

## Widening participation in higher and further education for young people in care

Intervention Developer	Become and WWCS
Delivery Organisations	Virtual School Heads from at least 23 local authorities in England, Become
Evaluator	What Works for Children's Social Care
Principal Investigator	Michael Sanders (PI) - Chief Executive - WWCS
Protocol Author(s)	Vicky Clayton, Abby Hennessey
Type of Trial	Pilot Evaluation
Age or Status of Participants	Treated: Young people in care aged 16-18 who are in post-16 education (in schools or colleges) within participating authorities.
Number of Participating Local Authorities	20+ treated
Number of Children and Families	Approximately 2500 young people
Primary Outcome(s)	Evidence of feasibility Evidence of promise Readiness for trial Costs
Date	January 2021 (v 1.1) - added in details of data storage

## Summary

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCS), 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 young care leavers' awareness of the support available to them to access higher education (HE) / university and further education (FE) / college.

This project builds on previous research by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT). BIT conducted a clustered randomised controlled trial, between 2014-7, and found that sending

a personalised “nudge” letter to disadvantaged students from someone they could identify with, was effective at raising the number who apply to, and accept offers from, selective universities<sup>1</sup>.

In this project, letters written by care experienced young people in HE and FE will be sent to young people aged 16-18 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 ([www.becomecharity.org.uk/for-professionals/propel/](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk/for-professionals/propel/)) and the Become Care Advice Line, which is free to call (0800 023 2033). As part of the project we are funding an additional Become Advisor to provide support to young people through the Become Care Advice Line. The Become Advisors can provide one-to-one, tailored advice on applying to college or university and accessing support.

WWCSC will also create videos of students who are care experienced talking about their experience of FE and HE and the support available. In this way, the students in the videos act as role models and can be a source of inspiration. These videos will be shared on Become’s Propel website.

Letters will be sent out in November 2020, with a further reminder letter in March 2021. WWCSC will carry out a mixed-methods pilot evaluation of the intervention to explore evidence of promise, the feasibility and readiness for a potential future trial and to provide an overview of the cost of delivering the intervention.

## Table of contents

### [Widening participation in higher and further education for young people in care](#)

#### [Summary](#)

#### [Table of contents](#)

#### [Background and Problem Statement](#)

##### [Policy context](#)

##### [Rationale for the evaluation](#)

#### [Intervention and Theory of Change](#)

##### [Description of the intervention being evaluated](#)

##### [1\). Intervention component: Letters and leaflet](#)

##### [Who will distribute the letters and leaflet?](#)

##### [2\). Intervention component: Access to Become advisor](#)

##### [3\). Intervention component: Become’s Propel website](#)

##### [Intervention development](#)

##### [Theory of change](#)

##### [Logic model](#)

#### [Pilot evaluation](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Sanders, M., Chande, R., Selley, E., & Team, B. I. (2017). *Encouraging people into university*. Department for Education.

[Aims](#)

[Research Questions](#)

[Evidence of feasibility](#)

[Reach](#)

[Acceptability](#)

[Facilitators and barriers](#)

[Evidence of promise](#)

[Readiness for trial](#)

[Design and Methods](#)

[Qualitative methods](#)

[Interviews:](#)

[Quantitative methods](#)

[Virtual School Heads \(VSHs\):](#)

[Young people who received a letter and leaflet:](#)

[Analysis](#)

[Qualitative](#)

[Cost evaluation](#)

[Ethics & Participation](#)

[Registration](#)

[Data protection](#)

[Personnel](#)

[Timeline](#)

## Background and Problem Statement

### Policy context

On 31 March 2019 there were 18,380 young people in care aged 16 and above, who represent 24% of all children in care.<sup>2</sup> 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. Only 1% of children looked after continuously for at least 12 months progress to high tariff HE (compared with 11% of other pupils) and this rate has remained static since 2009/10<sup>3</sup>.

### Rationale for the evaluation

This project has two overarching aims 1) to help young people with care experience see their social identity as compatible with FE or HE and 2) to help young people with care experience feel more supported and informed in their decision-making about college or university. The first aim will partly be achieved via the letter writer acting as a role model the student can relate to who has succeeded in the FE/HE setting. The second aim will be achieved by funding additional resource (one more Become Advisor for one year) for one-to-one, tailored advice on applying to college or university and accessing support. This second aim is also partially achieved by the letter and leaflet, which include details of the support available and signposts to the Become Care Advice Line.

The approach of sending a personalised “nudge” letter, from a relatable role-model, has not been tested with young people in care. Initially, we explored the option of delivering this intervention as part of a clustered randomised controlled trial (RCT), however we envisaged we could not recruit enough Virtual School Heads (VSHs) before roll-out to be sufficiently powered to detect an effect. Therefore, we considered the option of a quasi-experimental design, specifically a clustered Difference in Differences (DiD), where all the local authorities recruited would be in the treatment group and we would match the treated local authorities to suitable comparators. Whilst this seemed initially promising, further investigation found that the proportion of 16 - 18 year olds who are eligible to attend HE (i.e. have the grades to) but who don't attend is small<sup>4</sup>, and so the population to influence is smaller than was initially expected. (The same analysis has not been conducted for FE). For this reason, the clustered DiD was also underpowered with the number of local authorities we were able to recruit.

For this study, we focus on a pilot evaluation, and evaluate evidence of promise, feasibility and the possibility of running a multisite RCT or an RCT clustered at the school level (rather than virtual school level), which would be better powered. Also, this evaluation allows space for the intervention to be refined or adapted.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2019*. (2019, December 5th). Department for Education. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850306/Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England\\_2019\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Widening participation in higher education*. (2020, July 30th). Explore Education Statistics, HM Government. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

<sup>4</sup> Only 8.8 percent achieved five GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics (a common threshold for progression into Level 3 study that provides access to HE), compared to 47.8 percent of the cohort as a whole. Harrison, N. (2020). Patterns of participation in higher education for care experienced students in England: why has there not been more progress?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 45:9, 1986-2000, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1582014

## Intervention and Theory of Change

### Description of the intervention being evaluated

The following intervention components are being evaluated:

#### 1). Intervention component: Letters and leaflet

The first intervention component being evaluated is the sending of personalised letters and an information leaflet to young people in care from relatable role models. The letters are written and signed by students who are in either FE or HE (or had recently successfully completed FE or HE) and have care experience. Two letters are being evaluated: one letter focuses on HE and one focuses on FE.

#### Who will distribute the letters and leaflet?

Virtual School Heads (VSHs) are being recruited through the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) to support with delivery. VSHs have existing relationships with young people in care and access to their home addresses and are thus in a position to send the letters and leaflet. The VSHs are also in a position to tailor which letter the young person receives i.e. either FE or HE. WWCSO will provide two letters (one HE focussed and one FE focussed) to VSHs. VSHs will perform mail merge and send tailored letters to young people in care aged 16-18 years. WWCSO will cover the costs of stationery and postage.

#### 2). Intervention component: Access to Become advisor

The second intervention component being evaluated is the access to a specialist advisor, who has been hired by Become and funded by WWCSO; this advisor is able to offer support in decision-making around applying and entering HE.

#### 3). Intervention component: Become's Propel website

The third intervention component being evaluated is Become's Propel website. This website provides information to care leavers on support available from HE. The website was independently evaluated by the University of Northampton in 2017, however additional resources are being made available on the website through this project. The additional resources include videos of care leavers discussing the benefits of higher/further education and the support available to them.

Both the letter and the leaflet will signpost to Become's Propel website and to the Become Care Advice Line.

### Intervention development

The first intervention component (letters and leaflet) is being developed collaboratively between Become, TASO, and WWCSO. Become recruited eight young people with care experience to contribute to the intervention development. The young people are working with WWCSO and Become to write the letters and design the leaflet. The following framework was developed by TASO and will be used as a foundation for developing the letters:

**Dear [name],**

**[Introduction** - author explains how they are from a similar background as the letter recipient and establishes themselves as sufficiently relatable to act as a role model]

**[Role model story** - author explains that they are currently in higher education and describes a challenge faced in getting there but how they are now flourishing]

**[Future options** - why is it important to consider a wide range of options, and the benefits of HE - and if the recipient is considering HE, to make sure they consider a broad choice of courses and universities as they have options open to them]

**[Support is available** - provide reassuring messages about the cost of HE and the financial/other support which is available]

**[Access to Become support** - framing the advisor as a service which has been provided and they should take a look at]

**[Social identity reassurance** - some content to link back to the authors identity and experience of social care - closing statement emphasising that the recipient should consider HE and that there is support available]

[Sign off]

## Theory of change

The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) reviewed the supporting literature and created a high-level theory of change. In particular, we took learning from other 'letters' studies and applied this to our intervention design (Sanders, Chande, Kozman, & Leunig, 2018<sup>5</sup>; Hoxby & Turner, 2013<sup>6</sup>; Dynarski, Libassi, Michelmore, & Owen, 2018<sup>7</sup>; Hyman, 2020<sup>8</sup>; Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012<sup>9</sup>; Bird, Castleman, Goodman, & Lambertson, 2017<sup>10</sup>).

For example, in a similar vein to Sanders et al. (2018) the letters in this study will be written by role models - students who will emphasise that they are from a similar background as the recipient and appear knowledgeable and authoritative on the issue at hand. We will also follow a similar approach to Hoxby and Turner (2013) who emphasised that the intervention was designed to help a student gather the information to make a knowledgeable decision for themselves; they do not direct students to any particular college or group of colleges. Furthermore, Bettinger et al. (2012) demonstrated the value of personalised support, therefore making a convincing case for including signposting to the Become Advisor in our study. Lastly, taking learning from Dynarski et al. (2018), we decided that any information provided about the support available should emphasise the ease with which students can access it; there should be minimal friction in accessing the Become Advisor.

---

<sup>5</sup> Sanders, M., Chande, R., Kozman, E., & Leunig, T. (2018). *Can Role Models Help Encourage Young People to Apply to (Selective) Universities: Evidence From a Large Scale English Field Experiment*. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3305176](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3305176)

<sup>6</sup> Hoxby, C. & Turner, S. (2013). Expanding college opportunities for high-achieving, low income students. *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper*, 12, 014. <https://siepr.stanford.edu/research/publications/expanding-college-opportunities-high-achieving-low-income-students>

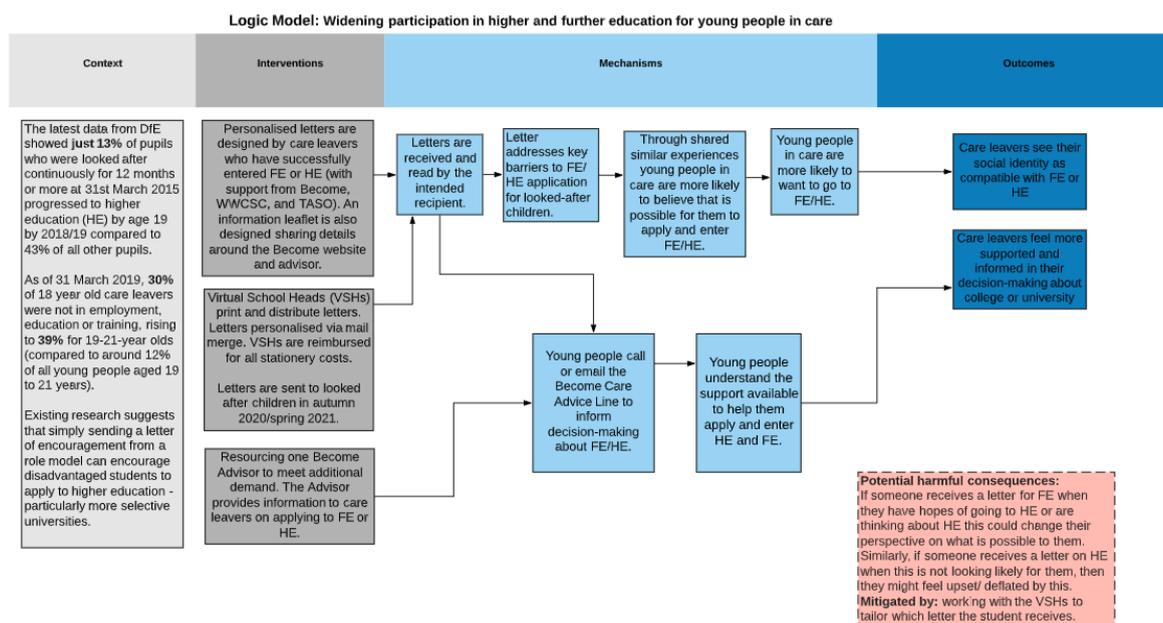
<sup>7</sup> Dynarski, S., Libassi, C. J., Michelmore, K., & Owen, S. (2018). *Closing the gap: The effect of a targeted, tuition-free promise on college choices of high-achieving, low-income students* (No. w25349). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25349>

<sup>8</sup> Hyman, J. (2020). Can Light-Touch College-Going Interventions Make a Difference? Evidence from a Statewide Experiment in Michigan. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 39(1), 159-190.

<sup>9</sup> Bettinger, E. P., Long, B., Oreopoulos, P., & Sanbonmatsu, L. (2012). The role of application assistance in college decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 127, 1205–1242

<sup>10</sup> Bird, K. A., Castleman, B. L., Goodman, J., & Lambertson, C. (2017). Nudging at a national scale: Experimental evidence from a FAFSA completion campaign. *EdPolicyWorks working paper no. 55*.

## Logic model



## Pilot evaluation

### Aims

This mixed-methods pilot evaluation has three primary aims:

- 1) To explore evidence of promise i.e. hearing from people delivering and receiving the intervention to understand their views and experiences.
- 2) To explore feasibility and assess readiness for a potential future trial.
- 3) To provide an overview of the cost of delivering the intervention.

The research questions and methods for this pilot evaluation are set out below. Findings from the pilot will be published in a report in 2021.

### Research Questions

#### Evidence of feasibility

This involves assessing reach and exploring acceptability (who the intervention reached and what the experience was of those delivering and receiving the intervention) and understanding the contextual facilitators and barriers.

#### Reach

1. How many young people were sent a letter and leaflet? (Data source: admin data from VSHs)
2. What proportion of the young people who received the letter(s) and leaflet interacted with the Become Advisors? (Data source: VSHs for the number of people who received the letter(s) and admin data from Become the number of young people who accessed the Become Advisors)

## Acceptability

3. In what way (if any) does the intervention need to be refined or adapted to make it more acceptable or more relevant or useful to the specific context in which it is delivered? (Data source: surveys with VSHs and young people, interviews with the Become Advisors, and focus group with young people)

## Facilitators and barriers

4. What are the contextual barriers and facilitators for delivery of the intervention, and are these accurately captured in the logic model? (Data source: surveys with VSHs, and interviews with the Become Advisors)

## Evidence of promise

This involves hearing from those who deliver and receive the intervention (VSHs, Become Advisors, and young people) to understand their views and experiences (benefits/harms) of the intervention/s. This includes revisiting our intervention theory and logic model and exploring whether our interventions address the cause/s of the problem.

5. How do Become Advisors support care leavers in application and entry to FE/HE? (Data source: interviews with Become Advisors, focus group with young people)
6. What perceived benefits of the intervention do stakeholders identify? (Data source: surveys with VSHs and young people, focus group with young people, and interviews with Become Advisors)
7. Do there appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects? (Data source: surveys with VSHs and young people, focus group with young people, and interviews with Become Advisors)

## Readiness for trial

8. What might improve recruitment of VSHs in the future? (Data source: surveys with VSHs)
9. Could the relevant data be collected to facilitate the IPE and hypothetically could the data be collected to facilitate matching for a later impact evaluation? (Data source: surveys with VSHs and young people]
10. According to VSHs, how acceptable is randomisation within the local authority? (Data source: surveys with VSHs)
11. Would there be any barriers for VSHs to send the letters to a younger or older cohort (years 8,9,10 or post-18 years old)?<sup>11</sup>
12. What adaptations to the letters would be required for young people who are / have been unaccompanied asylum seeking children (USAC)? (Data source: surveys with VSHs)<sup>12</sup>

## Cost

13. Can the data on costings be collected? (Data source: WWCS administrative data on payments)

---

<sup>11</sup> We are interested in expanding the age range to increase sample size. The expected mechanisms would be slightly different in the different age groups. For the younger age groups (pre-GCSE), the hypothesised mechanism would be increased aspiration leading to improved GCSE grades, thus increasing the pool of students with care experience who are eligible to go to university. For the older age cohort (post 18), the hypothesised mechanism would be increased knowledge about the possibility of HE from non-traditional pathways e.g. retaking GCSEs, Access to HE.

<sup>12</sup> Some VSHs have expressed an interest in creating a letter specifically for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Although UASCs are already included in the intervention, their experiences are likely to be sufficiently different to non-UASC care-experienced young people that they may benefit from a more relatable role model.

14. What is the cost to local authorities if they were to implement the intervention independently? (Data source: data from the VSH and Become administrative data)

The pilot is not designed to provide a counterfactual, or powered to detect impact, so all evidence of potential outcomes will be exploratory only and will not be able to be used to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention.

## Design and Methods

This mixed-methods pilot evaluation involves collecting qualitative data through interviews and a focus group and quantitative administrative and survey data.

### Qualitative methods

#### Interviews:

Become Advisors:

- One semi-structured telephone interview at baseline (December 2020) with a Become advisor (already in post prior to this project). This is to understand the service structure and usual practice e.g. how they are already supporting care leavers in application and entry to FE/HE.
- Semi-structured interviews with the newly recruited Become Advisor at interim (May 2021) and endline (November 2021). This is to understand evidence of promise and whether any part of the intervention needs to be refined or adapted.
- The interviews will be approximately 45 minutes and conducted by WWCS's qualitative researcher.

#### Focus group

- One semi-structured focus group with four to six young people (no less than three) who received a letter and engaged with the Care Advice Line/ Become Advisors.
- This is to understand satisfaction with the content and delivery of the interventions (both the letter and the Become Advisors), what adaptations would improve the acceptability or perceived effectiveness of the interventions, and any perceived benefit and unintended consequences of the interventions (May 2021).
- The focus group will only include young people (instead of a mix of young people and professionals or parents / carers) and so we have fewer concerns about young people self-censoring. The topic is not deemed sensitive, however, we will ask participants to be mindful of the level of privacy they have in the environment they are participating in when providing their answers.
- The focus group discussion will be 1 hour long. We will also offer a short (20 minutes) one-to-one conversation for those who do not wish to or cannot access the virtual focus group discussion.

Due to the context of the Covid-19, we shall be conducting the interviews via telephone and the focus group online (most likely via Zoom), and recording the session using the inbuilt functionality.

## Quantitative methods

### Administrative data:

Administrative data collection from VSHs about the number of FE letters and number of HE letters sent (following letter distribution in November 2020 and March 2021).

Administrative data collection from Become at 6m and 12m to find out:

- If collected, the type, frequency, and duration of support from the Advisors; this means, categorising and recording the type of support provided and recording how often and for how long the Advisors helped each care leaver who reached out.
- If collected, the method of communication for supporting individuals. For example, via email or via the Become Care Advice Line
- If collected, any outcome associated with support provided.
- The number of young people who contacted the Become Care Advice Line mention receiving a letter and leaflet when asked how they heard about the advice line; this means the Advisors will have to routinely ask young people who call or email whether they received a letter or not and record this systematically.

### Surveys

#### Virtual School Heads (VSHs):

- One online short survey (using Qualtrics software) shared at two timepoints via email to all recruited VSHs.
- The survey will be shared shortly after letter distribution (in both December 2020 and April 2021).
- This survey is concerned only with intervention component 1: letters and leaflet. The survey seeks to understand: contextual facilitators and barriers to delivery, what adaptations would improve the intervention's acceptability or perceived effectiveness, satisfaction with the content and delivery of the intervention and any perceived benefits and harms of the intervention.

#### Young people who received a letter and leaflet:

- One online short survey (using Qualtrics software) shared via email from VSHs to young people who received a letter and leaflet.
- This survey is concerned only with intervention component 1: letters and leaflet. The survey seeks to understand satisfaction with the content and delivery of the intervention, what adaptations would improve the intervention's acceptability or perceived effectiveness, and any perceived benefits and harms of the intervention. (April 2021).

The response rates for the surveys will give us an indication of whether the data can be easily collected (RQ9).

### Recruitment:

Virtual school heads will act as the gatekeepers to the young people. We will request that they send out a link to the survey and an invitation to the focus group discussion in an email

to the young people to whom they sent the letter. The invitation to the focus group discussion will specify that they'll have needed to have contacted the Become helpline. Young people who have accessed the Become helpline and confirm that they received one of the letters will also be approached via Become. The participants in the interviews and the focus group discussion will receive an information sheet beforehand, and will be required to confirm their consent via an electronic form.

### **Participants:**

- Become Advisors (2)
- All recruited Virtual School Heads (approx. 20) to share admin data
- VSHs who choose to take part in the survey
- Young people who choose to take part in the survey (would expect about a 20% response rate from approx. 2500 young people).
- Young people who choose to take part in a focus group (6)

## **Analysis**

### **Qualitative**

Interviews and the focus group will be recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised prior to analysis. Qualitative analysis of interview and focus group data will use NVivo software and follow a thematic analysis approach. This will involve data familiarisation, checking accuracy of transcription, labelling the data with descriptive codes and developing themes which describe patterns across the data to answer the pre-specified research questions. Any free-text responses from the surveys will be analysed using thematic analysis.

### **The following steps will be taken to ensure rigor in the analysis and reporting of qualitative data:**

- A systematic approach to the analytical process.
- Clear reporting of the steps taken in data collection, processing, and analysis.
- We will ensure that the findings are grounded in data i.e. through presentation of participant responses using quotes and we will not use statements out of context.
- WWCS's senior qualitative researcher will have oversight of the analytical process and the development of themes.
- We will seek to look for evidence disconfirming our own views, and will reflect on our personal values and our relationship to the research.

### **Quantitative:**

The total number of young people who were sent the letter and leaflet, and the total number of VSHs participating (recruited and retained until the endline data collection) will be reported. The proportion of young people who received the letter and leaflet who interacted with the Become adviser will be calculated by dividing the number of young people who contacted the Become adviser mentioning the letter by the total number of letters sent.

Summary statistics from the structured questions in the surveys will be reported.

## **Cost evaluation**

Cost calculations shall reflect the cost to local authorities if they were to roll out the intervention by themselves. The costing shall include the development and dissemination of the letters and videos, and the staff costs of the Become Advisor for the year. Video equipment (to develop the videos) is excluded. It shall not include the associated time of the VSHs, for example, to administer the letters or to respond to queries from the young people about the intervention as we estimate that these will be negligible.

Costs will be collected internally on the aspects that WWCS are funding (development and dissemination of the letters and videos), and any additional unforeseen costs associated with the Become adviser position will be collected from Become.

The cost per child will be calculated by dividing the total costs by the number of children reached (collected from the VSHs), and a range of costs provided to estimate the cost to local authorities were they to deliver this themselves with local role models (total costs for the development of the letters and videos and the dissemination of the letters within the local authority).

The costs for each element will be reported separately as detailed in the table below.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Cost included</b>
Development of letters	Payment to participants Staff time to interview participants and finalise the letter
Development of videos	Payment to participants Staff time to record the videos and edit
Dissemination of the letters	Postage and stationery
Become Advisor	Salary for one year

## **Ethics & Participation**

An ethics application was submitted to the WWCS research ethics committee (consisting of external representatives) for consideration at the meeting on 20th October 2020. The ethics application considered:

### **Benefits to research participants or third parties**

#### *Research participants:*

The existing research leads us to believe that letters will have a positive impact on those who receive them. Young people who receive a letter may feel supported in their decision-making process about their next steps. They may also feel a connection to the person writing the letter, (through shared care experience) and feel inspired to follow a similar path, or know that this option is available to them. Both of the letters (FE and HE) will

echo the same supportive messages about the value of education and the support available for people like the letter recipient.

In addition to the letter, young people will also receive a leaflet about how to access the Become Care Advice Line where an Advisor will be able to support them with HE/FE advice.

#### *Third parties:*

Longer term and wider benefits for those not involved in the research include potentially identifying a way to improve take-up of FE/HE.

The students with care experience who contribute to the intervention design are being supported by Become, a charity specialising in support for care leavers. Through sharing their story in a supportive environment, knowing the purpose is to help others pursue a similar path, this could bring positive benefits to participants e.g. to their wellbeing and sense of purpose.

### **Risks to the research participants and third parties and any mitigations**

If someone receives a letter focused on FE when they have hopes of going to HE or are thinking about HE this could change their perspective on what is possible to them. Similarly, if someone receives a letter focused on HE and if this option is not looking likely for them with their grades then they might feel upset/deflated.

#### *Accurate dissemination of letters:*

We can mitigate these risks by working with the VSHs to select which letter the student receives depending on where they are studying. For example, schools where young people are taking A levels (meaning they are more likely to be on-track for HE if they wish to attend) will get the HE letter and colleges doing more vocational 16+ courses will get the FE letter.

The FE letter will also include a line on HE so that children also realise HE is an option for them.

#### *Risks of the data collection activities*

Any risks pertaining to data collection e.g. survey, admin data or interview, will be considered in full through a Data Protection Impact Assessment.

#### *Risk to participants involved in developing the intervention*

The participants who are featured in the videos on the Become website will have their care status very publicly displayed. Their consent will be obtained prior to filming. The information sheet explains that they will be shown the video before it is published online and have the opportunity to withdraw their consent at this stage or any stage. The video will be removed from the Become website at most 2 years after the intervention is complete.

It may also be the case that being involved in developing the intervention brings up difficult memories. The information sheet explains that someone from Become can be on the call to provide support and a friend can also be present if they would like.

## **Risks to researchers**

There are no identified risks to researchers in this study.

## **Consent procedures**

The young people who receive the letters and leaflet do not have the option to opt in or out of the study. All members of the public receive letters and leaflets regularly without consent. Verbal consent will be recorded and obtained prior to interviews with the Become Advisors. Prior to the interview an information sheet will be shared with the Advisor and a discussion about the evaluation will take place.

## **Measures taken to ensure confidentiality and privacy;**

The confidentiality and privacy of individuals involved will be a priority throughout the project.

### *Confidentiality of the young people whose story is in the letters*

We will ensure that Become recruits young people who are comfortable to write a letter and that they will have the option of using a different name when signing off the letter.

Contact details will be stored in accordance with WWCS's Privacy Policy (<https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/policy-page-new/>). Personal data collected from interviews and focus group discussions will be stored securely in cloud storage with access restricted to members of the project team in accordance with WWCS Data Protection Policy (available on request).

## **Procedures for dealing with information arising in the course of fieldwork that is a cause for concern**

In an email sent to all VSHs who took part we suggested that they share their contact details, e.g. their email address/ work telephone number, at the time when the young people receive the letter and leaflet. This is so that they have a point of contact if they want to speak to someone about the letter they have received.

## **Expected outcomes, impacts and benefits of the research**

It is expected that the letters and support from the Become Advisor may help care leavers feel more supported and informed about their options with regards to continuing education.

## **Possible ethical implications of dissemination plans**

A report will be produced and published on WWCS website; no individuals will be identified in the report.

We will get a review of the report by key stakeholders to make sure we're communicating findings appropriately.

We will make sure the report is accessible e.g. understandable language, accompanied by a summary, using alternative text for figures and images.

Other creative means of dissemination will be designed by our Communications team.

The report will be shared individually with the students who design the letters and leaflet.

- The ethics application received sign off from El Briggs (project manager and Director of Policy), and Vicky Clayton (Data Science Manager) and El Briggs represented the

project at the REC meeting. The committee issued a favourable consideration on the condition that the information sheet was amended to make it clearer how young people featured in the videos could withdraw their consent, and that each young person featured in the videos would be provided with a paper or electronic version of the information sheet. These suggestions were implemented.

## Registration

This trial protocol will be registered with osf.io, and the trial registry will be updated with the outcomes at the end of the project.

## Data protection

WWCSC is the data controller for all of the personal data in this project. For the co-creation of the videos and letters, contact details which constitutes personal data will be shared with WWCSC by Become under the legal basis of consent. The data collected in relation to the interviews, focus group discussions and surveys will be personal data. The legal basis for this processing will be legitimate interest. This is a three part test:

- 1) Purpose test: are you pursuing a legitimate interest?

We are a registered charity with a mandate to seek better outcomes for children, young people and families, which includes care leavers. Since the aim of the research is to understand how to better deliver an intervention to help care leavers feel more supported and informed in their decision-making about college or university, we deem the research within our legitimate interest.

- 2) Necessity test: is the processing necessary for that purpose?

The processing of contact details for a small number of young people is necessary to allow the co-creation of the intervention. The processing of the data created during the interviews, focus group discussions and surveys is necessary to understand how to improve the intervention.

- 3) Balance test: do the individual's interests override the legitimate interest?

The data subjects are given an information sheet about the research and the opportunity to ask any further questions (through the provision of contact details in the case of the surveys and directly in the interviews and focus group discussions). The data subjects consent to participating in the research prior to data being collected (though please note that consent is not our legal basis under GDPR). On the basis that data subjects are fully informed about and give their consent to the data processing, we do not believe that the individual's interests override the legitimate interest.

The administrative data from Become is not personal data.

We do not expect to collect any special category data as defined under GDPR.

## Ensuring data quality, anonymity and confidentiality

- **Qualitative data:** Interviews and focus groups will be recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised prior to analysis. WWCS's qualitative researcher, who will be conducting the fieldwork, will also transcribe the three interviews and focus group to ensure data quality and familiarisation with the data.
- **Administrative data from Become:** confirming with the Advisors that the summary statistics are in line with what they would expect from their experience
- **Survey data:** validating data-type constraints (words instead of numbers where we expect them), range constraints for numeric data; set-membership constraints for categorical data (are the categories limited to what we expect?); regular expression / formatting patterns (e.g. dates) and cross-field validation (e.g. before dates start before after dates).

The care leavers developing the intervention will be known to the project team but the steps outlined above will allow their participation to be confidential. Anonymity will be carefully considered when writing up the analysis to ensure that participants in the interviews and focus group discussions are not identifiable.

## Personnel

Michael Sanders (Chief Executive, WWCS) is the principal investigator for this project, and Eleanor Briggs (Director of Policy, WWCS) is managing the project day-to-day. Fiona O'Connor (Head of Communications, WWCS) is supporting on intervention development, Abby Hennessey (Qualitative Researcher, WWCS) is leading the qualitative research and Vicky Clayton (Data Science Manager, WWCS) is supporting on the research side.

WWCS are working closely with the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSHs) on recruiting VSHs, the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) who are advising on the evaluation, and Become - the charity for children in care and young care leavers - who are delivering the website and advisory service.

## Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/leading
	Intervention development	
October 21st - 13th November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Designing personalised letters from two care leavers in higher education (HE) and further education (FE). One letter will be talking about experiences at HE and the other will focus on FE.</li> <li>● The letters and leaflet will be sent to year 12 and 13 students in care (whose Virtual School Head (VSH) has agreed to take part).</li> <li>● Designing a leaflet signposting to the Become Care Advice Line and to the Become <a href="#">Propel</a> website. Additional resources on this website will include videos of care-leavers sharing their</li> </ul>	Fiona O'Connor, Eleanor Briggs

experiences of higher/further education and the support available to them

<b>November 2020 and March 2021</b>	<p>Letter distribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VSHs will conduct mail merge and send both a personalised letter and a leaflet to students' home address.</li> </ul>	VSHs
<b>November 2020 onwards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people in care have access to an additional Become Advisor, who is able to offer support via the Become Care Advice Line, on what support is available in FE/HE (signposted to via the leaflet).</li> </ul>	Become
December 2020	Baseline interview with Become advisor	Abby Hennessey
December / January 2020	Survey and admin request to VSHs	Vicky Clayton
April 2021	Survey and admin request to VSHs; survey to young people	Vicky Clayton
31st March - 30th November 2021	Become share administrative data	Become
May 2021	Interim interview with Become advisor	Abby Hennessey
May 2021	Focus group with young people	Abby Hennessey, Vicky Clayton
November 2021	Endline interview with Become advisor	Abby Hennessey
January 2022	Report	WWCSC