

Widening care-experienced young people's participation in higher/further education

Information sheet for Virtual School Heads

Overview

This research project aims to increase the number of young people leaving care going onto higher and further education. The most recent data from the Department for Education (DfE) shows that just 13% of pupils who were looked after continuously for 12 months or more at 31st March 2015 progressed to higher education (HE) by age 19 by 2018/19 compared to 43% of all other pupils.

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC), the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), Become and the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSHs) are seeking to increase the number of young care leavers in HE and further education (FE), building on research carried out by the Behavioural Insights Team. This found that sending a personalised "nudge" letter to students from someone they could identify with, was effective at raising the number who apply to, and accept offers from, selective universities.

In this research, letters written by care experienced young people in HE and FE will be sent to young people in year 12 and 13 (or equivalent) who are currently in care. The letters will encourage young people to think about applying to HE/FE, setting out the support available (financial and other) to young care leavers and signposting to Become's Propel website and free adviceline. We will then monitor whether young people who received the letters were more likely to apply to HE or FE.

The role of Virtual School Heads

Virtual School Heads (VSHs) have a key role to play in the success of this project. Previous research has shown the importance of students receiving a personalised letter. By working with you we will be able to identify students and ensure they receive a letter addressed to them individually.

WWCSC will supply you with letters from care leavers to be sent out to students. There will be four letters in total (each student will receive two letters over the academic year). Two to be sent out in November 2020 - one from a young care leaver in HE and one from a young care leaver in FE - and two to be sent out in March 2021 - again one from someone in HE and one from someone in FE.

It is important that these letters are supportive and encouraging. For this reason, the letter from a young care leaver in HE will be sent to young people who are in years 12 and 13 taking A level/BTEC courses. The letter from a young carer in FE will be sent to young people who are in years 12 and 13 in college, taking vocational courses. This letter will also refer briefly to HE information so that young people who are pursuing FE at this stage recognise that HE is open to them as a post 18 option. The FE letter will also be sent to looked after young people aged 16-18 who are currently not in education,

employment or training to try to re-engage them in education and signpost to support available.

You will be asked to select which letter the young people in care in years 12 and 13 or equivalent in your LA should get and to complete a mail merge so they receive a personally addressed letter in November, and then a follow up letter in March 2021. The letters will also include:

- A flyer for Become's Propel website and their free advice line.
- An information sheet which provides details of the project and our plans to measure the impact of the letter.

WWCSC will pay for all postage and stationery.

Measuring impact

We want to see if sending these letters led to any increase in the number of young care leavers attending HE and FE. For this reason, we will ask VSHs to share information about the learners who have received letters, specifically, we will ask VSHs to share a list of the unique learner numbers (ULNs) of students who were sent letters. We will then link these ULNs with data held by the government to measure whether students who received the letters were more likely to progress to HE/FE.

Because there is a lag in data collection, we won't be able to see any impact on HE/FE entry until Spring 2022 for the Year 13s and until Spring 2023 for the Year 12s. Therefore, if VSHs also collect information on whether students go to HE/FE we may explore collecting this data so we can find out whether the letters had an impact a little earlier.

Contacts

If you have any questions about this project please get in touch with Eleanor Briggs, Director of Policy, WWCSC (Eleanor.briggs@whatworks-csc.org.uk).

To sign up to take part, please complete the [Expression of Interest form](#).

Timeline

| | Group 1 | Group 2 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 2020/21 AY | Year 12 | Year 13 |
| 2021/22 AY | Year 13 | Enter HE |
| Most apply to HE | Jan-22 | Jan-21 |
| HE entry data available | Spring 23 | Spring 22 |