

TASO Recommendations: tackling inequalities for those with experience of children's social care - A case study on the University of Kent's Progress

2025



Overview

TASO, recently published “Tackling inequalities for those with experience of children’s social care - Key findings and recommendations” which outlined the disparities in educational progression and success for individuals with experience of social care in comparison to those without. The full report is available on their website: [download the report](#). Their paper, outlines recommendations for how the higher education sector should be responding to these disparities and supporting these individuals to access and succeed within higher education.

The University of Kent, in collaboration with the Kent and Medway Progression Federation (KMPF) and its partnering institutions have made key contributions to work within this area and it is pleasing to see that our work is already addressing or exceeding the recommendations proposed by TASO. This case study outlines the steps the university has taken to support individuals with experience of social care, in accessing and succeeding within higher education.

Recommendation 1: Supporting Entry and Progression for Students with Experience of Children’s Social Care

The University provides tailored pre-registration support for care-experienced students, with a designated named contact for students. Prospective students can receive guidance on university-related queries and arrange campus visits to become familiar with the environment before the term begins. Furthermore, the University offers a Care Experienced and Estranged Student Travel Bursary to cover return travel costs for attending open days or offer holder events at the Canterbury or Medway campuses. This financial support ensures that care-experienced students can explore the university without financial barriers.

In recognition of the financial barriers that Care Leavers experience, for those who chose to study at Kent, they will automatically be eligible for the Kent Financial Support Package, receiving £1,000 per annum for every year of study at Kent. In addition, the Care Leavers Support Package provides both financial and non-financial assistance to Care Leavers (subject to eligibility). This package includes guaranteed access to accommodation throughout the duration of the course, including during summer vacations, ensuring stable housing. Financial support includes a one-off £600 cash bursary to help with initial university expenses, as well as a £100 contribution towards graduation costs. Additionally, the University may cover travel expenses for attending university interviews, easing potential financial burdens during the application process.

From the moment their place at Kent is confirmed, students are connected with a designated staff member for care leavers, ensuring they receive continuous, specialized support without the need to repeatedly share their personal history. This approach acknowledges the importance of consistent, tailored assistance throughout their university journey.

Upon arrival at Kent, students are invited to join the Kent Ambition Scholars Programme, which offers a curated selection of workshops and support throughout their degree. Additionally, they are encouraged to participate in the Empower Scheme, providing tailored careers support from the outset of their university journey.

Through these initiatives, the University of Kent demonstrates its commitment to supporting care-experienced students by addressing their unique challenges and fostering a successful transition into higher education.

Recommendation 2: Expanding Access to Vocational Routes into Higher Education

Collaboration and partnership building are integral to supporting care-experienced students. In alignment with this, as part of the University of Kent's Access and Participation Plan (APP), we have set a collaborative target with two of our KMPF partners Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), and the University of Creative Arts to increase the number of care-experienced students progressing to our institutions.

To achieve these goals, the participating higher education institutions (HEIs) are developing a programme consisting of three complementary strands aimed at carers (strand 1), professionals (strand 2), and students (strand 3). We recognize that care-experienced students need a strong and informed support system, and it is imperative that professionals – such as social workers – are fully aware of the progression routes into higher education (HE) and the support available to these students. By ensuring that the individuals in their support network understand the available options and resources, we can make higher education a more viable and accessible option for care-experienced students. Through this partnership, we are collectively working to raise awareness of care-experienced students' ability to enter HE, highlight the various pathways into HE available to them, and inform both students and professionals about the support systems in place once they are in higher education.

This holistic approach ensures that HEIs are addressing the needs of all individuals with experience of the children's social care system, supporting their transition into higher education and enhancing their opportunities for success.

Recommendation 3: Supporting Mature Students

The University acknowledges the challenges students face, particularly those returning to education. We maintain strong ties with local colleges and offer a variety of talks, workshops, and additional support. Care-experienced students are informed of a designated staff member available to provide further advice and assistance. To support mature students, the University also offers a £2,000 annual scholarship for those studying an Access programme at one of our local colleges.

Recommendation 4: Collaboration Between Local Authorities and Universities

The University of Kent, alongside other partner higher education institutions (HEIs), is a longstanding member of the Care Leaver Progression Partnership (CLPP). This network, which spans Kent and Medway, is dedicated to improving the post-16 education outcomes and experiences of students with experience of social care. The CLPP was established following the end of AimHigher in 2011, with the goal of ensuring that work supporting care leavers in education would continue across the region. The partnership includes all the colleges and universities in Kent and Medway, Medway Council, Kent County

Council, Virtual School Kent, Medway Youth Trust, and Jobcentre Plus.

As a committed member of the CLPP, the University of Kent contributes financially to the partnership. The main aim of the CLPP is to better understand and remove barriers to post-16 education for local care leavers, and it delivers a variety of initiatives to support this goal. Additionally, the partnership members work collaboratively to collect and share data on the numbers of care leavers in education and their outcomes, helping to inform ongoing efforts to improve support and progression for care-experienced students.

Recommendation 5: Extending Support to All Those with Experience of the Children's Social Care System

We recognize that students with experience of the care system include not only care leavers but also those who have experienced short-term care, kinship arrangements, and similar circumstances. While our financial support is targeted at care leavers, our pastoral support, both pre- and post-entry, is available to all students with care experience.

Recommendation 6: Focus on Retention

The evaluation of our financial support has demonstrated its positive impact on student retention and success. Additionally, anecdotal evidence from students reinforces the belief that the comprehensive support provided at Kent plays a crucial role in helping them continue their studies.

Recommendation 7: Evaluating Interventions

At the University of Kent and through our collaborative partnerships, we are committed to evaluating to effectiveness of our interventions.

Within the university's APP, there are annual commitments to evaluating our work with care experienced students. Given the very small number of participants in each intervention, our evaluation is qualitative and mainly through the publication of case-studies. However, all participants are added to HEAT, and it is our hope that we will be able to aggregate cohorts in time. We are exploring the use of TASO's Impact Evaluation with Small Cohorts methodology. Details of our evaluation approach can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of our APP.

Through our collaborative work, an enhanced theory of change (ToC) was developed by KMPF's Monitoring and Evaluation team and Dr Anna Anthony, Co-Director of Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). Using this ToC, an evaluation plan was created to evaluate each element of the collaborative interventions.

Recommendation 8: Corporate Parenting Approach

Our efforts through the CLPP, along with the various provisions we have in place for care leaver students, effectively fulfil this recommendation.

Recommendation 9: Early Identification and Support

In addition to our partnership work, the university has a commitment to providing comprehensive, sustained and progressive support for students as early in the education lifecycle as possible. As such, the university has developed a number of different activities which are designed to specifically address

the needs of students with experience of children's social care. This includes the delivery of our flagship pre-16 programme 'Plan My Path'.

Plan My Path is a progressive programme, giving students the opportunity to explore university life, take part in interactive, and creative sessions in-school and on the University of Kent's campuses (Canterbury and Medway), to think about their future and consider the options for how to get to where they want to go.

This project is focused on the young people and is responsive to their interests, aspirations, and things they want to learn more about. It also supports them in developing their skills and exploring tools needed to help plan their path.

Through Plan My Path, the university has also developed a zine (a self-published magazine, amplifying the voices of those who are commonly under-represented) for students to learn more about going from care to university. This was produced in collaboration with our care experienced Targeted Outreach Ambassadors, children in care and care leavers, and University of Kent colleagues.

Additionally, the university provides bespoke campus visits and guarantees care experienced learners a place on our Ambition to Succeed progression programme.

Further information

To find out more about the support Kent offers care-experience students, please visit our website: [Support for care-experienced students](#)

To find out more about our outreach offer for care-experienced students, please visit our website: [Activities for care-experienced students](#)

To find out more about the Care Leaver Progression Partnership, including access to reports on our collaborative efforts to support care experienced students, please visit their website: [Growing Up, Moving Forward](#)

To find out more about the Kent and Medway Progression Federation, please visit their website: [We are KMPE](#)

Conclusion

Overall, the University of Kent has a comprehensive, multi-layered approach to supporting care-experienced students, meeting key recommendations through financial aid, early outreach, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation. By embedding these principles into its strategic priorities, the University of Kent is not only meeting but actively advancing best practices in supporting care-experienced students in higher education.



Outreach & Widening Participation, The Registry,
University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NZ

kent.ac.uk

University of
Kent