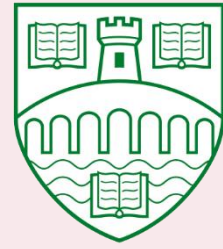




CARE EXPERIENCED INTERN THE UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE PREPARED BY WHO CARES? SCOTLAND



Shumela Ahmed is care experienced and a student at the University of Stirling on the verge of completing her undergraduate course in Politics and Journalism. She hopes to go on a postgraduate course, also at Stirling, and gain a TQFE (Teaching Qualification in Further Education).

Tracey Kerr is the Widening Participation and Scottish Recruitment Manager at the university.

NEED

In 2016, Tracey found that she had project money left over and chose to invest it in hiring two interns for a ten-week period over the summer. One of these interns was care experienced - Shumela, and the other was a young carer. Tracey asked both interns to carry out research and use their own experiences of studying at Stirling to produce a report which made recommendations on how the university could improve its policy and approach in supporting non-traditional students. This was a blue skies exercise, with Tracey paraphrasing the brief as, 'If we had all the money in the world, what would your recommendations be?'

APPROACH TO DRIVING RESULTS

Shumela was a strong candidate for the role due to her extensive experience of engagement with various functions of the University. She completed Stirling's own access course before beginning her undergraduate course. She has been passionate in her approach to student representation, and was acting School Officer for three years, representing students studying within the school of Arts and Humanities. She was also a Student Ambassador, employed by Widening Participation to provide support with open days and guided tours. She has also been elected as Alternative Student Officer within the Student Association, representing students from non-traditional backgrounds who face barriers to education, such as those with care experience, young carers or mature students.

To fulfil her role as Student Ambassador, Shumela has been offering individual guided tours to prospective students with care experience. She notes that usually the tours at the university focus on the social and leisure facilities such as the union and the gym, but her own tours are designed to address the concerns of care experienced students and showcase the available support. She makes sure to take students to various relevant services, such as the student support hub, finance and accommodation as a way of ensuring that all care experienced students are aware of the support available and how to access it.





corporate **PARENTING**

Shumela worked twenty hours over three days a week, for ten weeks, and her schedule was flexible to allow her to make plans for childcare. During her internship, Shumela also had the opportunity to visit Strathclyde University in Glasgow, who had also hired a care experienced intern. Shumela took this opportunity to gain insight into how Strathclyde's Widening Participation department works and also to network. She made some useful contacts, such as the head of The Children's University. She also met representatives from MCR Pathways, and has since become a mentor for them.

Shumela documented her entire journey over the ten weeks, dedicating time each day to writing her report and detailing her findings and thoughts. The report itself ended up being 6,000 words, and at the end of the internship, Shumela presented her findings to Stirling University's Corporate Parenting Steering Group. The group consists of services staff from the university, the head of student support, council members, student representatives and local college representatives. It is chaired by a senior academic who specialises in social work. The report made some key recommendations:

- The introduction of a comprehensive care package for care experienced students, based on the care leavers covenant recommendation that free or discounted leisure activities are a way to take action to reduce social exclusion and isolation for care leavers. Shumela suggested that access to the gym and cinema on campus should be made free for care experienced students.
- If a student self declares as care experienced, they should receive an automatic invitation to interview for the role of Student Ambassador.
- The implementation of a bursary for care experienced students. Shumela hopes that this will be agreed as £1000 though it is currently looking to be capped at £500 initially.

Shumela's recommendations are now being considered by the Corporate Parenting working group and also by Tracey. Shumela is working hard with student services to gather a focus group of care experienced students in order to gain further insight into how the support Stirling offers could be further improved and to share reflections on their time at Stirling. Shumela was asked to detail her hopes or aspirations for how Stirling will continue to support care experienced students. She said,

“ I'd like to see a bit more focus on our older demographic of people who have been in care, I think there's room for a lot of work to be done there across the board, but that's about it, I've had nothing but great experiences here, and massive opportunities, and I've grabbed every one with both hands.

OUTCOMES AND ACTION POINTS

- Higher education institutions should **be alert**, acknowledging the consistently and overwhelmingly poor outcomes which are proven to impact on the life chances of care experienced young people.
- The additional support needs of care experienced students should be **assessed**, and the approach to the delivery of support services should be **driven by and co-developed with care experienced young people**.
- **Strive to improve** upon existing services and support, promoting sustainable and continuous change through good policy and practice.
- Care experienced students should be encouraged and supported to **access** the opportunities and support available to them.

