate Parenting specifically.

1. **Corporate Parenting Action Plan**
   1. **Management and Delivery of Plan/Outcomes**
      1. With regard to continuous enhancement of provision for care experienced students, the cross-partnership Priority Groups Forum meet bi-annually to share best practice and discuss issues affecting care experienced young people. This helps to ensure equivalence at every academic partner.
      2. In terms of strategic and operational planning, a number of work-streams during the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years have reviewed the current support available for care experienced students and its effect on recruitment, retention, and outcomes, and also identified areas for improvement.
      3. In October 2020, the university sought direct feedback from care experienced students in the form of an anonymous online survey, launched to coincide with National Care Leavers Week. The survey was open for just over a month and heavily promoted, including on cross-partnership social media platforms. There were more than 40 responses, with most indicating that the student had declared their status and was aware of the support on offer and how to access it. This was particularly significant given the survey took place during the Covid19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions, which affected the learning experience of all students. The university was also pleased to note that the majority were happy with their experience and there were no significant areas of concern raised. However, a number of recommendations were added to the Care Experienced Action Plan as a result of comments taken from the survey. Going forward, the survey will be run on an annual basis.
      4. During the 19/20 academic year the university also undertook a mapping exercise, based on the 2019 CELCIS report and its recommendations. The exercise reviewed the institution’s current position against those recommendations, and involved every academic partner individually. The final report showed the university as whole was performing strongly in its support for this group, and a small number of areas where this could be strengthened were identified and subsequently reviewed by the Priority Groups Forum.
      5. With regard to relevant training for university and academic partner staff, the internally created online Corporate Parenting module is now mandatory across the partnership.
   2. **Raising Aspirations and Pre-Entry Outreach**
      1. To raise awareness of the support services available for care experienced students, the [Care Leavers section](https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/inclusive/care-leavers/) of the university website is regularly updated. This provides full details of the support available both centrally and at academic partner level, contact details, related videos, and links to external organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland. During the Covid19 pandemic, it also displayed links to up to date external guidance specific to care experienced students.
      2. In addition, the dedicated [Corporate Parenting webpage](https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/inclusive/care-leavers/corporate-parenting/) outlines for students what corporate parenting is and has links to the university Corporate Parenting Plan, in English and Gaelic, along with copies of individual academic partner Corporate Parenting Plans. By providing this information online, care experienced students are able to access it wherever they are based and whilst protecting their privacy. Since 2018 students can also access the Corporate Parenting reports, produced every 3 years, for the university and its academic partners.
   3. **Application**
      1. With regard to university Admissions processes, students who declare care experience at the time of application are flagged on the data management system and the application form marked. This ensures the interviewer/decision maker is aware of the student’s situation and can take this into consideration.
      2. The university have a [Contextualised Admissions policy and practice](https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/studying-at-uhi/first-steps/admissions/) to formalise the existing inclusive approach to admissions. This means that contextualised data provided on an application form is used to assess an applicant’s prior attainment and potential to succeed in higher education in the context of the circumstances in which their attainment has been obtained, if they do not meet the standard entry requirements for the course. In addition, a wide range of equivalent qualifications is accepted and the university recognises there are a variety of routes through which qualifications may be gained and ways in which readiness for higher education study may be demonstrated.
      3. The data below shows an increase in the number of care experienced students enrolling with the university, with the highest proportion studying at FE level;

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Academic Year** | **FE** | **HE** | **Total** |
| 2017/18 | 254 | 108 | 362 |
| 2018/19 | 327 | 93 | 420 |
| 2019/20 | 641 | 113 | 754 |
| 2020/21 (as of Nov 20) | 371 | 122 | 493 |

* 1. **Pre-entry**
     1. To ensure care experienced students have timely information regarding funding for HE courses, the university maintain a [funding section](https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/studying-at-uhi/first-steps/how-much-will-it-cost/funding-your-studies/bursaries-and-scholarships/winter-covid-hardship-fund/application-form/) on the website which provides full details of the financial support available. The information includes individual bursary schemes, internal and external, and the university’s Discretionary and Childcare funds. A link to the webpage can be found on the dedicated Care Leavers section of the website.
     2. To provide assistance prior to enrolment, care experienced students are encouraged to access the online [Essential Student Skills](https://induction.uhi.ac.uk/) resource. This provides information on the university, and includes elements such as thinking about learning, collaborative learning, and new to blended learning, all of which are specific to pre-entry.
     3. For accommodation, the university has an arrangement with Cityheart Living (Scotland) Ltd to provide student residences at a number of locations across the region. As part of this, the university have an agreement in place to ensure 365 day accommodation for care experienced students. The university have further agreed to act as guarantor for care experienced students with regard to accommodation, if their local authority is unable to do so.
  2. **On Course Support**
     1. All university students have access to a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) to provide academic support and guidance as well as signposting for additional support services. The university Student Services Team coordinate the support and training available for Personal Academic Tutors based across the network which includes an annual Development Day, and on a number of occasions agenda items for the day have included a session on support for care experienced students.
     2. The online [Essential Student Skills](https://induction.uhi.ac.uk/) resource is available to all students and the interactive modules can be accessed at all stages of their journey, using timescales which best suit their needs. This can provide useful support and guidance for care experienced students and can make the process of entering university a less daunting experience. Full details of the resource, and a link to access it, are on the university Care Leavers webpage.
     3. Depending on the need of the student, a Learning Support Plan may be implemented which will outline the necessary adjustments to support them during studies and will take into account any external commitments or challenges.

* + 1. In terms of pastoral support, the university facilitated the creation of an [online counselling service](https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/online-counselling/) which may be accessed by students from across the partnership. This provides additional support for care experienced students wherever they are located. Students also have free access to an external resource, [Togetherall](https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/support-for-your-wellbeing-and-mental-health/togetherall/), which provides anonymous mental health support and is available 24/7.
    2. Once students have completed their journey with the university, it is important that they have the same opportunity as their peers to celebrate their success. To help alleviate any financial impediment to this, in 2019 the university introduced a bursary to support care experienced students with any costs related to participation in graduation ceremonies. This is available across the partnership and includes gown hire, photography, and travel and accommodation. It was noted in a Parliamentary Motion, and the university is one of the first in Scotland to introduce such a bursary.
  1. **Communication**
     1. The online Corporate Parenting training module has over time raised awareness amongst all staff of the legislative duties and, importantly, of the challenges faced by care experienced students.
     2. For care experienced students, the support available to them is regularly promoted on social media channels and also the university’s main landing page, MyDay, which all students access when logging-in. The university and its academic partners also promote and interact with key local and national events, using them to highlight the internal and external support available.
     3. From 2021/22 onwards, there will be an additional section in the mandatory Consent page of the Enrolment Form which asks care experienced students two questions to gain their consent, or not, to being contacted to discuss any support needs and/or to receive specific information or details of events. This will ensure this group continue to be sufficiently supported whilst also adhering to current GDPR legislation.
  2. **Monitoring of Plan/Outcomes**
     1. This is the second report to provide information regarding the university Corporate Parenting Plan and the actions within it. The Plan is monitored and reviewed on an annual basis, with reporting taking place every three years in line with Government requirements.
     2. The Priority Groups Forum continue to have a standing agenda item to discuss support for care experienced students. This is also monitored and reviewed outside of the work of the group, by the undertaking of additional processes such as the annual survey and the recent mapping exercise.
     3. At a senior management level, in 2020 the University Court requested an update on activities currently undertaken with this group of students, as a result of the publication of the SFC National Ambition for Care Experienced Students.
     4. An annual report on the support for care experienced students is also produced by the university Student Support Manager, which is sent to key internal groups for noting.

1. **Conclusion**
   1. The ongoing work undertaken since 2013 has been with the aim of ensuring care experienced students have access to all the support they need, which will allow them to make the most of their time at the university and achieve their full potential.
   2. Through specific actions in the Corporate Parenting Plan the target is to increase the number of care experienced students at the university and improve retention and outcomes. University staff also continue to work closely with external agencies such as CELCIS, Who Cares? Scotland, and the College Development Network to achieve these objectives.
   3. By ensuring all university and academic partner staff complete the mandatory training module, this raises awareness of the difficulties care experienced students may face and enhances the support available. Work within the Priority Groups Forum continues to share best practice across the partnership and ensure equivalence of experience no matter where the student may be based, including remote and rural learning centres and online distance learners.
   4. The university remain sympathetic to the fact that some young people do not wish to draw attention to their care experienced status, for numerous complex reasons, and as such not all applicants may declare their status prior to enrolment. However, students have the opportunity to do so at any point during their academic journey either by speaking to their Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) or any member of support or academic staff, and this can then be updated on their live records. There is also a significant amount of support available online which can be easily accessed by care experienced students whilst maintaining their privacy, and this information is clearly promoted via links from the Care Leavers webpage as well as through support staff.
   5. By supporting the work of staff at the academic partner colleges and by liaising with key Admissions staff the university are steadily increasing the number of care experienced young people applying for our courses. The provision of FE courses at some academic partner colleges is key to this, as care experienced students have the opportunity to progress to degree courses and postgraduate study whilst based at the same campus.
   6. The university is proud of the continued work to enhance the experience of our students who have been in care. The desire is not only to encourage and inspire greater numbers of care experienced young people to enrol on our courses but also to ensure they have access to all the support they require to accomplish their academic and personal goals. The university will continue to strive to remove any barriers they currently face and it is our expectation that future reports will continue clearly reflect the achievements and outcomes of the actions in our Plan on enrolment, retention, and positive destinations for these students.

1. Scottish Government (published annually) *Children’s Social Work Statistics*, Edinburgh; Meltzer, H, et al (2004) *The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland*, London: TSO. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)