

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN COLLEGES ACHIEVING THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK

Section 1: Raising aspirations and pre-entry
outreach

August 2015



Ariennir yn Rhannol gan
Lywodraeth Cymru

Part Funded by
Welsh Government



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Published by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales)

21 De Montfort Street

Leicester LE1 7GE

Company registration no. 2603322

Charity registration no. 1002775

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SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION: A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN COLLEGES ACHIEVING THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK

SECTION 1: RAISING ASPIRATIONS AND PRE-ENTRY OUTREACH

1.1. 'Develop effective links with local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts and others to ensure that care experienced young people know about and can access FE provision'

- **Partnerships and networks are absolutely key**

For example, East Kent College and Wakefield College participate actively in regional groups of key stakeholders as do many other colleges. This both promotes good practice by sharing information and builds better relationships between educational institutions and with other key organisations – for example, local authorities, Health and Social Care Trusts and charities.

- **Data sharing protocols are crucial to success and to maintaining effective information exchanges across organisations and through changes of staff**

For example, Neath Port Talbot College (NPTC) Group regularly reviews and updates its protocol with the local authority; the time spent on this allows for an evaluation process on what works and makes sure that new staff are on board. Regular reviews mean that everyone concerned is reminded of its importance, this reinforces the close working relationship between all the key agencies.

- **A multi-agency approach for larger colleges**

Peterborough Regional College developed strong collaboration with local authorities and other organisations, supporting learners pre and post 16 with protocols/data sharing agreements. This included the ongoing identification of learners from looked-after backgrounds pre-application, entry and on-programme.

Derby College, one of the biggest colleges in England, attracts learners from Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire, requiring communication with all those local authorities and with other local stakeholders including local large employers. A multi-agency approach, including the work of the intervention team, is essential. The designated person was previously a multi-agency officer for the local authority and so brings into the role that deep knowledge of the other agencies locally which work with vulnerable young people and adults within Derby and Derbyshire. 'Key to our support for the learners here is that link with the external agencies' he said.

- **Good practice includes the work done prior to application, in schools and elsewhere including taster days and other outreach events**

At Forth Valley College staff visit schools, residential care homes, foster carers, and 'Throughcare' and 'Aftercare' services to share information on studying at the college and to answer any questions. The college has an extensive list of external contacts who work with looked after young people or care leavers (LAYP/CL) and uses these to promote the college's support.

- **A multi-media approach to provide information and raise awareness about extra support**

Websites and leaflets highlight that extra support is available for care leavers in many colleges. For example, Forth Valley College's Marketing Department has produced two information [leaflets](#) aimed specifically at LAYP/CL applicants and associated external contacts. These leaflets direct LAYP/CL applicants to support from Learner Advisers and provide a checklist of support available:

- Named staff member for care leavers
- Financial advice and support
- Information on our website for care leavers
- Priority processing for funding
- Pre-application help
- Help in organising childcare or transportation
- Guaranteed interview if entry requirements met
- Progression and career support

These leaflets are used at open days/evenings, for visits to schools and residential homes, and are given to external contacts at stakeholder meetings.

Many colleges have recognised that it is important to put clear and easily accessible information for young people with care experience on their websites ([Hugh Baird College](#), [NPTC Group](#) and [Northbrook College](#)). This also enables foster carers and other key professionals to look at the same information as the young people in their care and play a role in encouraging their participation, reassuring them or checking they have understood the support on offer.

There is further support available from The Who Cares? Trust who have published handbooks for FE and HE: An HE handbook for care leavers in [England](#) and [Scotland](#); an [FE Handbook for Scotland](#); and a [joint FE and HE Handbook for Wales](#).

The Who Cares? Trust is currently working on a new [online version of a UK wide Handbook](#) which will be available in autumn 2015.

- **Promoting and running additional outreach activities to ease transition**

Forth Valley College runs a summer school, to ease the transition to study at college, allowing potential students to meet other students in similar situations and get to know their key workers in college. This helps to bridge the gap for those who are or have been in the care system between leaving school and going to college, and engages potential students in positive activity over the summer, which can prove a

difficult time for some looked after young people as there may be little structure or positive activity in their life once school is over. The summer school is 'sold' on the basis that it may increase a potential student's likelihood of their being accepted onto the college course they would like to attend. It consists of team building activities and tasters, a chance to meet college staff and familiarise themselves with the college buildings and facilities, and check out what support is available.

Many Colleges run special taster days or even longer programmes (such as Neath Port Talbot College Group / Belfast Metropolitan College / Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT)). Some colleges have run taster days tailored for one individual or a small group to ensure that all potential students will be ready to start with the others at the beginning of term. Some colleges organise meetings with schools, carers and other professionals as well as with the potential student; these may happen before or after the summer schools or taster days.

- **Peer mentoring**

'We refer each other to the student support team. Like if we find out that there's another student in our position we send them to talk to the team.'

Many colleges have found that young people from a care background can be very effective mentors for others. In some areas, looked after young people may already know each other as they may meet in other forums or from school, so can help encourage others into college, and support them while there.

- **Student involvement / Learner voice**

Involving foster carers and social workers in outreach activity is important - and often previous students from a care background are included in the outreach or summer school activity, as role models and to encourage participation. This learner voice is often more effective than anything the college staff can say.

'Being in care, though seen as a bad thing by a lot of people, has opened so many doors for me.'

NPTC Group and Glasgow Kelvin College are clear about the importance of placing the experience of the care leaver/looked after young person at the centre of the activity and in ensuring that their voice is heard. Building a relationship of trust, based on mutual respect, is paramount. Young people are often involved in planning their college experiences as well as feeding back; taster workshops and away days can help with this.

- **Colleges recognise the importance of an approach which meets the student's needs in a personalised way – supporting anonymity**

'I don't want to stand out or be treated differently - so I don't want to have to be called out to a meeting during class time.'

'I didn't like to tell anyone I was in care, maybe if I did tell people then I might have found making friends harder.'

Some young people need travel expenses, to attend taster days for example, so a good understanding of the support required across the board is needed. At the NPTC Group this awareness is developed from the good relationship with the local authority and other key players, both to avoid double funding and use college or other resources in the most effective way, whilst ensuring that the care leavers in receipt of financial support are not able to be identified by other students. At some colleges, including Hugh Baird College, bursaries and entitlements are loaded onto a card - so that all students are having the same kind of card swiped at cafeteria tills.

- **Partnership approaches to target the hardest to reach young people**

In South Wales, the NPTC Group works in partnership with the local leaving care team and other partners. This has enabled the college to ensure that young people in and out of care have opportunities to engage with and access opportunities at the college, particularly those that are hard to reach or 'NEET'- not in education, employment or training. Together the partnership actively promotes visits to the college, tasters, and also activities such as a Learner Voice day and induction events. These may be held off site to encourage participation in a non-threatening location. The college works closely with the local Youth Service to engage those young people that have disengaged from mainstream education and taster sessions are arranged to actively re-engage them. Amongst these learners are looked after children whose personal circumstances have had an impact on attendance and engagement within the mainstream education setting.

- **Provision of impartial advice and guidance**

The NPTC Group's Learner Services Team work closely with the designated person and Social Services to ensure that young people get all the advice and guidance they need, and the Designated Person arranges specialist advice from internal staff and external partners when needed. In addition, Careers Wales have staff based at the college who work closely with the Designated Person to ensure that young people from this cohort have access to impartial advice and guidance.

1.2. 'Develop effective links with local authorities / Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that data and information is shared effectively with students, potential students and their supporters and carer'

- **A robust system for information sharing within partnerships**

Derby College maintains a robust system with Derby City Council for vulnerable learners including care leavers, holding monthly learner meetings with a representative from the local authority multi-agency team, where information is shared about how the learners are progressing and what support has been put in place outside of the college. The emphasis is on ensuring learners are happy at college, achieving their potential and being able to achieve and progress beyond the college. The college also holds separate meetings within the college, with the learner present - especially if the learner needs extra support. The college also works to ensure that packages of support are in place to enable the learner to stay at the college. This can include transport arrangements, ensuring that the learner has the opportunity to get extra support - pastoral or academic.

- **Replacing negative, stereotypical language with sensitive and proactive language**

Hugh Baird College gathers all the necessary support information at the same time as enrolment, providing learners with help to complete forms if needed. Rather than use terms like 'vulnerable bursary', the college has developed its own scheme the 'Individual Costing Action Plan' or ICAP - and all the support flows through this. At the same time a key member of staff is allocated to each student through the ICAP scheme - and this also helps to avoid drawing further attention to the looked after young person later in the process - because they have already met this person separately and know it is them that they can contact.

- **A support team of staff who are easily identified, accessible and have varied responsibilities**

'My personal tutor is great but even more important are the [student support team] - without them I wouldn't still be coming to college.'

At NPTC Group finance staff and other support staff are all seen as part of the 'team' working with care leavers and looked after young people. This is also true at West Highland College UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands), where the student support services are immediately accessible near the front door of the college. Again this means that students can quickly access support, and because this support is not specified, and finance or support staff are needed by all students, their status is not revealed by them seeking support in those spaces.

Many colleges mentioned the importance of the clear identification of all staff so that students know who to ask for help as soon as they start at college. Typically, colleges use an information leaflet and then repeat that information on college walls and notice boards using the same staff photographs and colours. These staff, who will previously have met the students from care backgrounds, can then 'hover' on enrolment day and can be seen by the student without having to acknowledge that they have met before.

Different approaches might also be needed; for example, if most sixth form attendance is at the same college as the FE provision, such as at NPTC Group, or where high numbers of students are attracted from well outside the immediate local authority area such as at Sheffield College, then information and outreach has to be adapted.

- **Scotland – Community Engagement Groups**

The West Highland College UHI has developed a strong collaborative partnership with the Highland Council's Resource Manager for Looked After Children, and in particular with Barnardo's Scotland, Lifestyles and Action for Children in order to establish provision and support to reduce the number of young people between 16-19 who are NEET. Some voluntary organisations and other providers are based in the college's main building. Further working partnership agreements are in place between all 9 High Schools within Lochaber and Skye and Wester Ross catchment areas. These are managed by Learning Centre Managers locally and the Student

Services Manager at West Highland College UHI. Here, Community Engagement Groups exist in each college location, to act as a representative body from the local community, to strengthen community links and inform college provision, as well as raising awareness of college activities to a wider range of stakeholders including employers.

- **England - The role of Virtual Schools**

In England, Virtual Schools can play an effective role and one example of this is the Staffordshire / Stoke on Trent FE Network for looked after children. The Virtual Schools have spearheaded this network, with termly meetings where knowledge can be shared - what is going on in both schools and colleges around looked after children, as well as information sharing about changes in legislation, behaviour, education and other policy arenas. This enables draft protocols to be put in place and ensures that information gets out to looked after children; everyone is thus focused on the looked after young person or the young person making the transition from care. All of the colleges in the area implement this [protocol](#).

1.3. 'Effectively publicise the support the institution offers to potential students with a care background, their carers and those colleagues in local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts, residential homes, schools and other organisations who are supporting them in their educational progression'

- **Including local authorities as parents**

Peterborough College holds a 'Welcome to Peterborough Regional College' event, to ensure the right support is given from the outset. This event is for local authorities, foster parents, carers and the young people to provide information and raise aspirations. It incorporates support with applications, IAG/study/career progression information, transition and on-programme support, services available, key college contacts and help with completing applications for bursary. The calendar of enrichment activities and parent evening letters are sent to local authorities to ensure everyone is aware of these events.

At West Highland College, when a young person discloses that they are from a cared for background an appointment is made to meet immediately with an information and guidance officer. This meeting will provide specific information on courses in order to enable the young person to make informed decisions and aid applications for entry to and progression to study options at FE/HE level. For looked after or care leaving students who make such appointments, follow up phone calls are made to confirm their understanding of the points covered and to assess if any other information or support is required for the student to be able to make an informed choice.

- **Clear and accessible information on website**

Some colleges have clear and accessible information for carers and looked after young people on their website. [Hugh Baird College](#), [NPTC Group](#) and [Northbrook College](#) all have this kind of link, for example. The website should include the name and contact detail of the designated member of staff so that care leavers, local

authorities, foster carers, etc, know who to contact for advice and information. This ensures that the young people can gain access to information without declaring their status or that those who support them can also find out more. As well as showing the kinds of support that care leavers can expect and ensuring that they know they are welcome at the college, it is also made clear that care leavers know that their details will not be disclosed without their permission.