

Care experienced students / care leavers

Introduction

A [care leaver](#) is a young person (16-17) who was in local authority care (including but not limited to public care, foster care, semi-independent living or residential care homes) when coming to university and has been in care for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday. A care experienced student, on the other hand, is a young person who has spent any amount of time in care, but had returned to their parent(s) care by the time they applied to university. However, to be eligible for the Undergraduate Access Scholarship a care experienced student has to have spent 3 months or more in care after turning 10.

When coming to university, students from a care background are likely to face particular challenges, such as coping with little or no family support, struggling financially or having difficulties finding flexible year-round accommodation. Christmas and the summer holidays can be particularly difficult times. The local authorities do offer a range of support to care leavers although there can be quite a lot of variation between them.

The University of Manchester is committed to widening participation and aims to support care experienced students/care leavers throughout their studies. When applying to the University, care experienced students are given a named support contact who can provide one-to-one support and advice. Please see the following to find out more about financial, housing, psychological and academic support offered at the University. Most of these services give priority to students from a care background. It may also be useful to encourage students to use the other resources that the University offers.

Challenges experienced by students from a care background

When coming to university, students from a care background are likely to face a number of particular challenges - both financially and emotionally - due to the lack of a family support system which most other students have. With [only 6% going onto higher education](#), students from a care background have the lowest participation rate across all student groups and those who make it to university are [38% more likely to withdraw](#) than the average student.

Financial difficulties are one of the reasons underlying the relatively low retention of students from a care background. Although local authorities and universities offer financial support, care leaver students have to stretch their annual budget so that it covers the summer months since they normally lack a family home to return to. Therefore, careful [budgeting](#) is essential. This is a skill most students have to learn when coming to university (although often with support from family to do so). However, for students from a care background it can be particularly challenging given they suddenly have to handle large amounts of money transferred to them at the beginning of term.

In addition to the difficulties in affording all-year-round accommodation comes the struggle of finding accommodation. While most students rely on their family to act as guarantor or provide

money for a deposit, care leaver students usually do not have this option. Some of their local authorities (who act as the “corporate parent”) may offer help with this but many do not.

These complications, as well as the unsettling conditions experienced throughout childhood and/or puberty, can deteriorate the mental health and wellbeing of students from a care background and have a significant impact on their academic performance as well as personal development. [Christmas holidays](#), for instance, can be an emotionally trying period for those who do not have a family to celebrate with and may be feeling alone in their halls of residence.

Finally, even though people from a care background who made it to university are clearly very academically capable, a troubled childhood and/or being hosted by various foster families or children’s ones means that their schooling may have been discontinuous, at various schools or interrupted throughout. Therefore, it may be helpful to engage with the academic support provided at university as much as possible.

Widening participation at The University of Manchester

Given the unusually [low participation](#) and [retention rates](#) of students from a care background, the University aims to support them as much as possible in their journey to and through higher education to ensure that they can learn and thrive regardless of their background. The University of Manchester is committed to [widening participation](#) by organising [outreach events](#), [supporting current students](#) and offering [contextual admissions](#).

If a student has disclosed to you that she/he is care experienced/a care leaver you could ask their permission to make an email introduction to the [named care leaver support contact](#) responsible for care experienced students/care leavers at the University, or they can do this themselves.

If you would like advice on how to best support students from care experienced backgrounds you can contact [BECOME](#), a charity that is working to improve the lives of people from a care background and that has a designated care advice line (Freephone 0800 023 2033 or email advice@becomecharity.org.uk). It may also be useful to familiarise yourself and/or draw the student’s attention to the [legal entitlements of care experienced students](#) and the financial support granted by local authorities to access higher education.

Support provided by local authorities

Local authorities (e.g. city or county councils) continue to provide support to care leavers, even once they have reached the age of 18. However, the amounts and types of support provided depend on the local council the student came from. Below are some examples of the ‘care leaver offers’ provided by local authorities to students.

- [Trafford](#) offers: a higher education bursary of £2,000 provided each year; £80 per week to support living costs; a one off £100 grant for interview clothing.
- [Cheshire East](#) offers: a higher education bursary of £2,000 provided each year and up to £500 annually for books and materials; accommodation costs for the duration

of study as well as £36 living allowance per week; a graduation gift of £100; smart clothes for an interview; a bike.

- [Stockport](#) offers: a higher education bursary of £2,000 provided each year and assistance towards essential books and materials; vacation payments of up to £100 per week; a graduation gift of £100. N.B.: this support is extended to postgraduate study.
- [Hampshire](#) offers: a higher education bursary of £2,000 provided each year.

To learn about the support other local authorities offer to care leavers please see the relevant local authority's website and look for their 'care leaver offer' as it should be published.

In addition to the support provided by local authorities, the University offers a range of resources – some are specific to care experienced students, whilst others are available to all – to provide [tailored advice to students](#), support them [financially](#) as well as [academically](#) and increase their [overall wellbeing](#).

Support provided by the University

Financial support

Within the University

Student Finance: Care experienced students/ care leavers are eligible for the maximum tuition fee loan (£9,250 for the academic year 2019/2020) and the maximum maintenance loan (£8,944 for the academic year 2019/2020) from the Student Loans Company (SLC). Further information can be found at: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/student-finance/> These loans have to be paid back after graduation. Please see <https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan/how-you-repay> for further information on the terms and conditions. This will be similar for many care experienced students although for those back with their family it will depend on their "household" income. N.B.: This is not the case for students on NHS courses that started prior to 2017.

The Manchester Bursary: Care leavers and most care experienced students will be eligible for The Manchester Bursary of £2,000 (household income related) for the duration of their course. This bursary is awarded by the University and does not have to be paid back. Since the Student Loans Company (SLC) shares the information regarding household income with the University, students do not have to apply for the bursary and will automatically be contacted if eligible. N.B.: Students on NHS courses that started prior to 2017 are not eligible.

Undergraduate Access Scholarship: This is a £1,000 scholarship per year of study, which is in addition to the income assessed bursaries that the University offers. Some form of proof of local authority care is required and students should be contacted about this if they have indicated their time in care on their UCAS form although if not then approach the care leaver contact directly. N.B.: Students on NHS courses that started prior to 2017 are not eligible.

Facing a crisis? Living Cost Support Fund: Care leavers are one of the priority groups for the University's Living Cost Support Fund and, therefore, if they experience any financial difficulties as a result of an unexpected event, they can make an application to the University's Living Cost Support Fund: <http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/finances/funding-opportunities/all/living-cost-support-fund/> The Students' Union also offers [short term loans of £100](#) and has a [team of advisors](#) (including a qualified debt counsellor) that can help.

Erasmus, Study Abroad or Work Placements: The University awards bursaries of up to £2,000 to students studying abroad or going on placement. For further information visit: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/student-finance/2019/uk/university-support/>

Budgeting: The University has a useful [website](#) which offers advice on how to make the most of your money. The University's Students' Union has a [team of advisors](#) which can offer support in regards to financial matters.

Manchester Master's Bursary: The University offers a £3,000 Master's bursary. Students who have spent a minimum of three months in public care since they have turned 11 and are undertaking a postgraduate taught Master's degree are one of the prioritised groups to receive the award. Further information can be found at: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/masters/funding/uk-eu-student-advice/masters-bursary/>

Subject specific awards: The University offers [subject-specific awards](#) that range from £1,000 to £10,000 per year. Most of these awards are aimed at overseas students. However, some are open to everyone who demonstrates academic excellence. For help with award applications students can contact the [Careers Service](#).

Other resources

Turn2us Search for Grants: This [website](#) allows students to find grants offered by local charities that can help paying for books, course materials, clothes etc.

The Spark Foundation: This [foundation](#) offers one-off grants of up to £600 to young adults under the age of 26 who have been in care in England or Wales.

Capstone Care Leaver Trust: The [Capstone Care Leaver Trust](#) offers financial support to care leavers aged 17-25 to access further and higher education as well as buying a laptop, household goods or paying for a driving licence.

N.B.: If students from a care leaver background are not being provided with what they are legally entitled to (e.g. a one-off £2,000 higher education bursary provided by their local authority), you should advise them to contact [Coram Voice](#). Coram Voice run a National Advocacy and Advice service for care leavers (call 0808 800 5792 Mon-Fri 9:30am-6pm and Saturday 10am-4pm).

Accommodation

The University's Accommodation Office can provide a flexible, up to 52 week accommodation contract in University halls although this will not necessarily be at the same hall of residence for the full year as not all halls are open/available over the summer vacation. This can be for the duration of the student's programme of study if they wish. Living in University halls has the advantage that no guarantor is required. Furthermore, in the case of care leavers, university accommodation is lenient in regards to the deposit to be paid up front. However, this is not guaranteed and is assessed on a case-to-case basis. Students should be encouraged to and supported in contacting the [Accommodation Office](#) to make them aware of their situation.

Please see the following website for further information on housing support:

<http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/imworriedabout/accommodation/>

Please see the following website for further information on University's halls of residence:

<http://www.accommodation.manchester.ac.uk/ouraccommodation/>

Hulme Hall Trust Fund: The [Hulme Hall Trust Fund](#) offers full accommodation bursaries primarily but not exclusively to Manchester Access Programme (MAP) students.

Manchester Student Homes: Students that want to move out of university accommodation should be advised to use the [Manchester Student Homes website](#) to look for alternative accommodation since it only advertises university approved accommodation and accredited landlords. Furthermore, they may help students to find accommodation that does not require a guarantor. For more information please see:

https://www.manchesterstudenthomes.com/Pages/International_Friendly_Standard

Mental health and wellbeing

Counselling Service: The [Counselling Service](#) is based on campus (Crawford House) and offers online self-help resources, workshops and same-day meetings with a qualified University counsellor.

St Peter's House Church and Chaplaincy: If students want to speak to a counsellor promptly and were unable to get a same-day appointment with the Counselling Service they can ask to talk to a counsellor at [St Peter's House](#). Although St Peter's House formally is a Church and Chaplaincy, its counselling service is secular.

ResLife (for students living in University halls): ResLife Officers and Advisors provide support and guidance to students living in University accommodation. [ResLife Advisors](#) usually live on site and are available 24/7. They can be a useful first point of contact to turn to for advice and help.

Manchester Nightline: This is a confidential listening service offered to students by students. It is available 8pm-8am during term time. The number can be found on the back of student ID cards.

Student Minds: Student Minds is a student mental health charity which [offers workshops and student support groups](#).

Zion Centre: The Zion Centre is a community centre based in Hulme (Manchester) offering a range of [self-help groups and mental health support](#).

Self-Help Services: [Self-Help Services](#) is a mental health charity that ‘helps people to help themselves’ through one-to-one support and wellbeing workshops. They provide a range of support for people with common mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and panic attacks.

42nd Street: [42nd Street](#) offers one-to-one counselling and therapy to young people aged between 11 and 25.

Crisis Point: [Crisis Point](#) is a mental health crisis centre that aims to support people through crisis – often preventing need to admit to hospital. People are able to stay at the centre for up to 10 days and can attend up to 6 one-to-one counselling sessions over a two week period.

Samaritans: [Samaritans](#) is a charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress.

Academic support

PASS/Peer Mentoring: Every undergraduate course at The University of Manchester has a course-specific [Peer Support](#) scheme. These schemes run regular study sessions facilitated by higher year students (PASS Leaders or Peer Mentors) and are a safe space to ask questions, discuss academic content as well as socialize and meet course-mates. Study sessions are designed to be complementary to lecture content and consolidate knowledge. In addition to providing academic advice, PASS Leaders and Peer Mentors can also be a useful point of reference for getting general advice on settling into university life.

My Learning Essentials (MLE) Workshops: The University of Manchester Library offers a range of [online resources and workshops](#) aimed at improving academic skills useful across disciplines, such as reference management, literature searching, data handling, critical reading etc.

Gold Mentoring Programme: [Manchester Gold Mentoring](#) gives students the opportunity to choose a mentor and be in contact with them over a six-month period. Mentors can provide insight into different career paths, opportunities to network and advice on CVs and applications.

Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS): [DASS supports](#) a variety of students and aims at making higher education accessible and inclusive for disabled students.

Mitigating Circumstances: Students can apply for [mitigating circumstances](#) for exams or assignments if their performance has been affected by their personal circumstances. This has to be done within a specific time frame after the due date. People at the [support office](#) within each school can provide help with the application process.

One-to-one support

Care Leaver Contact: Students who are care experienced have the option to declare this when applying to University, and are assigned a [named support contact](#) before they join us. If a student

discloses to you that they are care experienced, but has not indicated this when applying to University you could ask their permission to make an email introduction to the named contact, or encourage them to do so themselves.

School Contact: Each school has a school-specific [student support contact](#) responsible for student wellbeing. They can help with all non-academic queries – such as mitigating circumstances, interruption of studies, mental health support etc.

Other resources

Additional support

Students' Union: The Students' Union is independent of the University and is run by students, for students. It provides a physical space and variety of resources, activities and societies so that students can make the most of university life. Further information can be accessed at: <https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/> The Students' Union can also provide advice on [finances](#), [housing](#), [academia](#) and [wellbeing](#).

Employability

Careers Service: The University's [Careers Service](#) is based in the Atrium (University Place) and offers advice on CVs, applications, job opportunities, interviews etc. [One-to-one appointments](#) can also be booked and are tailored to the school the student is part of. Priority is given to care experienced students/care leavers. [The Careerslink](#) is a particularly useful resource provided by the Careers Service which advertises vacancies and events available to University of Manchester students and graduates. All the resources provided by the Careers Service are available to students for two years after graduation.

Student Ambassadors: [Student Ambassadors](#) work on a variety of outreach events and activities designed to enthuse and motivate prospective pre- and post-16 students about Higher Education, and promote the University as a place to study. Care leaver students can automatically become student ambassadors and do not have to go through an application process. It's a great way to meet new people, gain work experience and earn some money. There are events that are specifically for looked after children and care leavers, where the presence of Student Ambassadors who are care experienced is highly valued. For more information contact Emma Lewis-Kalubowila (elk@manchester.ac.uk).

Global Graduates: [The Manchester Global Graduates Programme](#) gives students the opportunity to spend one week meeting with alumni in one of the University's host cities (which include New York and Singapore). Priority is given to students in receipt of The Manchester Bursary and the trip is fully funded.

Wellbeing

When it comes to wellbeing, a small action can make a big difference. The University of Manchester's six ways to wellbeing (<http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/wellbeing/six-ways-to-wellbeing/>) will help you make positive changes to keep feeling good and living well.

Sporticipate: Sporticipate offers many different [sports and activities](#) that are free and on campus. All classes are inclusive and beginners are always welcome. Sporticipate offers a nice opportunity to keep healthy and socialise.

Volunteering and Community Engagement: This service provides volunteering opportunities to suit all interests and schedules. It's a great way to develop new friendships and skills: <http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/>

Wellbeing Champions: [Wellbeing Champions](#) actively promote [the Six Ways to Wellbeing](#) across campus. Becoming a Wellbeing Champion is an exciting opportunity to meet people, learn how to take care of yourself and boost your CV by making a difference.

Exciting opportunities and events

Greater Manchester Care Leaver Awards: [The Greater Manchester Care Leaver Awards](#) are an opportunity for care leavers to gain recognition for their achievements in education, the workplace, sports, arts etc.

Care Leaver Christmas Dinner: Lemn Sissay, the University's chancellor, hosts a [Christmas dinner](#) to celebrate the season with care leavers.

International Society: The University's [International Society](#) offers trips around the UK, language classes and a wide range of cultural events and opportunities to meet and mingle with other students. It also organises a variety of events during the festive season for students celebrating Christmas in Manchester.