

GUIDE FOR CARE EXPERIENCED LEARNERS



WE ARE GREATER MANCHESTER HIGHER.

Greater Manchester Higher is a collaborative network of higher education providers, offering impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) to help you make informed choices about your future.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is for anyone who is care experienced and their supporters. It highlights what support is available in higher education and how to access it.

Only **14%** of care leavers enter higher education by the age of 19, compared to 47% of the general population. We know that care leavers who enter higher education can often face additional challenges, so this guide is designed to highlight the support available to help you succeed and achieve your future ambitions.

Further information about the support available can be found on our website:

gmhigher.ac.uk/students/support/care-leavers



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Care experienced

Someone who's been in local authority care and doesn't fit the legal definition of a care leaver. This term includes adopted children, those looked after at home under a supervision order or in kinship care. Universities and colleges may use the term 'care experienced' in their offer for support.

Where care experienced is used, this applies to anyone with experience of the care system.

Care leaver

Someone who's been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, including at some point during the age of 16-17, and is under the age of 25. Most institutions offer support for care leavers, but some institutions also offer support to 'care experienced' students, which is broader than the definition of care leaver. Local authority support is only available to care leavers.

Where care leaver is used, support is only for those who fit this definition.

Estranged

A young person under 25 who has little or no contact with their parents (either biological or adoptive) and this is unlikely to change due to an irreconcilable breakdown in the relationship. A young person falling under this definition may have been in local authority care at some stage of their lives, but don't fall within the definition of a care leaver.

Kinship

A young person who lives full time with a relative who is not their parent e.g. aunt/uncle, grandparents, older sibling etc. This may be formal, where the young person is 'looked after' by the local authority and placed with kinship foster carers, or informal, where there is no local authority involvement. Often referred to as family and friends, carers, or connected people by local authorities and in official documents.

Personal statement

Personal statements are an important part of the UCAS application. It's an opportunity to describe your ambitions, skills and experiences.

Bursary

Bursaries are a sum of money given by universities/colleges to help students pay for their education. Sometimes it's specifically provided towards fees and accommodation. Bursaries are only given to a select number of students who meet certain criteria. Terms and conditions will depend on each higher education institution. Bursaries don't need to be repaid.

Grant/Scholarship

Grants are offered to students from under-represented backgrounds by charities/trusts to help cover living costs. It may be a one off payment or paid in instalments. Grants and scholarships don't need to be repaid.

HIGHER EDUCATION

WHAT IS HIGHER EDUCATION?

Higher education is the next level of study after sixth form or college, and is available to those who've completed Level 3 qualifications (such as A-levels, BTECs or T-levels).

Higher education can include studying a degree at university or further education college, or undertaking a higher or degree apprenticeship.

WHY HIGHER EDUCATION?

As a HE student you'll get to:

- Study something you really enjoy, or try something new;
- Meet like-minded people and expand your network;
- Do things like study abroad or undertake a work placement;
- Build confidence and develop transferable skills;
- Access professions such as nursing, law, teaching and medicine.

As a graduate you'll:

- Improve your career prospects;
- Increase your earning potential;
- Enjoy better health and wellbeing;
- Be an asset to society;
- Be a role model to the people around you.

If you'd like to find out more about routes into higher education, please visit:

gmhigher.ac.uk/students/further-education-options/

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Higher education costs money, but don't panic as financial support is available (including additional support for care leavers), so money shouldn't be a deciding factor when considering higher education.

STUDENT FINANCE

Here's a breakdown of what you need to know about student finance and the financial support available:

Tuition fees

- Universities and colleges can charge up to £9,250 per year for full time study. Fees for study in a further education college are often less.
- This money is paid directly to the university or college by the Student Loans Company.
- There's nothing you need to pay up front, simply make your application to the Student Loans Company as soon as you can, applications usually open in the Feb/March before you begin your study.

Living/Maintenance costs

- You can also apply for a maintenance loan to cover living costs while studying such as food, rent and course materials.
- The amount varies depending on where you choose to study, whether you live away from home or choose to live with parents.
- The amount also depends on your level of household income.

If you're a care leaver you'll be classified as an 'independent student' and you'll automatically get the maximum amount available.

You'll need to prove your independent student status, but your personal adviser or social worker will be able to help you access the documents you need.

If you're care experienced, estranged from your parents, or in kinship care, you may be able to apply for student finance as an 'independent student'. You'll need to provide evidence of your estrangement status.

Find out more:
[gov.uk/student-finance](https://www.gov.uk/student-finance)

If you have further enquiries about your status, you can email:
independent_student_enquiries@slc.co.uk

Information correct as of January 2024

ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Local authority HE bursary

If you're a care leaver starting higher education for the first time before your 25th birthday, you'll be entitled to a £2000 higher education bursary from your local authority. Each local authority will pay this in a different way – we recommend that you check with your local authority.

Local authority leaving care grant

Care leavers are also entitled to a Leaving Care Grant (also known as a Setting Up Home Allowance). This can be used to help furnish your accommodation. The legal minimum is £3000, but some local authorities may offer more than this. Ask your local authority about these before you start university and get them written into your Pathway Plan, if possible.

You can search for your local authority care leaver offer at:

careleaveroffer.co.uk

Grants from other organisations

Alongside bursaries, care leavers and care experienced students also have access to grants, such as the Capstone Care Leavers Trust, The Spark Foundation Trust and Care Leavers Foundation. You can find their websites towards the back of the guide.

University bursaries

Many universities will offer bursaries for students who are care leavers or care experienced. These don't have to be repaid. Information can be found on the Propel website or the individual university websites.

Priority for emergency student support funds

All universities will have emergency student support funds, and a care experienced student's application may be prioritised over other applications.

Travel costs to open days and interviews

Some universities cover the costs of transport for students who struggle to afford the cost of travelling to open days and interviews. There may be other financial support open to you at university, it's always a good idea to ask the university named contact about this.

Support with graduation costs

Affording graduation costs can also be a concern for those who are care experienced. To ensure that care experienced students can celebrate their achievements some universities help cover the costs of graduation.

**Please remember that the information provided in this booklet is a general guide and isn't specific to every university. Please contact universities to find out more about the specific support they offer.*

SUPPORT FROM UNIVERSITIES

Starting university is an exciting time, but it can also be stressful. To help you adapt to student life, universities help in the following ways.

PRE-ENTRY SUPPORT

Universities will provide support throughout the application cycle, before you start university. This includes the following:

A named contact

Many universities have a named member of staff to support care leavers and care experienced students, the named contact provides information to care experienced students before and throughout their studies. You can find the named contact on Propel or the university website.

Contextual admissions

Universities sometimes offer reduced entry requirements to take into account someone's background or personal circumstances (for example having a disrupted education); this varies across universities, so you should contact those you're interested in.

Pre-entry visits/outreach activities

Most institutions offering HE courses will hold open days, allowing you to visit the campus before you apply and to help you make your decision about where to study.

Once you've applied and been given an offer, applicant visit days are an extra opportunity to find out more about the subject you've applied for and to ask any further questions you might have.

Many universities will arrange specific visits or organise specific activities for students who are care experienced. These will give you the chance to ask any questions you have in a supportive environment. You can contact the university you're holding an offer from to arrange visits or visit our website to find out about activities within the region.

SUPPORT DURING YOUR STUDIES

Care experienced student network

Some universities offer a network for care experienced students to meet up and socialise. If you're interested in whether a university has such a network contact the named contact.

Wellbeing and counselling support

All universities have some level of wellbeing and counselling provision for students, and care experienced learners will often be prioritised for these services, so if you encounter stress during your studies there'll always be someone to talk to. Some universities also run wellbeing events such as workshops and courses focusing on common issues such as sleep and anxiety, as well as offering self-help resources.

More information about university support, including who the named contact is, can be found on the Propel website or via the university's own website.

CAREER SUPPORT

Universities also help care experienced students to gain skills from extra-curricular activities and work experience.

Student ambassador employment

To help care experienced students earn money whilst studying, many universities encourage them to apply for the role of student ambassadors. This allows care leavers to work with other students and to assist with events such as open days and summer schools.

There are often a wider range of other roles available too, and it can be a well-paid and flexible way to get some great work experience during your studies.

Priority for internships

Many universities offer internships for their graduates; this helps graduates to experience the workplace and add new skills to their CV.

Many of these internships are prioritised for care experienced students.

Support after graduation

Many careers services will provide tailored support to care experienced students and some will provide you with a graduation/ready for work grant to help you make the transition out of university successfully.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT

If you're a care leaver, you'll be entitled to support from your personal adviser if you stay in education or training until the age of 25. As well as supporting you with your education, they can support you with other things such as housing, money, health and wellbeing. All the support you require from your local authority should be in your Pathway Plan, so it's important you contact your personal adviser or social worker before starting university to get this in place.

ACCOMMODATION

One of the great experiences of university is living in student accommodation and making new friends. To make this transition easier, most universities offer additional support.

365 Accommodation

Many universities offer care experienced students the chance to stay in university owned accommodation all year round.

Guarantor support

Many universities also offer independent students (which can include care experienced students) a guarantor scheme to help with rent.

The Unite Foundation Scholarship

This is offered in partnership with 27 universities and provides free accommodation for the duration of your degree. To be eligible you need to be under 25, a statutory care leaver or estranged from your family, holding UK home fee status and applying to a partner university. Please note that the Unite Foundation can't guarantee this scholarship.

Support with finding accommodation

If you'd prefer to live in private accommodation rather than university accommodation (such as halls of residence), the university accommodation team may have a list of approved contacts, and some universities may be willing to act as guarantors or provide a list of approved guarantors. You may already have accommodation, which you want to continue living in; therefore, you should speak to your personal adviser or social worker about this.



ACCESSING THE SUPPORT

To access the support we've talked about, it's important that you tell your university that you're care experienced. This can be achieved in the following ways.

Tick the box

Tick the box on your UCAS application to let your university or college know that you're care experienced. This allows the care experienced support staff to contact you to let you know what support you're entitled to. Admissions teams will also be able to see this information, however it will not negatively affect your application. It will not be shared with anyone else, unless you choose to make more people aware.

Personal statement

A personal statement is a chance for you to explain why the university should accept you on their course, including how your experiences both inside and outside the classroom have given you the skills and personal qualities to make you an ideal student. You may want to share your care experience in your personal statement if you can relate it to why you're applying to a course, or how you've developed certain skills due to your experiences such as independence and resilience.

Referee

Your referee will usually be a teacher and they will comment on your suitability as a student and for the course. They will not share personal details about you but they may comment on your circumstances, if appropriate.

Enrolment

You may be asked at enrolment if you're a care leaver/care experienced. Again, it's important to tick this box to let the university know so they can reach out to you to offer additional support.

Reach out to the named contact

Once you join your university, get in touch with the named contact and inform them that you're care experienced. They'll be able to inform you of the support available and make sure you're getting everything you're entitled to. You can contact them at any time during your course if you decide not to disclose this initially.

Verification check

For some kinds of support (usually financial support), you may be asked to provide evidence that you're care experienced. Your personal adviser or social worker will be able to help you access the documents you need.

Your local authority will also be able to provide support and you should liaise with them about this. You can contact your local children's rights or advocacy service if you're encountering any issues with accessing this support. Some universities will also advocate on your behalf with the local authority with your permission.

TOP TIPS

As a care experienced student the prospect of starting university can be daunting.

Remember there is always support for you at university to help you achieve your goals. Follow our top tips to help your journey...

- 1 Tick the care experienced box on your UCAS application.
- 2 Get in touch with the named contact.
- 3 Talk to your local authority contact and discuss the support they can provide you.
- 4 When applying for grants and bursaries, check that you meet the eligibility criteria and check the deadline as some grants and bursaries may have early deadlines.

Use this section to note down your next steps

FURTHER INFORMATION

GREATER MANCHESTER HIGHER

Find out more about the support available at Greater Manchester universities, resources and events:

gmhigher.ac.uk/under-represented

PROPEL

Search for university care leaver contacts, specific support at university and resources:

propel.org.uk

UCAS

Search for university courses and resources for care leavers:

ucas.com

CARE LEAVER OFFER

Find your local authority's offer to care leavers, including education:

careleaveroffer.co.uk

BECOME

A charity for children in care and young care leavers:

becomecharity.org.uk

UNITE FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship covering accommodation and bills for up to 3 years of study at HE:

thisisusatuni.org

CORAM VOICE

Children's rights organisation:

coramvoice.org.uk

CAPSTONE CARE LEAVERS TRUST

Grant for care leavers in need:

capstonecareleavertrust.org/eligibility-criteria

BARNARDOS

A charity supporting children, young people, parents and carers across the UK:

barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-young-people/leaving-care

CARE LEAVERS ASSOCIATION

Charity aimed at improving the lives of care leavers:

careleavers.com

STUDENT FINANCE ENGLAND

Find out about student finance specific to care leavers:

practitioners.slc.co.uk/care-leavers

THE STUDENT ROOM

Community page for students where you can ask questions about university and learn more about being a student:

thestudentroom.co.uk

CARE LEAVER COVENANT

Find a range of opportunities and support available to care leavers:

mycovenant.org.uk

NNECL

National Network for Education of Care Leavers. Find out which universities hold the NNECL quality mark:

nnecl.org

STAND ALONE

A charity supporting people who are estranged:

standalone.org.uk

THE SPARK FOUNDATION TRUST

A charity offering grants to care leavers:

sparkfoundation.org.uk



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