

A Guide to Supporting Care-Experienced Students

At the University of Chester, we understand that students who have experience of local authority care, or who are estranged from their families are statistically less likely to attend university. With this in mind, we are committed to doing what we can to encourage students to consider university as a viable option for them, as well as supporting them to succeed and fulfil their potential when they are with us. We have compiled the following guide as a reference point for teachers, advisors and influencers to offer some key information about how you could support these students to consider university, and what assistance is available to them.

Before Application

- **Foster and encourage aspirations** – Engage the students in regular conversations about what they would like to do in the future as a career, or to ask questions about what they would like to get out of life in order to steer them to consider certain pathways. Researching careers and job types can never happen too early, so you could encourage them to undertake this, but also engage them with what they have discovered to sustain the process.
- **Focus on long-term goals** – Care-experienced students often have many short-term goals and milestones that become their focus in day-to-day life. As a result, long-term goals can become less of a priority. Focusing on long-term life aspirations can give students purpose, and something to aim for.
- **University WP activities and projects for target groups** - Every university will have their own team who works with schools and prospective students. They will also likely have some projects or events that they run exclusively for students who are care-experienced. Seek them out to find out their eligibility criteria, and how your students can be involved. For more information about what is on offer at the University of Chester, you can email [here](#).
- **Finance information** – Being worried about finance when it comes to university is common for all students. However, it can be much more acutely felt by students who have experienced care, or who are estranged from family. With this in mind, encourage students to find the facts about what they are entitled to, in addition to the standard Student Finance package. Institutions will have their own [bursaries](#) which will each be different. They should also speak to their local authority about this too as the offer varies across councils. More details can be found in [Further Information](#).
- **LAC students' forum** - Websites such as The Student Room offer forums for students to access and discuss issues with other students. This may be a useful resource to gain student life insight and reassurance about what is available. It would be useful to encourage students to verify any information they find out on these sites to ensure it is accurate.
- **External support** - There are many charities and organisations who operate to support students who have experience of local authority care, or who are estranged from family. Many of them can be found in the [Further Information](#) section below.

During application

- **TICK THE BOX** - It's incredibly important that students tick the relevant boxes on their UCAS application to indicate that they are a care-leaver or an estranged student. This is simply to alert the universities chosen, to make contact with the student to ensure that all support

measures are in place ahead of term starting. We understand that students may not want the 'label' of being a care-leaver or estranged student to follow them to university; many use this as a fresh start. However, we would reassure all students that this information is only shared with the support teams to arrange for support, and will only be shared with other university staff with the permission of the student.

- **Find out what's on offer** – Once students have an idea of the universities they might like to go to, encourage them to research the support that is available at each. Websites such as Propel (link in Further Information) have information from all universities to highlight what is available for care-experienced students all in one place.
- **Student Finance** – The student finance package which is available to all eligible students is separate to finance available for additional needs. Unlike the Student Finance Package, Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is **NOT** means tested. Each student is assessed on their needs. Encourage any student who has a physical or mental health condition, or a specific learning difficulty to apply for DSA, in case they are eligible for support. Not all students will receive DSA, but universities have a wide range of support available too.
- **Application support** – At the University of Chester, we provide support for students who have experienced local authority care, or who are estranged, with their application. This could be ongoing personalised advice for personal statements, a guided tour of the campus to familiarise students, and meeting support staff who would be working with them after they have enrolled. If you would like further information, please click [here](#) to email.
- **Local authority** – The offer from each council varies from region to region, so it would be useful for students to be encouraged to ask their social worker or personal adviser to explain all of the options available to them if they decide university is right for them.

At university

- **Support packages** – Universities will provide support packages for care-experienced students. Again, these will differ from place to place, so it's very important to find out what is on offer before they make their UCAS choices, as it might help students decide which place suits them best. You can find out more about our support packages, [here](#).
- **University contact** – There is likely to be a team who are responsible for the welfare of care-experienced students as part of their remit. In addition to this at the University of Chester, we also have staff who have designated responsibilities for specific areas. For example, we have a member of staff who is the contact for students who are care-experienced, or who are estranged from their families. Encourage your students to find out who they are as soon as they arrive. They may never want to engage with that member of staff, but it's useful to know that they are there if and when support is needed. Further information can be found on the dedicated pages on our website by clicking [here](#).
- **Financial support** - Often Universities have dedicated bursaries or financial support packages for students who are care experienced or estranged from their families. Again, the financial support offered differs for each university but you can find about more about Chester's offer [here](#).
- **Accommodation** – The University of Chester offers 52 weeks of accommodation for students who require it. You can discuss this with the designated member of support staff, or with the accommodation team.
- **Not Alone** - University can be a huge transition with many changes in usual routines, and for some people this can be overwhelming. This can be particularly so for students who have

experience of local authority care as many things might be changing in their circumstances at once. It's therefore important for students to know that they are never alone at university. The link member of staff, and more broadly, the wellbeing team are there if and when a student needs them; Students' Union have reps who are able to sign-post to information; Residential teams offer support too, with Hall Wardens being on hand; University accommodation is also looked after by our porters 24/7, so there is always someone to talk to.

Further Information

There are lots of places you can find further information and resources which you might find useful. Some are aimed at advisers supporting students, and others you might like to share with your students. Here are just a few:

- [Propel](#) – a website that provides information about the support available from all universities relating to care-leavers.
- [National Network for the Education of Care-Leavers](#) – NNECL is a charity set up by universities and works towards ensuring educational progression for care-leavers
- [Stand Alone](#) – A Student Portal with information and support for those who are estranged from their families. Stand Alone have produced a guide explaining how to apply for Student Finance if you are estranged from your family, you can find this [here](#).
- [Learning and Work Institute](#) – Learning and Work Institute are an organisation who conduct research to improve the employment and educational lives of others. This link is to a guide they have produced for practitioners.
- [Centre for Social Justice](#) – A governmental think-tank with the aim of putting social justice at the heart of parliament.
- [UCAS](#) – There is a designated section on UCAS for care-experienced students, which has a range of information, videos and useful links, as well as information about the application process.
- If you would like to discuss any outreach activity at the University of Chester, for students who are in care, including bespoke visits, you can send an email [here](#)
- Students or staff can make direct contact with our wellbeing team by emailing [here](#).
- If you would like to discuss the Care Experienced or Estranged Student Support Packages offered at the University of Chester then please get in touch with Becca Hughes on r.hughes@chester.ac.uk.