

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

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

Section 2: Application, entry and induction

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SECTION 2: APPLICATION, ENTRY AND INDUCTION

2.1 'Identify a designated member of staff to act as a key point of contact and advisor for children and young people in care / care leavers to provide support prior to and on entry. Ensure the contact details for the designated member of staff are easily accessible'

'The fact that I can go and talk to [designated person] at any time is really important - she has become a really important person for me. She showed me around the college before I started and she is my main link person.'

▪ **The role of the designated member of staff – different approaches**

The role of the designated member of staff within the college varies; some have a curriculum manager, others a senior member of the support staff, such as the senior safeguarding officer or the senior learning support manager. The role the designated member of staff plays also depends on which of the four UK nations they are working in. While all colleges interviewed have a designated member of staff it is interesting to note the different roles, status and job titles of the person. Some providers have student support teams that cover a range of areas and students are allocated one named worker who they can seek out first, but others are also there in the event that the named person is unavailable. Hugh Baird College for example, has a range of people supporting students entitled to bursaries which forms the entry point for their access to support. Care leavers/looked after young people are met before they start their course. The people they have met from student support are clearly visible on enrolment day, but do not approach the young people directly.

Other good examples of how the student support team works as a whole can be found in many colleges including Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) and Neath Port Talbot College (NPTC) Group.

At Northbrook College, students are introduced very early in the year to the designated member of staff. She emails care leavers/looked after young people, letting them know who she is and what she can offer, stressing that she will not 'push herself on to them' but is there to help if they need it. She believes that if you try to overdevelop the relationship then the learners back away. Students with care experience want to be perceived as 'just the same', they want to get on with their lives, gain qualifications, get to work and get a home; they want to 'start their lives'. Northbrook has all the support mechanisms in place and highlights them but the college does not draw attention to the learners - and doesn't make assumptions about them.

'If you talk to someone you feel like a weight's been lifted off your shoulders.'

2.2. 'Have in place methods of identifying applicants from care and establish contact with them as appropriate'

- **Begin to identify well in advance of application, encouraging disclosure**

As far as possible colleges try to work well in advance of application to identify and support possible care leavers intending to attend college the following year. At South Staffordshire College for example, the FE Network is vital in helping to identify applicants from care beforehand. Most of this is illustrated in the sections above, but there are some issues which still emerge at enrolment or even well after, especially where a care leaver arrives at the college from out of area, or does not claim any support. The right of a student not to disclose their status is paramount. If someone has not disclosed the issue may emerge at the point where a student either has some difficulties or is apparently unable to attend part of the course, such as a trip, or when a financial need is disclosed.

Hugh Baird College and NPTC Group, for example, work hard in the run-up to enrolment to ensure that application forms are fully completed by all students so that any students who might need extra support are able to be reassured. Many students need support in completing the form, particularly in understanding the implications of disclosing or not disclosing information.

2.3. 'Ensure information on the full range of support offered to applicants, their carers and professionals supporting them is readily available and easily accessible (financial, welfare and accommodation, academic) e.g. via dedicated website pages, leaflets, etc'

'I need to know about extra help that's available.'

- **Potential for referral to support from any contact students make**

Communications across college need to be developed so that there are potential referral points from all contacts the students have. Hugh Baird College believes that care leavers themselves guide the process for support, and so the process must begin with any member of staff that a care leaver/looked after young person chooses to talk to.

- **Regular reminders of support available for students and staff**

West Highland College UHI offer their support through a comprehensive set of opportunities for students. Drop in sessions are available for all students and individual appointments are made with the Student Services Team to discuss funding options and any concerns of a financial nature prior to their course start date and throughout the student journey. Looked after young people and care leaver students are reminded of the date and time of their appointment by text message the day before the appointment. All students are sent letters and information leaflets advising of the process for applying for funding and dates of pre course drop in sessions. Pre induction, individual interviews and information leaflets are made available. Signage and posters are available in libraries/cafes/student areas in all college centres. Information is included in the student handbook. One to one

surgeries with the Funding Officer are held for one month after courses start and are advertised throughout the college. The Funding Team is placed within the Student Services Office and is available at all times for students to drop in. Regular reminders are made of support available through the college social media sites. College staff are made aware during staff development sessions of the support available to students from a care background. The college has produced a useful flowchart which sets out what needs to be done at each stage of the [learner's journey](#).

2.4. 'When determining the support needs for applicants, ensure that the individual's circumstances are reflected in the support offered'

'I feel that I have always got someone to talk to in college if I'm not feeling ok and I know that I won't be judged'

To meet this criteria, colleges are guided mainly by the regulations in place in the particular nation/region or locality. In England this is largely done through bursary assessments, which are usually undertaken at the same time as recruitment. In Scotland, NI and Wales students can claim an educational maintenance allowance (EMA) and some colleges have access through special funds to be able to offer top ups, or through funding for a particular project to support looked after young people.

There is always a relationship between bursary and attendance/attainment so all students in receipt of bursaries are monitored. At Derby College, for example, the support teams become involved if attendance drops below a level deemed acceptable, but the approach to rectifying the problem is tailored to meet the individual needs of the care leaving student, rather than moving quickly to disciplinary. Individual support is essential. One young person who had recently left care spoke about difficulties managing her money. She didn't have enough money to pay for bus fare to the college. Through discussion with the designated member of staff she was directed to a short course on money management at the college and provided with emergency funds in the short term.

Most colleges support care leaver students to be able to claim their allowances and find ways of administering it in flexible ways, that meet the individual's needs. This can include, for example, dividing the bursary into smaller amounts and paying it weekly rather than monthly, to help with budgeting. Travel costs are often directly funded.

2.5. 'Where appropriate offer flexible application arrangements e.g. interview guarantees, activities to keep students engaged with the college until the start of their course, flexible intake dates for courses'

- **Guaranteed places**

At Peterborough College, all applicants are offered an interview and the guarantee that a suitable course will be found for them, if not internally, then through an outward referral to another provider.

- **Timing and summer programmes**

The timing of courses is important. Sheffield and Peterborough Colleges have roll-on roll off programmes and many colleges offer January intakes, while some colleges offer summer programmes (such as Forth Valley College and West Highland College). Some colleges offer early interviews as part of their support to care leaving students and also summer programmes or tasters, which can help students to stay involved and motivated before the start of college term.

- **Pre-entry steps in**

Offers to students/potential students include signposting to other providers of pre-entry programmes or to the college's own programmes. For example, Sheffield College works very closely with Connexions so that looked after young people can be tracked across all the systems, in an effort to ensure that all care leavers have a course place.

2.6. 'Offer transition support before the course starts to help students and their carers feel comfortable with the institution e.g. visits to the college, meeting of staff from support services and academic tutors pre-course'

- **Partnership work to help make choices**

East Kent College reports that transition support through the summer is really important. This is carried out by full time support staff who are committed to building relationships with all the relevant external agencies.

Sheffield College works closely with Connexions so that potential students can gain access to the full offer of advice and guidance to help them make informed choices.

- **An intensive transitions programme**

Glasgow Kelvin College offers a 'Transitions to Learning and Work' programme for learners referred through local authority partners including Glasgow City Council Social Work Services and local schools. This intensive programme provides youth work style learning activities which develop the capacity of young people to work together and to learn, as well as introductory vocational experiences. Learners are supported by both teaching staff and Youth Workers based on the Curriculum for Excellence reforms and the programme is funded by the Big Lottery.

2.7. 'On enrolment ensure that students and staff are supported to ensure that the college experience is positive for care experienced young people and that their needs are met'

- **A dialogue between support and academic staff, providing awareness training**

Like most colleges, Derby College works hard to identify care experienced young people before enrolment. Once the young person does arrive the college builds a dialogue between the intervention team and the academic staff. Providing they give their consent, every care experienced learner is allocated a personal coach

and a named member of the academic staff in the appropriate curriculum area, where the young person is studying.

Training is offered specifically for tutors and those with pastoral care responsibilities at Peterborough Regional College; others, such as Dumfries and Galloway College, offer the support teams awareness training. In general, however, colleges tend to have involved their specialist staff in enrolling and interviewing looked after young people, in advance of the main enrolment days.

Glasgow Kelvin College suggests that learners may need intense support at the beginning and it is worthwhile investing this time at the outset to minimise the risk of later withdrawals or a sense of failure on the part of the learner. The college is clear that it is worth spending as much time as possible with the learner to give them a full college experience.

- **Supporting non-disclosure, making sure ALL students' practical needs are met before starting courses**

'I just want to be the same as other students.'

Some colleges specifically consider a young person's right to non-disclosure - not all care leavers / looked after young people choose to disclose their status, for a range of reasons. Northbrook College insists that it is part of the job of the support staff to ensure that all learners know who to turn to when they need extra support.

At NPTC Group the college support staff ensure that finances are provided for all aspects of a programme. For example, for university visits; sometimes the local authority has a budget for this type of activity, so the importance of working in partnership cannot be over-stressed. Support staff check to ensure that the right budget is being used to support the range of kit and activities the young person needs. Again the focus is on making sure the looked after/care leaving students are not singled out and can carry out activities with their peers.

At Hugh Baird College, the support staff ensure that the student has all the kit they need (tools, protective clothing etc) before the course starts so that they can start on the same day, with the other students.

- **In-kind support such as vouchers, spreading out payments**

Peterborough Regional College states that:

'We continually look for ways to remove barriers so we provide 'in kind support' such as luncheon vouchers and local transport vouchers. Another positive impact are the payments made for the vulnerable bursary. We have tailored these payments to meet the needs of the students. For example, we now make weekly payments throughout the academic year (44 weeks rather than 36 weeks) this prevents financial barriers when returning to study after the half term breaks.'

- **Different approaches to financial support for childcare**

The four nations have slightly different approaches to financial support for childcare. For example in Scotland, at Forth Valley College, looked after young people and care leavers on both FE and HE courses can receive childcare support paid from discretionary funds. Lone parents are awarded 100% of their childcare costs. Students who have a partner will have their costs of childcare means-tested against their household income. Care leaving students will receive information on childcare assistance via e-mail, specific leaflets, through Learner Adviser support, summer school sessions, induction, website and their course handbook.

- **Quick intervention in crisis is key – keeping an open door**

At the NPTC Group, students are encouraged to approach support staff if there are difficulties, or academic staff or personal mentors, if they prefer. The importance of quick intervention is emphasised by East Kent, Sheffield and Peterborough Colleges. Two key points are made: every attempt will be made to ensure the young person can continue to attend college unless it becomes too difficult for them and that secondly the colleges ensure the young people know that, even if they have to withdraw in extreme personal circumstances, they can return to try again the following year.