

Strategy to support care experienced students at Oxford Brookes

2020-23

1. Definitions

This strategy uses the term 'care experienced students' to denote all students who have been in care at some point during their childhood including those over 25. The statutory definition of a care leaver is a young person aged 16-25 years old who has been 'looked after' at some point since they were 14 years old, and were in care on or after their 16th birthday.

2. Context and scope

Evidence suggests care leavers are much less likely to progress to Higher Education, highlighting the importance of Oxford Brookes University adopting a strategic approach to addressing barriers. Research published by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) shows that 12%¹ of care leavers had entered higher education by the age of 23.² This is significantly lower than the 42% participation of all other pupils.³ Furthermore, in 2017, 40% of 19-21 year old care leavers were not in education, training or employment, compared to 13% of all 19 to 21 year olds.

There are currently about 430 looked after children from Year 9 - Year 13 under the care of Oxfordshire County Council. Only about 3% of care leavers progress onto HE immediately after completing A-levels in Oxfordshire. This does not include those that enter HE later.

Oxford Brookes already undertakes a number of initiatives to support care experienced students including the Transition from Care Bursary, a named support contact, a [contextual admissions policy](#) and we have committed to be a partner of [The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers](#) (NNECL).

Care leavers were identified as a priority target group as part of the self-assessment in our Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25. Oxford Brookes is committed to doubling our intake of care experienced students. The small number of enrolled care experienced students means it is difficult for us to identify trends or gaps in attainment and progression, however we have committed to monitoring and reviewing this data over the duration of our Access & Participation Plan.

¹ Dataset does not include HE offered through further education colleges

²Harrison, N. (2017): MOVING ON UP: Pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education. National Network for the Education of Care Leavers.

³<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/care-leavers-and-looked-after-children/>

This strategy will look at the whole student lifecycle from working with children in care in our local community, through access, success and progression.

Oxford Brookes is an inclusive university and through an awareness of intersectionality, we recognise the diverse differences of all our students.

3. Barriers

The Office for Students (OfS) identifies the following key barriers faced by care experienced students:

- lower prior attainment. In 2018, the average Attainment 8 Scores (achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications at Key Stage 4) for looked after children were 19%, compared to 44% of non looked after children.⁴
- lack of positive role models
- low expectation from carers and advisers
- low aspirations
- concern about being able to afford higher education
- lack of information and advice before and when applying to higher education
- difficult accessing the financial support they need
- problems with accommodation
- low levels of personal and emotional support from professionals
- lack of personal support networks. Findings from the Pathways Report show that 28% of the care leavers surveyed arrived at university on their own, travelling independently and without support⁵:
- low levels of confidence to self-identify and proactively ask for support.⁶

Children in care are four times more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty. They are also four times more likely to have a special educational need than other children.⁷

Harrison's research showed that over half (57%) of the 212 care-experienced students surveyed thought about leaving. 'Care-experienced students who reported negative experiences of transition or subsequent HE life were significantly more likely to have considered leaving, as were those who identified as being disabled'⁸.

4. Overarching principles

- Take a whole lifecycle approach to supporting care experienced students
- Build strong relationships with virtual school, foster parents, LEA, and schools and colleges
- Ensure a coherent and consistent prospective student journey, aimed at creating an early and lasting sense of belonging to the University
- Use research and experience from care experienced students
- Deliver tailored high quality support

⁴ **National Statistics (2018)**: DfE Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England

⁵ **K Ellis, C Johnston (2019)** Pathways to University from Care: Findings Report One

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<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-reflective-practice/care-leavers-and-looked-after-children/>

⁷ **National Statistics (2018)**: DfE Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England

⁸ **Harrison, N. (2017)**: MOVING ON UP: Pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education. National Network for the Education of Care Leavers.

5. Access

We will work in partnership with local organisations to tackle the barriers care experienced face in progressing to higher education.

a. Sustained outreach programme

Working with Oxfordshire Virtual School, we will deliver a 3 year sustained outreach programme for Children in Care from Year 9-11. The project will:

- address the specific barriers and needs of care experienced students
- promote resilience and confidence
- develop study skills to address gaps in their learning
- provide positive role models and an authentic student voice⁹ using Student Ambassadors
- engage foster carers and social care professionals

Students who take part in this project will then be guaranteed a place on the Brookes Engage programme for Year 12-13. Lessons learned from the sustained programme will be used to strengthen the support provided during Brookes Engage.

We will explore opportunities to work with other HEIs, to provide local children in care with a broader experience.

b. Visiting the campus

We will continue to pay for travel to Open and Applicant days for care experienced students and from 2020 we will also offer to meet students who are attending alone and arrange individual appointments during or after the event. In addition, we will actively promote bespoke visits to the campus for care experienced students.

c. Advisers and influencers

We will provide information and advice on university and the support available at Oxford Brookes to key advisers including Local Authorities, social care professionals and foster carers.

6. Transition and induction

a. Named contact

We will provide a named contact for all care experienced students. They will understand the needs of care experienced students and where to signpost students for further specialist support. The named contact will be introduced at the point of offer (where care experience is declared), and will be available for advice until graduation. The role will proactively reach out to all care experienced students, with particular focus on those who are eligible for the bursary. Examples of the support provided is detailed below in each section of the student life journey.

b. Financial support

Oxford Brookes will continue to offer a [Transition from Care Bursary](#) of £2,000 per year to care leavers. We will increase promotion and simplify the application process to ensure that the students who need support are receiving it.

⁹ Askew, J. Rodgers, P. and West, A. (2016) Who cares about care leavers? NEW DIRECTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, no. 175, Fall 2016, p49-56

There are a number of other bursaries and scholarships that care experienced students can access depending on personal circumstances including the new mature and enhanced [Brookes Bursary](#). Additional funding is also available via the hardship fund. We will ensure that clear information about financial support is available on our website, including a finance calculator which will make finding financial support easier. We will also provide additional finance guidance and budget management training to care experienced students including promoting Blackbullion (online finance support).

c. Support during transition and induction

The named contact will proactively contact all offer holders who declare themselves as care experienced to:

- offer transition e-mentoring with current students (with other care experienced students where possible)
- discuss any support requirements
- verify eligibility for the Transition from Care Bursary
- arrange to meet and greet on arrival to help them find their accommodation and to signpost to any other services that may be helpful.
- arrange a current student to help them to move in if necessary.

In addition, for those eligible for the Transition from Care Bursary we will also:

- provide free bedding and kitchen packs.
- establish their transport needs and provide funding to pay for appropriate transport on moving day, for those without alternatives.

During induction the named contact will:

- outline the support available throughout the duration of their course, including individual appointments
- contact the student at the end of the first week to check they are settling in
- contact any students who have declared care experience at enrolment, who are not already being supported.

d. Accommodation

We will extend our policy so that all care experienced students (previously limited to care leavers) will be guaranteed accommodation in our halls of residence for 52 weeks if required¹⁰.

The named contact will work with the Accommodation Bureau to advise on accommodation that will meet the individual student's needs. This may include selecting alcohol-free accommodation (piloted in 2020/21) or earlier access to accommodation.

Halls managed by the University do not require a deposit but partner accommodation requires a £250 damage deposit e.g. Cheney and Parade Green. Oxford Brookes will provide additional funds for those in receipt of the Bursary to pay the deposit where required (this will be returned to the student at the end of the year).

We will support students to move halls (minimum 2 weeks depending on hall contract length) due to essential cleaning and maintenance.

¹⁰ Subject to meeting the [criteria](#) including application deadlines. We will endeavour to support those students who enter via clearing but cannot guarantee due to availability.

e. Training for staff and student ambassadors

Training will be provided to the key members of staff and student ambassadors who will be supporting care experienced students. This training will be given by a care experienced professional and will provide staff with an understanding of the barriers faced by care experienced students and how to support them.

7. Success

We will continue to provide access to a named contact throughout a care experienced student's time at Oxford Brookes. We will structure this in a way that allows individual students to tailor the support to their needs and ensure that we have clear and easy referral pathways for care experienced students to access support such as counselling.

The named contact will maintain regular contact with recipients of the Transition from Care bursary to try to build relationships and trust. Their role will include checking academic progress and where needed, and with the student's consent, they will flag any issues with support coordinators, academic advisers or other relevant colleagues.

The Centre for Academic Development will provide a 'study strategy meeting' for all care experienced students to help them plan for the demands of semester 1. During this meeting they would agree when they would meet them again, in line with their level of need and course demands.

The Inclusive Teaching Working Group (ITWG) will look at care experienced students as one of its student groups. The group is responsible for taking forward curriculum development and pedagogic initiatives in support of the objectives of the University's Access and Participation plan. The ITWG will promote structures, processes, and practices within the institution to facilitate the conditions to ensure all students can access, participate, progress, and succeed at Brookes.

Peer support will be offered via a buddy network from pre-arrival transition to graduation. The care leavers buddy network would have an in-depth insight or experience of the complex issue and barriers care experienced students often face in higher education.

Brookes Union will set up a new student community for care experienced students and will explore suitable online spaces for students to make friendships and support each other.

Brookes Union Advice provide a free, confidential service which is independent from Oxford Brookes University. They have experienced advisors who can provide confidential advice on a wide range of issues.

We will guarantee an interview for a paid Student Ambassador role and offer a 30 minute practice interview with a Careers Consultant.

Our continuous evaluation of wider student success initiatives will inform the implementation and subsequent development of this strategy.

8. Progression

a. Careers support

The career progression team uses an inclusive and accessible model.

From 2020 we will include a more proactive approach including:

- training for Careers Consultants on supporting care experienced students.
- a named Careers Consultant for all those in receipt of the Transition from Care Bursary, who will make contact during Semester 1 and provide specific welcome appointments.
- personalised contact from named Careers Consultant to highlight central careers provision as well as offering ongoing support throughout their student journey, including bespoke/tailored sessions.
- prioritising employment and placement opportunities for care experienced students

b. Graduation pack

Those in receipt of the Bursary will receive a free graduation pack which includes free guest tickets, a free gown and a free stage photo plus a mount.

9. Evaluation and oversight

The Access and Participation Group will oversee the implementation of the strategy, and receive regular updates on progress against milestones. The evaluation will be managed by the WP evaluation team and where possible underpinned by [NERUPI](#).

a. Measures of success

Evaluation of impact will monitor:

- increase in attainment and progression of students on the outreach programme
- increase in applications and enrolments from care experienced students
- improved attainment levels as reported in Access and Participation Plan
- improved progression rate as reported in Access and Participation Plan

In particular, we will measure the impact of our financial support package for care leavers in supporting the above objectives where relevant.

b. Research strand

This Strategy will include a research strand which will focus on the experiences of Oxford Brookes University care experienced students and will be led by the Widening Participation Evaluation Team. This will support insights into how universities can facilitate the access, success and progression of care experienced people. This strand will also provide insights into the specific challenges and barriers facing our own care experienced students, with the intention of adapting university provision accordingly.

July 2020