



University of Worcester Care Leavers Plan

Introduction & Context

1. The University of Worcester has a rich and diverse population of students and staff and we recognise the enormous benefits this brings to the student experience at Worcester. Whilst we develop our policy and practice across the all areas of the Institution's work to reflect this, we are aware that for some of the most vulnerable groups of students it is necessary to go beyond this and to clearly define the support in place for them.
2. We recognise that although care leavers are a distinct group this Plan would also benefit a range of other potentially vulnerable students, including:
 - Young People leaving care;
 - Older students who are care-experienced;
 - Students estranged from their families;
 - Young Carers;
 - Students with caring responsibilities;
 - Asylum seekers and those seeking leave to remain in the UK.
3. Therefore, although throughout this Plan we refer to 'care leavers' we should recognise the potential for positive impact for all of these groups.
4. Members of these groups face unique challenges and have unique support needs in relation to HE progression. For example, participation rates in Higher Education for young people leaving care are xx %, significantly lower than the next most underrepresented groups.
5. Attainment rates amongst this group are also much lower than for other young people in the same geographic areas and schools (OFFA 2016¹). This is often a reflection of disrupted learning. Students clearly need support at all points in their learning journey:
 - Attainment
 - Aspiration raising and information advice and guidance
 - Application, selection and transition
 - Student success
 - Progression

¹ www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance-and-usefulinformation/topic-briefings/

6. Whilst care leavers and other potentially vulnerable groups may have specific needs the principles underpinning this plan are based upon the broad definitions of inclusion and the ability for all students to achieve to their highest potential. As such, the Plan is closely related to the University Strategy (2013-18) which states that:

We aim to select and admit highly motivated students who will benefit from the educational experience we offer, and who will go on to make a full contribution to society, inspired by commitment to the principles of social inclusion. We believe that opening up access to higher education is a fundamental university objective and is one of the key contributions that the University of Worcester makes to public benefit. (p.18)

7. We recognise that currently such students can experience particular difficulties at various times throughout their engagement with the University and are often limited through their individual past experiences. This Plan therefore outlines proposals that will enable movement from our current position to a point where we are removing unnecessary barriers for these, and potentially all, students.
8. This Plan therefore outlines the student journey and details interventions, support packages, amendments to Institutional policy and practice, staff development and communications as applicable.

The Current Situation

9. In order to understand these groups of students better, the University currently participates in the following local forums:
 - Virtual School group
 - Young Voices Forum
 - Foster care Matters (facilitators)
 - Care leaver's consultation group
10. These groups are essential in advising and supporting the strategic approach and positive implementation of the support we offer to care leavers and therefore developing our work with partners, statutory bodies, third sector support organisations and young carers directly will remain underpinning principles as we take things forward.
11. The University Outreach Team and the team of Graduate Ambassadors have a programme of support specifically aimed at supporting care leavers. These programmes are developed in consultation with partners from the Local Authority's "Looked After Children" Team and work alongside the Virtual School. Activities include academic support, summer schools, academic mentoring, a parent support programme and specific information, advice and guidance.
12. This Plan therefore aims to tackle underlying issues either of process, provision of information and/or practice that can impact upon these students' participation, progression and success. Achievement of the objectives will, through even more focused efforts to ensure inclusion, be beneficial to all students.

Objectives

13. The key objectives of this Plan are to:

- Contribute to ensuring that a greater proportion of care leavers progress to HE;
- Ensure that those students succeed academically at the University of Worcester; and
- Realise their full potential in all areas of their personal development.

14. Specifically, we wish to:

- Increase the number of care leavers entering the University of Worcester;
- See care leavers participating fully in all that the University has to offer;
- Close the gap in attainment for care leavers;
- Maximise the success of care leavers in progressing beyond University onto graduate employment and/or postgraduate study.

15. To achieve this objective the following will form our Key Strategic priorities:

- Proactively engage with care leavers prior to their making the decisions about university;
- Develop, implement and test appropriate and innovative support interventions;
- Review existing practice and policy to ensure these are fit for purpose;
- Communicate effectively so that care leavers are able to understand what support will be available to them at each stage of their higher education engagement;
- Maximise the relevance of the support offered to care leavers to increase engagement by vulnerable students with support offered at the University;
- Commit appropriate resource to embedding this work across the Institution.

Actions

Continuing current activity

The University will continue its participation in the forums listed above and, in addition, will nominate a representative to attend the West Midlands Care Leavers Forum.

Web site

16. For care leavers the information available online is often the most influential in making their decisions about Higher Education. Research amongst care leavers suggests that they use the search term 'care leaver' in their initial contact with the website. It is essential in our communications with Care Leavers that we ensure that all of the information which is relevant to them is contained in a single place and that a single term search enables them to access the full breadth of information on all aspects of the support we offer.

We will create new webpages specifically for care leavers that contains in a single place all of the information that they are likely to require. This information will be developed in consultation with care leavers and other groups of vulnerable students to ensure it has the maximum effect to enable the student's decision making process and provides clarity about the support on offer and how students access it.

17. The web presence should also be attractive in both visual appearance and language. The University Care Leavers Forum (which includes care leavers) will regularly review the web

content and Forum Chair (see below) will work with the University's Communications and Participation team to ensure that information is accessible, appropriate and effective.

Care Leavers Advocate

18. Offering support for care leavers in a consistent and meaningful way must be a priority for the University.

We will provide a named individual (Care Leavers Advocate) for each care leaver who makes themselves known to the University.

We will establish a Care Leavers Forum for both Advocates and care leavers themselves to discuss and develop the support provided.

19. Wherever possible the Advocate should be a 'good fit' for the prospective student. This means that we will draw staff from across the Institution to participate in a scheme of support and mentoring. There are many members of staff who will be able to offer a very high standard of support, who have a genuine desire to support vulnerable students and who bring a wealth of experience in addition to their role within the University. Staff in academic or professional support roles in any area of the Institution will be eligible to apply for the voluntary Advocate position.
20. The University will offer training and support to participating staff and ongoing peer mentoring between participants.
21. The Care Leavers Forum will be chaired by an Institutional lead nominated by the Pro Vice Chancellor Students.
22. The Forum will draw membership from:
 - Admissions Office;
 - Student Services;
 - Academic institutes;
 - Students Union;
 - Facilities;
 - Specialist staff and researchers;
 - Care leavers currently or previously studying at UW.
23. The Forum will meet at least twice in an academic year.
24. The Forum will drive forward the work of the Institution in relation to care leavers, supporting staff working with students and ensuring that the student voice and the experience of students is used effectively to develop policy and practice.

Application selection and Transition

Aspiration and attainment raising

25. In addition to our targeted Outreach approach (as outlined above) we will:

Ensure that the Care Leavers Advocate will be available for potential applicants who wish to visit the University for an Open Day or other University-based visit.

Provide online mentoring support.

26. The Advocate will be allocated to the student as an initial contact and will act as a first point of contact for information about travel arrangements, what to expect from the Open Day/University visit and how they might get the most out of the visit. If the student wishes to follow this up through a mentoring arrangement this will be provided either with the existing contact or another Advocate.

Application support

27. The University Outreach Team and specialist staff can provide pre-entry information, advice and guidance via a series of workshops for local care leavers interested in applying to Higher Education. These workshops can also be made available at UW Open Days or other University-based visits or events where feasible.

The Advocate will arrange for this as part of Open Day visits or provide information about available workshops.

The Advocate will be available to the student throughout the application process in order to provide support and guidance on the process, including, if needed, assistance in preparing personal statements.

Care Leavers Advocate to help students prepare for successful entry interviews including, if desired, direct contact with admissions tutors.

28. These measures aim to ensure the student is well informed about the support offered at UW in order to encourage them to include their care status on their UCAS application (thereby making it easier to offer continued support).

The University will use contextual data when making offers to students who identify as care leavers.

If the student is successful in gaining an offer from UW the student will be contacted by a dedicated care leaver support team member. The student will then work with the Advocate to identify any ongoing support needs.

29. Where we are made aware of care leaver status or other specific need the University can use this information (supported by evidence as appropriate) in deciding an offer to study. This may mean making a reduced offer and/or providing additional support in order to assist the applicant to attain the necessary pre-entry grades or qualifications.

30. Ongoing support needs might include:

- Organisation of accommodation (see below);
- Study skills enhancement;
- Financial planning including how to access available financial support packages;
- Mental health or wellbeing;
- Identifying potential arising issues that may impact on successful completion of the programme of study;
- Advice on part-time work and placements;

- Independent living skills.

Transition Support

We will ensure that care leavers have guaranteed year-round University accommodation from entry up to and including graduation.

We will provide a peer mentor from the student body to support settling in to University life.

We will provide care leavers with access to essential living items upon arrival at University

We will create a tailored programme for care leavers aimed at building confidence and skills attainment

31. Care leavers may be leaving foster placements that are not easily accessible after leaving for University. Other care leavers may have no fixed address outside of the University and would therefore otherwise need to seek temporary accommodation outside of the academic year which may well be unsuitable for their needs.
32. A peer mentor will help to ensure that care leavers are able to engage successfully in University life from arrival. The University also recognises that for those students who remain on campus outside of normal studying time there is a need to ensure that opportunities to remain active in University life continue and this can be facilitated by the Care Leavers Forum.
33. Care leavers may leave their accommodation from the age of 16 and may not have the support available to advise on essential living needs. The Bottom Drawer Project aims to provide this advice and support or, if required, to provide students with, for example, bedding, towels, cooking equipment and utensils.

Enabling Student Success

The Care Leavers Advocate will, throughout the care leaver's time at University, support and advocate for the student where necessary. Such support will include, for example, assisting students with mitigating circumstances claims, academic progression and signposting for personal support needs.

We will provide a prospective application form for exceptional mitigating circumstances based on their specific care leaver-related needs.

We will offer support to students to engage with ongoing financial planning and financial support.

For students who do not intend to stay in University accommodation, but who need to be in Worcester outside of normal study periods (eg. on placements), we will either provide advice on accommodation or negotiate with the student about the placement requirements.

The above accommodation offer will also apply where a student undertakes reassessment or otherwise needs to extend their programme of study.

Progression

Care leavers may need specific assistance with recognising opportunities for further study or employment whilst at the University.

We will facilitate internships for care leavers, helping them to identify and apply for such positions.

We will provide advice and guidance on postgraduate study and assist with application.

We will provide tailored careers advice, guidance and support based on individual need.

Communication

The University recognises that care leavers may not have a permanent address and it may be more effective to receive and send communications via the internet.

We will, upon request, communicate with care leavers via web-based applications where reasonably possible.

We will ensure that information on the care leavers webpages will include information and support for staff (including Advocates), for external professional support workers and for parents/former guardians and that this will be updated as appropriate.

Staff development

Staff development for specialist support services and for wellbeing / care leaver support staff, training and support for staff within Institutes will be provided.

Implementation, management and review

Responsibility for implementation of this Plan will sit with the office of the Pro Vice Chancellor Students.

The Plan will be reviewed annually as part of the University Access Agreement monitoring process; it will also be part of a longer term Institutional research and evaluation process which supports UW's evidence-based approach to policy development.

A named Institutional contact for Care Leavers will be nominated by the Pro Vice Chancellor
Students who will have operational responsibility for ensuring that all elements of the Plan and the associated actions herein are developed and maintained effectively.