

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

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

Section 3: Ongoing support

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SECTION 3: ONGOING SUPPORT

3.1. 'A designated member of staff to act as a key point of contact and advisor throughout the duration of the student's course'

- **Single points of contact for management and practical support**

At Belfast Metropolitan College, the Head of Student Support is the single point of contact within the college for the management of queries into the progression of young people from a care background. This post is supported by a learning support officer assigned to care leavers, who is the single point of contact in terms of the operational support and guidance to care experienced students.

- **Single point of contact within a support team**

[Hugh Baird College's](#) cross-college support team and its links with support for other 'vulnerable' or potentially disadvantaged students helps to ensure that there is always one key contact point for learners, with cover if they should not be available.

- **A Learner Adviser**

At Forth Valley College there is a Learner Adviser in each campus, on a duty rota, to support looked after young students with any issues they may encounter while studying at the college such as finance, accommodation, transport, childcare, counselling service referral and signposting to external agencies and partners. The advisors also give advice on progression routes and pre-exit strategies. This is advertised through websites, leaflets, summer school, induction, course handbooks and is shared with all external contacts.

- **Organise regular contact with support staff and pastoral support**

East Kent College organises regular contact between support staff and care leavers. Northbrook College places importance on the role of the pastoral learning mentor. Glasgow Kelvin College approaches pastoral support informally and a relationship of trust is established; 'if they need something specific we try to do that for them', and the impact of this is that young people do stay in touch even when they have left the college.

*'Working towards my degree has been a bit up and down. I had to start again. But, I've just heard that I'm on track for getting a first.'**

*A former FE student with care experience, who keeps in contact with her college.

- **In large colleges, ensure all campuses are covered**

Both Hugh Baird College and Neath Port Talbot College (NPTC) Group have a support team approach but with clear leadership. At NPTC Group there are campuses across more than one geographical area and therefore there is a deputy designated person in one part of Wales, while the lead role is based at the main campus further south.

- **Adapt systems according to the needs of individuals**

An awareness of different care backgrounds is vital in helping practitioners to have a clearer understanding of care leavers' life circumstances. As well as young people coming through the care system in its various guises, different issues may face young people arriving as unaccompanied minors from other countries and this requires the adaptation of support systems accordingly.

'My recommendation to other colleges is... have all the support mechanisms in place but don't draw attention to the learners - and don't make assumptions about the learners - it's not always a struggle to keep them in college.'

3.2. 'Financial support for the learner is in place throughout their time at college and includes support for progression and the student's continuing learning post-19'

- **Work with local authority staff to negotiate financial support**

East Kent College stresses the need for close working relationships with the staff of partners and NPTC Group found that negotiation with social workers about the provision of financial support was helpful.

- **Quick access to vulnerable learners bursary**

Northbrook College recommends that the bursaries should be well-organised, and put into place very quickly; students getting access to money is key to the young person attending college; colleges report that for some it is the bursary that persuades them to stay in education; without the bursary, they could not consider a college place. Financial issues put a real pressure on care experienced (and other) young people to get a job as soon as possible - sometimes because they would like to gain greater independence and have control over their lives.

- **Resolving accommodation difficulties on transition to HE**

It is important to ensure that any gaps in support are covered, such as through the holiday periods, as this can help ensure that students return to college to complete their courses. Wakefield College and other institutions in the West Yorkshire network have found that providing lockable storage for some students can make a big difference if the students have nowhere safe to store their belongings. A potentially difficult time for students who are progressing to HE can be the summer before they start their university course - they may not have adequate housing during this time.

- **Addressing key 'flash points' and 'pressure points'**

Belfast Metropolitan College tries to ensure additional support from the key worker at any key 'flash points', such as the return from holidays. Others identify that support is needed around assessment times and other pressure points. Some colleges pay travel expenses through purchasing bus passes so that transport costs can be covered. At NPTC Group's most northern campus, all activities have to conclude before the final bus of the day (at 4pm). Looked after young people/care leavers may be particularly vulnerable to transport problems as they lack other support or may be unfamiliar with local geography.

Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) offers post-19 support to care leavers who were not disclosing; the college looked for information to identify young people as care leavers from MIS data. They ensure that the application and enrolment forms have a box to tick that shows if anyone is coming from a care experience background. This still does not identify those who choose not to disclose information but it has improved the college's work with care leavers.

3.3. 'With the consent of the learner, agree a protocol for the sharing of information with the learner and the responsible local authority / Health and Social Care Trust, including continuing contribution to the Pathway Plan'

- **Form a proactive working relationship with the local authority**

Belfast Metropolitan College developed a proactive working relationship with the Belfast Trust in support of their students from a care background. The Trust and the College have regular meetings to review the educational pathways of young people from a care background.

One crucial success for NPTC Group has been continuity - many of the relevant staff in the local authority and elsewhere have been working with the college for some time and know each other well. It is clear that college staff are able to follow up with known social workers, and are able to avoid the delays that would have occurred previously - this makes for successful interventions.

3.4. 'Provide academic support where required'

- **To ensure clarity about support available, avoid jargon**

All students should be able to access academic support, but some need extra input from the outset; best practice ensures that every student, including those from care leaving backgrounds, are aware of what academic support is and how to access it. TCAT stressed the importance of making sure that support is offered in language that students and their supporters/carers are able to understand, avoiding learning and skills sector jargon.

For some colleges weekly contact seems to work best but others find it more effective to meet less frequently unless the young person seeks out support to meet a specific need, such as completing an assignment.

- **Extra funding for a pre-entry course**

Many colleges, such as Glasgow Kelvin College and Dumfries and Galloway College, have gained extra funding to provide a pre-entry course covering typically one year of basic study – such as study skills, literacy and numeracy as well as a wide range of other programme offers and tasters. This usually includes some community or outdoor experience which is not classroom based. These courses support those who missed out on education and need to gain a basis from which a college mainstream programme might be accessed.

- **Assurance in a crisis – emotional support**

Key support might be needed around difficult moments; one college reported how a student, who was a care leaver and was unable to cope, was supported to continue and achieve.

'I had to give bad news to one care leaving student about his test results - he had not quite made the pass mark - and he went charging out of the room. But, because we were briefed and knew that he might find this difficult, we got in touch with him immediately to explain that he could take the test again and that extra learning support could be on offer to help him to prepare. So he came back to college, took some extra lessons and passed with flying colours the next time. He just needed that extra bit of support. But it's more important just to keep letting them know that we are not giving up on them.'

- **A LAYP/CL strategy to raise success and attendance rates**

Peterborough Regional College has a Looked After Children and Care Leavers (LAYP/CL) strategy to continue to raise learner success rates, raise learner outcomes and progression rates into FE, HE and employment and to widen participation through providing high quality student support mechanisms. The College monitors the attendance of the LAYP/CL and this has helped improve the attendance rates by 10%. A weekly attendance report goes to the local authorities/social workers/personal advisers who will make contact with the young person if attendance is low and arrange a meeting to discuss this and action support if required.

- **Vital enrichment courses to support independent living**

Peterborough Regional College arranges termly meetings with local authorities working closely with the corporate parents. These have enabled the college to develop and implement smarter strategies and ways of working including the setting up of the weekly attendance monitoring. The need for additional support was recognised in these meetings and has led to enrichment activities being designed specifically for the needs of these students, for example, a basic cookery course for unaccompanied minors to support independent living.

- **Small groups, youth and community work approach**

Glasgow Kelvin College staff believe that the college achieves good results with students with care experience through a person-centred, individualised approach

within a group/classroom of 5 or 6. This is based on a youth and community work ethos, which promotes confidence, self-worth and decision making within a specifically tailored year long programme. This model works for those students who can't go straight onto mainstream courses. The course consists of three blocks the first of which is based on study skills and getting used to college life - but it is not taught in a traditional or formal way. The second and third blocks mainly consist of tasters. This programme is currently funded by Big Lottery and the aim is to mainstream this provision at the end of the funding. Students can then progress over time to other college programmes.

- **Mentors acting as 'go-betweens'**

At Northbrook College the pastoral learning mentor can also help if the looked after young person needs to talk to the academic staff about anything. The student is not always able to articulate their needs clearly and so the mentor can be a 'go-between' between the tutor/teaching staff to make sure that any support needs are met.

- **Embedded language learning**

Peterborough Regional College has adopted an embedded ESOL approach for young unaccompanied people who are refugees; they have found that learning English works much more effectively if it is embedded into a vocational area such as Motor Vehicle courses, in which the young people are keen to participate.

3.5. 'Ensure students have access to pastoral support'

- **Supporting and responding to mental health difficulties**

'I enrolled at college. My behaviour was erratic. I used to do my work and then screw it up and put in in the bin. I did this because at school I wasn't good enough. This got worse as the course went on.'

At East Kent College many care leavers have been identified as experiencing mental health difficulties, including depression and anxiety. Difficulties may emerge before the start of the programme, but often come to light later, and the college response relies on access to effective and quick referral routes.

To properly support looked after and care leaving students, East Kent College has excellent relationships with external agencies, and it is by working together that they can arrive at solutions to support the young person most effectively. College support staff are critical to successful support, especially during the transition period.

- **Personal Education Plans (PEPs) set up by support staff who attend review meetings - progression mentors appointed**

East Kent College believes it is not realistic to separate academic and personal support, so the support staff set up the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and attend PEP review meetings. However, all vulnerable students also have a progression mentor and some students prefer to work through and attend the PEP review with their mentor.

- **Addressing external factors such as hunger and poverty**

'It's really important to me that we can get food here - it means that I don't have to worry about that too.'

East Kent College maintains a risk register of vulnerable students, overseen by a Vice-Principal and looked after young people clearly fall into this category. There are termly meetings with all relevant staff. The college now runs a college campus food bank to help address issues of poverty, which is particularly helpful for young parents or others living independently who struggle financially.

3.6. 'Where required, support students in need of emergency or long-term accommodation'

- **Accommodate impact of life issues, such as young parenthood/independent living**

Colleges may need to factor in the impact of independent living and / or young parenthood which can characterise the lives of some care leavers. Hugh Baird College is mindful of this when arranging timetables and activities, while Belfast Metropolitan College and Forth Valley College offer referrals to housing support. Hugh Baird College reported a particular time of difficulty being the end of the second year of college, when a student is leaving but cannot yet take up other accommodation; having nowhere to store belongings is just one of the many problems if the only accommodation available is a hostel.

To support independent living Peterborough College organises cookery classes, particularly useful for those at distance from any support networks.

3.7. 'Provide impartial progression guidance relating to further study (e.g. FE to HE), or progression routes into employment and where relevant offer transition support'

- **Progressing to Apprenticeships within the same institution**

Northbrook College believes that the longer young people can stay in education the better it is likely to be for them and the more success they are likely to have in all aspects of their lives. They will learn skills for the world of work and learn how to get on with different people. At the College, one option is progression into Apprenticeships, such as Hair and Beauty, Early Years, Health and Social Care, Construction and Motor Vehicle. Northbrook reports that some care leavers do progress to university, but the majority are keen to gain employment and therefore independence as soon as they can.

- **A solid relationship with the local IAG provider is important**

While all colleges have and make good use of their internal guidance and advice staff, a solid relationship with the local careers/guidance services is vital. For example, Sheffield College has a very close relationship with the Connexions service

locally which enables joint tracking of care leavers and instant referral so that no-one gets lost in the system.

- **Hold progression meetings with relevant stakeholders**

East Kent College sees its internal information, advice and guidance provision as absolutely critical in supporting the progression of young care leavers. This is supported through strong ongoing contact with all networks and results in positive outcomes for care leavers. Progression meetings are held with relevant stakeholders.