



The Hub for

S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

**Support for University and College
for *Care Experienced* in South-East Scotland**

Executive Summary

The Hub for SUCCESS is a collaborative project concerned with improving post-school educational outcomes for people of all ages with experience of care in the South-East region of Scotland.

Core project partners: Edinburgh City Council, Edinburgh College, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot Watt University, Queen Margaret University, the Open University in Scotland, and Newbattle Abbey College.

The project partners will work collaboratively to provide bespoke support in order to -

- Raise aspirations among care-experienced to pursue post-school educational opportunities
- Widen access to college and university for care-experienced
- Support care-experienced individuals into, through and out of college and university

1. Overview and Context

The Hub for Support for University and College for Care Experienced in South-East Scotland ('The Hub for SUCCESS'), offers a regional response to improving post-school educational outcomes for care-experienced people through partnership working, and supports public bodies in carrying out their duties as corporate parents.

The Hub will have a physical presence in Edinburgh city centre and will serve the South East region, defined as Edinburgh, and the Lothians. It will operate on behalf of – and in partnership with – the region's colleges and universities to create strong links with local authority services and third sector bodies that work most closely with care-experienced individuals.

The key stakeholders and beneficiaries of the Hub project are the region's care-experienced individuals, local authorities, third sector organisations and colleges and universities.

Aims and outcomes

The *central aim* of the Hub is to inspire, encourage and support people of any age who have had experience of care to pursue and complete educational opportunities beyond secondary school.

As a direct consequence of its work, the Hub will assist colleges and universities in the region to achieve the ambitions for care-experienced learners in relation to widening access to further and higher education as set out by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Commission on Widening Access in 'A Blueprint for Fairness'.

The SFC's vision is 'for there to be *no difference* in the outcomes of care-experience learners comparative to their peers'. Additionally, the regional Hub will aid partner institutions / organisations in carrying out their corporate parenting duties in a *collaborative and holistic manner* to ensure positive post-care wellbeing as required by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/protecting/lac/lacimprovingoutcomes/corporate-parenting>

Why a regional hub focusing on post-school education?

The educational outcomes for people who have spent a period of time being looked after are stark compared with their non-looked after peers. Figures show that young people in Scotland who spend a period of time in care leave secondary school at a younger age and with fewer qualifications with 73% leaving at the minimum age, compared with 27% of all school leavers. Moreover, only 5% of care leavers go directly from school to study at university, compared with 40% overall. (Scottish Government 2017)

There are a number of reasons for the low numbers of care-experienced people taking up post-school opportunities. These include -

- Disruption to education brought about by changing placements

- The high percentage who suffer mental health issues
- Challenging personal circumstances, including family and accommodation issues
- Lack of information and support
- Low expectations and lack of aspiration

Regarding this last point – ‘low expectations and lack of aspiration’ – it is clear that many care-experienced people suffer from a ‘poverty of expectation’; that is, they often have low expectations of themselves, at least in part, because others have had such low expectations *of* them and *for* them. In interviews with care-experienced university students carried out during the scoping of this project, a common theme that emerged was the burden of having to overcome the low expectations that others had placed upon them. In their own words:

‘It feels like we [my siblings and I] were washed out before we began.... Teachers said that I’d never amount to anything and my social workers said, “you’re gonna be just like your mother, a raging alcoholic.”’ (BSc Nursing, Edinburgh Napier, age 33)

‘It doesn’t matter what you were in care for; it’s always your fault.... You devalue yourself because of the way others see you.’ (BSc Public Sociology, Queen Margaret University, age 28)

‘When you’re in care they [teachers, social workers, foster parents] expect the least of you.... I decided I want to be something more than what is expected of me.’ (BA History, University of Edinburgh; MSc Applied Criminology and Forensic Psychology, Edinburgh Napier, age 39)

Although there have been many excellent initiatives to raise the profile – and the aspirations – of care-experienced people in the last few years, there has been little improvement in post-school educational outcomes for this group. The numbers going on to – and, crucially, *completing* – further and higher education studies have not shifted in any significant way, in spite of efforts by individual schools, local authorities, colleges and universities. We therefore need to take a different approach – a more coherent, joined-up approach that serves the *particular* needs of care-experienced people and addresses this affliction of the poverty of expectation that undermines their life chances.

The need to be more joined-up in approach is recognised by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which calls upon Scotland’s public bodies to serve as Corporate Parents for care-experienced people and carry out their corporate parenting duties in a *collaborative and holistic manner*. As corporate parents, therefore, we – that is our universities, colleges, local authorities, schools, and public and third sector bodies – need to work *together* to inspire, encourage and support care-experienced people of all ages – and to expect the most of them regardless of their personal histories. Only by working together will we be able to address the complex needs of this group by pooling resources and sharing information and expertise.

How is this project different from other widening access initiatives?

Unlike other widening access initiatives this project is not focused on postcodes or ‘low progression schools’, as people with experience of care can live in any postcode in the region and attend any school. The Hub for SUCCESS, rather, is focused on the individual, offering bespoke support for looked after / care-experienced people from as young as

Primary 6 to mature adulthood and differs from existing access programmes in the following four ways:

- The Hub will engage directly with those services that *specialise* in providing support for individuals with experience of care. More specifically, **it will forge strong connections with local authority services and third sector bodies** that work most closely with looked after or care-experienced people by making direct links with Throughcare and Aftercare Services, social workers, Head Teachers, and also with Champions Boards, which are comprised of care-experienced young people. It will work with third sector bodies such as Barnardo's, Who Cares? Scotland and The Prince's Trust. This kind of connectivity between the Hub and local authority and third sector bodies will allow people *to opt in* to a variety of services including a wide range of age-related learning activities, taster sessions, campus visits, etc, offered by the Hub in collaboration with its partner colleges and universities.
- **It will support people of any age** who have had experience of care and provide bespoke support. This is particularly important as many people will no longer have access to the care system. The Hub will, therefore, have set hours for people to access its services where they can receive information on course offerings, bursaries, advice on finance and accommodation, and support for completing forms such as UCAS applications.
- It will provide activities and services for the **whole journey** starting in primary school and going through to college / university completion. It will actively support transitions into, through and out of college and university.
- The Hub will work to **facilitate culture change** in colleges and universities – particularly in universities as they have had less experience in this area – by providing CPD / training for student support services, personal academic tutors, lecturers and others to equip them to respond to the particular needs of care-experienced people, recognising that many have challenging personal circumstances that can disrupt their studies.

2. In numbers

As outlined above, the educational outcomes for care-experienced are poor and the evidence demonstrates the need for targeted intervention through partnership working.

Key national statistics (Scottish Government 2017):

- School exclusions: care-experienced young people are eight times more likely to be excluded from school
- School qualifications: 15% of looked after young people leave school with a Higher (SCQF Level 6) qualification compared with 62% of their peers
- Leaving school: 73% of care-experienced young people leave school at 16 or younger
- Access to university: 5% of care-experienced young people leave school for university compared with 40% of their peers
- Housing: 68% of care-experienced young people experience three or more placement moves

- Prison: 33% of young people in prison and 31% of adult prisoners self-reported as having been in care at some point (Scottish Prison Service 2016)

The South East Scotland region

There are efforts currently underway by the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council to improve data collection in relation to care-experienced. We do not have precise numbers in relation to all care-experienced in the Edinburgh / Lothians region; however, we do know the following: in Scotland there are approximately 15,000 people in the care system, a figure that has remained fairly static in recent years. On 31 July 2015 there were approximately 2,400 people recorded as being looked after in the South East Scotland region and in that same year some 700 were reported as having left care. Assuming these figures remain reasonably static going forward, this means that some 3000 people with current or recent experience of being in care could benefit from the services of the Hub. Moreover, as these numbers do not include those who have been out of the care system for more than a year, there are potentially several thousand more in the region that could benefit – a significant number of whom will be adults over the age of 26. For this more mature group that no longer has access to social services, having a place – a central hub – to go to or to call upon for information and advice is key.

3. Partners and additional stakeholders

Core Partners

The Hub for SUCCESS will rely on a number of core partners in the South East Scotland region and a representative from each will serve on the Advisory Board. Also, the partnering universities and the college are expected to offer up to six days of ‘in kind’ staff time per annum.

- Edinburgh City Council
- Edinburgh College
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Heriot-Watt University
- Queen Margaret University
- The Open University
- University of Edinburgh
- Newbattle Abbey College

Additional Stakeholders

In addition to the core partners above, the following institutions and organisations have expressed an interest in engaging with, contributing to, or using the services of, the Hub:

- Borders College
- East Lothian Council
- Midlothian Council
- Centre for Excellence for looked after children in Scotland (CELCIS)

- Scottish Funding Council
- Skills Development Scotland
- College Development Network
- Barnardo's
- Move On
- Champions Boards
- The Life Changes Trust
- Who Cares? Scotland

4. Overall approach and key principles

The Hub will support and encourage people with experience of care in relation to post-school educational opportunities, especially further and higher education, from early intervention starting in late primary school to pre-entry to post-entry through to completion and post-completion.

It will be particularly concerned with *transitions*. Feedback from care-experienced learners tells us that times of transition are especially challenging as they often have no one to help them navigate institutional systems and processes and – more significantly – to provide them with the emotional support they need during times of change.

Also, we know that people with experience of care often are more likely to drop out than their non-looked after peers. This means that special attention needs to be given to this group not only to enable them to access further and higher education but to be a resource for them throughout the *whole process* from pre-entry all the way through post-completion. Care-experienced students often have challenging life circumstances and sometimes require flexibility if they are to be able to complete their course.

The Hub will, therefore, be responsive and dynamic placing the people it serves at the heart of its work. It will be committed to listening to concerns, answering questions, addressing needs, offering encouragement, and eliciting feedback to improve services. It will actively seek input from people with experience of care in the development of its programmes and activities. It will also work towards developing and maintaining an ethos of respect and concern for its users seeking to build trust and establish positive, affirming relationships.

The Hub will operate by harnessing the expertise of – and facilitating connections between – colleges and universities, local authorities, public and third sector bodies. It will draw on 'in kind' contributions from core partners and operate without institutional bias, representing all partners equitably.

5. Functions

Outreach and early intervention

The Hub staff will work closely with partners to plan and deliver a range of outreach activities to raise awareness of opportunities, to demystify processes, and to provide support. It will offer activities and events at appropriate venues including schools and community centres across the region aimed at care-experienced people, their carers, social

workers, teachers and other support staff. It will target *both* older primary and younger secondary school pupils as early intervention is essential to raising aspirations. It will also offer individualised, bespoke support as required.

Drop-in Centre

The Hub will provide a drop-in centre located in the city centre for care-experienced people of any age, providing face-to-face help with information and advice on a range of topics related to educational opportunities in the region, including (but not limited to) information on course offerings, advice on accommodation and finance for college and university, and support for completing UCAS applications and other forms.

Feedback from care-experienced students suggests that this kind of one-to-one support that a central hub can offer is key, especially for people who have been out of school for some time and are no longer looked after.

In addition to providing one-to-one support and advice for care-experienced individuals, the Hub will serve as a central point of contact for those who provide support services (for example, Throughcare and Aftercare services).

Pre-entry Support

The Hub will offer transition support into college and university – as well as from college into university – augmenting existing supports within institutions. For example, the Hub will organise activities to develop support networks for students prior to entry such as group Q&A sessions and taster sessions on campus.

Post-entry Support

In recognition of the low retention rates for this group, the Hub will be available to care-experienced students post-entry by offering a safe and informal environment where students can bring their concerns and receive support. It will also organise regional events and activities in line with the academic year to bring together those care-experienced students who would like to have a network to share experiences. In addition, it will highlight opportunities offered by third sector bodies and advocacy organisations, such as Who Cares? Scotland.

Support upon Completion

The Hub will be a resource to students as they transition out of college or university and into the workplace by offering advice, listening to concerns and signposting to relevant services and networks.

Training Provider

The Hub will be a resource for partner institutions to aid them in improving support to students; for example, by developing frameworks for mentoring and peer support services and by facilitating training for personal academic tutors and other relevant staff members. Where possible it will use Student Ambassadors who are themselves care-experienced to take part in delivering training of staff in institutions.

Online Presence

The Hub will have an online presence via *Propel Scotland*. <http://propel.org.uk/Scotland/>. *Propel Scotland* is related to the UK-wide *Propel* website, which is managed by the charity Become. *Propel Scotland* provides information on support services offered to care-experienced people by colleges and universities.

6. Proposed Delivery Model and Governance

The Hub for SUCCESS will operate with two core members of staff, a full time manager and part time coordinator, as well as two (hourly) paid student ambassadors, preferably *with experience of care*, selected from the region's partner institutions. (See Appendix A) It will also draw on the expertise of staff in the region's colleges and universities and will rely on 'in-kind' contributions from institutions equivalent of up to six days per annum.

An Advisory Board made up of the central partners will provide strategic direction for the Hub. (See Appendix B) Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) will have responsibility for the recruitment and line management of staff, with at least one (non-ENU) member of the Advisory Board serving on the recruitment panel for the Hub Manager post. All external funding for the Hub will be managed via ENU.

7. Venue

It is expected that the Hub will be located in Edinburgh city centre within the Through Care and After Care HUB.

Locating the Hub within a building owned by a third sector organisation which provides services to vulnerable people offers the opportunity for sharing of good practice and also referral, as appropriate.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

A content management system will be developed to track and record Hub engagements. The CMS will allow the Advisory Board to monitor the intensity of activity. In addition, the Hub will regularly seek feedback from users through formal and informal means in order to adapt and improve services throughout the pilot period.

The Hub pilot project will be formally evaluated during the first half of the third year. The evaluation, which will draw upon both quantitative and qualitative data, will be undertaken by an independent evaluator. The evaluation exercise will also draw out lessons learned which will be shared with stakeholders and other groups concerned with supporting care experienced individuals (see Appendix D).

Appendix D: Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Monitoring:

A content management system will be developed in order to track the number and nature of activities and engagements and record relevant information on users.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement:

The project will solicit ongoing feedback in order to improve services throughout the evolution of the pilot. Feedback will be sought from care-experienced individuals, practitioners and other stakeholders through both formal and informal means from the very start of the project and services will be adapted accordingly.

Evaluation and Learning:

The pilot will be evaluated by an external evaluator during the first half of the third year of the project. The evaluation will involve both quantitative and qualitative data, with an emphasis on the qualitative as there is little in the way of established baselines for care-experienced in this context.

The evaluation will focus around the following outcomes:

- Care experienced individuals in the region have raised aspirations and view further and higher education as a genuine option post-school
- Care experienced individuals in the region feel supported to *pursue* college and university
- Care experienced individuals feel supported to *complete* college and university courses
- Institutions are carrying out their corporate parenting duties in a collaborative and holistic manner
- Practitioners in partner organisations feel supported and equipped to serve care experienced individuals

Evaluators, working closely with Hub staff and partner institutions, will also conduct a lessons learned exercise which will be shared with relevant stakeholders and other groups involved in supporting care experienced individuals.