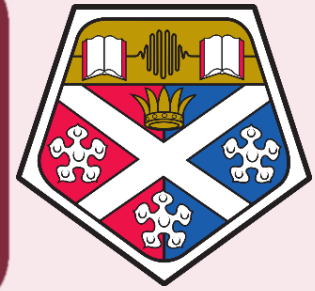


APPROACH TO GRADUATION COSTS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENTS THE UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE PREPARED BY WHO CARES?



NEED

Graduations and all of their associated costs can be as high as £200. As credits, loan agreements and residential leases come to an end, it can be difficult for students to keep on top of finances at the end of their studies whilst also managing ongoing living costs. Graduation is an important event for all students. However, the educational outcomes for care experienced young people are **significantly worse** than those of their non-looked after peers. So, for care experienced students, graduation is a time to celebrate **extraordinary success**, achieved in many cases without the family support typically received by peers.

“ ” You need people to understand the barriers and to *care*, so you paint quite a bleak picture all the time...we'll be talking about the stats for homelessness, mental health issues, criminal justice...but you know that the students are these amazing, resilient people, and it's really important to get that balance that we should be celebrating as well.

Stephanie McKendry, Widening Access Manager, University of Strathclyde

SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strathclyde University have implemented a funding scheme which covers the costs of graduation for care experienced graduates. These students receive a transcript, gown and photo package as well as two tickets to both the graduation ceremony and ball. To obtain the necessary funding, The Widening Access Team put in a successful bid to the 2015/16 **Strathclyde Alumni Fund**, a panel which seeks donations from former students for scholarships and activities. The following year, the team put a business case to the Director of Student Experience and Enhancement Services that covering graduation costs for care experienced students should be considered part of core business. This too was successful and the team have now secured **internal funding** from the university.



CHALLENGES

There are still care experienced young people graduating who do not self-declare for the entirety of their academic careers, and therefore miss out on valuable support. The university use information from UCAS forms and registration as well as holding events using platforms like National Care Leavers Week to raise awareness of the support available.

The university have also implemented a **mentor programme** which they hope will **improve the line of communication between care experienced students and support services**. Each student who declares themselves as care experienced is now assigned a member of staff as a mentor in their first year. The Widening Access Team expected a limited response when recruiting mentors for 15 care leavers and were overwhelmed by 300 applicants. All grades of staff fill mentor roles, from administrators with experience in professional services, to security guards or heads of department. These mentors then also act as care experience champions within their departments, pushing positive agendas for the care experienced population. The team hope that the support of the mentor programme and funding scheme will **encourage self-declaration** and promote positive attitudes towards **care identity**.



OUTCOMES AND ACTION POINTS

- Contacting care experienced students regarding the available graduation funding initiates a dialogue about **next steps**. During these conversations, communicating that support is still available after graduation allowed for appropriate referrals, such as to the careers service.
- The funding scheme is a way to **celebrate success in the face of adversity**. Attending college and university and completing further and higher education qualifications can be a powerfully affirming and empowering process for care experienced young people.
- The funding scheme and mentor programme are **incentives**, encouraging students to **self-declare** as a means of receiving **tailored support**. **Self-declaration promotes positive attitudes to care identity**.

