



Heriot-Watt University Corporate Parenting Plan

“As always, I can't express how grateful I am for the support given to me. (...) I would love more opportunities to have tea and chat and chill with staff and others, as I really enjoy the social aspect in a relaxed environment (...) Overall, I know I would not feel capable of being a university student and attempting to achieve my degree without the support of the wellbeing services. It is a huge weight off of my shoulders knowing there is non-judgemental, caring and dedicated support available at any time I need it.” Care-experienced Student, Heriot-Watt University, 2024.

Introduction

Our Corporate Parenting Plan aims to address the specific disadvantages of care-experienced students by supporting our students with care-experience in accessing education, progressing and achieving at Heriot-Watt University.

The number of students informing the University that they are care-experienced is just under 100 in 2024-25, up from between 80 and 90 in the previous two years. Many are also carers and/or estranged.

We have significantly developed our support for care-experienced students, and other groups of widening participation students over the last few years, building on the pioneering work of our Student Recruitment team in supporting widening access in admissions, we have extensively developed our support through the entire student journey.

Our support has also been shaped by care-experienced students who have provided valuable feedback to us about support initiatives.

The University's Corporate Parenting Plan is written with the recognition that enhancements to the support we offer and reflection on our practice are always necessary and ongoing.

Our Corporate Parenting Plan has been developed and is implemented with a commitment to ongoing partnership work through sharing information, best practice and collaborative activities with other institutions including the [Hub for Success](#), [CEECEF](#) and [The Wee Campus](#).

Students with Care-Experience

Care-experience applies to anyone who has been, or currently is, in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short. This care may have been provided in one of many different settings, such as in residential care, foster care, kinship care or looked after at home with a supervision requirement. This also includes adopted children who were previously looked after. We will provide support no matter what age the student is.

The above would normally apply to on-campus students with experience of care in the UK. Students from outside the UK would also be eligible for wellbeing support, and may also be eligible for financial support in very specific circumstances.

What is Corporate Parenting?

Corporate Parenting is defined by the [Scottish Government](#) as “an organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted.”

Corporate Parenting at Heriot-Watt University

Educational outcomes for care-experienced students are likely to be less positive than for their non-care-experienced counterparts, they are “one of the most under-represented groups within higher education and are more likely to take longer and non-traditional routes into higher education.” ([Hub for Success](#) Impact Report). Care-experienced students at university also face potential obstacles to progression and success, in financial support and accommodation, as well as problems of isolation, emotional support and greater incidences of disability and mental health issues compared to non-care experienced students.

At Heriot-Watt University we recognise care-experienced students as one of our groups of widening participation students and our approach has three inter-related elements.

- Support for admission, application, outreach and pre-entry advice, guidance and support.
- Support for the transition into university, and ongoing support up to graduation and beyond.
- Partnership working with the Hub for Success which ensures consistency in approaches and co-operation with our educational partners, sharing good practice and organisation of joint events and activities.

Our legal responsibility as a Corporate Parent is outlined in [section 58 of the Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#):

- **ALERT**
to be alert to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of care-experienced students
- **ASSESS**
to assess the needs of care-experienced students for services and support we provide
- **PROMOTE**
to promote the interests of care-experienced students
- **PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES**
to seek to provide care-experienced students with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing
- **HELP ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES**
to take action to help care-experienced students to access opportunities to make use of services and support.
- **IMPROVE**
to improve the way we function in relation to care-experienced students.

How Heriot-Watt University Supports Care-Experienced Students from Application to Graduation

Detailed below are the University's activities to support care-experienced students at each stage of their university journey under the four key stages of their Heriot-Watt University experience.

1. Application and Admission
2. Pre-entry, Induction and Transition
3. Ongoing Support During Studies
4. Graduation and Beyond

1. Application and Admission

Action	Details
Fair Access and Minimum Entry Requirements	All applicants with care-experience are eligible for consideration under the University's Fair Access Policy as one of our Widening Participation groups. Care-experienced applicants who have the ability to meet the minimum entry requirements are guaranteed an offer at undergraduate level, in line with the Fair Access Policy.
Advice and Guidance on Applying to University	A tailored programme of Information, advice and guidance is available before and during the application process and the transition to university. This includes support to attend open days and offer holder days, including guidance on what these are and how to get the most out of them. The programme is sufficiently flexible to deal with unexpected situations.
Learning Explorers Programme	Jointly with partner institutions we contribute to the Learning Explorers Programme run by the Hub for Success to raise awareness and acceptance of care experience with P7s, and to seek to raise aspirations in relation to further and higher education. This is an ongoing project in the January Semester each year.
Access Bursary	Priority to access bursaries is given to care-experienced students, the Access Bursary is currently worth £1000 a year for each year of study.
Outreach	The Outreach team continue to work with the Harmeny Education Trust.

WP Student Ambassadors	We have recruited WP (widening participation) student ambassadors from care-experienced backgrounds to share the authentic experience of university with applicants and offer holders.
Named Pre-Entry Contact	We offer and publicise a named contact for care-experienced applicants and offer holders.
Online Sessions for Care Experienced Applicants	We offer one-to-one support sessions online to support offer holders through the transition to university and to introduce the relevant named contact for current students on each Scottish campus. We offer additional online sessions through the Hub for Success for care-experienced learners at college who have applied to university.

2. Pre-entry, Induction and Transition

Action	Details
Pre-Entry Messages	Care-experienced offer-holders (CF and UF) receive dedicated pre-entry messages encouraging participation in Get Ready for Success at HWU, with information about the HWU Expenses Bursary and other pre- and post- entry support. They also receive email reminders at key points in the application and transition process to highlight support opportunities and key dates and decisions from their named contact.
Pre-Entry Meetings	Applicants are invited to one-to-one meetings during offer holder days and over the summer period (either in person or online) with their dedicated point of contact to help them for the transition to university life. This also helps ensure any support can be put in place for the beginning of their studies with us.
Get Ready For Success	All care-experienced offer holders and new students are invited to participate in Get Ready for Success at HWU a three-day enhanced induction programme prior to Welcome Week specifically designed to support widening participation students with getting the best possible start to their

	student experience: academically, personally and socially. To support participation, we will pay travel and other costs, and also provide lunch for participants over the 3 day programme.
HWU Expenses Bursary	All enrolled care-experienced students are eligible for the Heriot-Watt University Expenses Bursary which is worth £525 (2024-25) and is available for each year of study.
Accommodation	The University guarantees to make an offer for accommodation to all eligible students in their first year of study. Care-experienced students are offered year-round accommodation throughout their studies.
Ask A Student Success Advisor	Care-experienced offer holders have the opportunity to ask a Student Success Advisor about any aspect of Heriot-Watt University life and study by emailing them. Student Success Advisors are all recent Heriot-Watt graduates so can advise and offer insights based on their own experience.

3. Ongoing Support During Studies

Action	Details
Dedicated Point of Contact	Care-experienced students have named points of contact at Edinburgh and Scottish Borders Campuses, who is introduced to students in introductory emails prior to arrival on campus. Students can approach their contact with any issue. In addition to their named contact care-experienced students will also a dedicated Student Success Advisor and Disability Advisor.
Enrolment Declaration and Follow Up	We offer all students the opportunity to declare care-experienced status at enrolment which is followed up by support from Student Wellbeing Services. Students can also declare through Hardship Fund applications and to University Accommodation.
Updated Web Resource to Increase Awareness	During AY23-24 we have reviewed and updated our web pages for care-experienced students to increase awareness of the support available and how to access it.

Supportive Communications to Care Experienced Students	We email care-experienced students regularly with information and advice on events, activities and support resources to ensure they are up to date with the support offered and have a sense of being supported. We also now have a dedicated email mailbox for care-experienced students.
Training And Guidance for Personal Tutors and Student Advisors	The policy framework, practical support and resources for care-experienced students forms part of the training and guidance given to personal tutors and student advisors.
Training for all Student Facing Staff	Online training for staff in Corporate Parenting and supporting care-experienced students is made available to all staff in student facing roles. Dedicated in person training in supporting students from widening participation backgrounds, including care-experienced students, is being offered to staff from 2024-25.
Activities For Care Experienced Students	Each semester we run at least one event and invite all our care-experienced students to join. The purpose of the events is to create a sense of community and for students to have a fun opportunity to take some time out of their studies to relax. Recent events have included a Winter Warmer Hot Chocolate event, Take a Break with Tea & Cake and a Pizza event. We also offer an Exploring Postgraduate Study session once a year to current undergraduate care-experienced students to help them explore further study opportunities. See also Collaborative Events and Activities with Partners.
Winter Gift Initiative	The Winter Gift Initiative where care-experienced students receive a card and a gift. This initiative allows another opportunity for us to engage with our care-experienced students who are also able to request an appointment with their dedicated point of contact and provide feedback via this initiative.
Winter Break Support	We email care-experienced students after the December exam period, providing the dates that Student Wellbeing Services are closed over winter and highlighting contact details for other services offering support over this period. We have received positive feedback about our support emails. It's important for students to know where support is available, even if they don't need to access it.

Financial Support and Advice	We work closely with colleagues who administer hardship funds to ensure that applications from care-experienced students to the Hardship Fund and to the Laptop Loan Scheme are prioritised to ensure quick and positive outcomes. To give greater clarity on financial support we have created a Student Guide to Financial Support, accessible to care-experienced students as a leaflet and online. Named points of contact can advise care-experienced students on Hardship Fund applications and liaise with appropriate staff to ensure applications are progressed. Care-experienced students can access emergency funds (a £50 next day payment) via Student Wellbeing Services. We send dedicated emails to care-experienced students alerting them to any additional funding opportunities with option of help to apply.
Collaborative Events and Activities with Partners.	As part of our partnership with the Hub for Success, we have collaborated in organising events for care-experienced learners across Edinburgh Further and Higher Education institutions. The aim of these events is to create a community of care-experienced across Edinburgh, and to provide a safe space for students to have a fun and relaxing time. Events have included a Welcoming Pizza Event, and a Winter Warmer Hot Chocolate event. These events were first offered in 2023-24 and are being further developed in collaboration with partners in 2024-25. These events are going to be widened out to the wider care-experienced community to include offer holders and recent graduates.
Care Experienced Student Voice	The student voice is being heard and represented by our Hub for Success Ambassadors. Work is ongoing work to capture the student voice. We currently gather feedback from care-experienced students after events and activities and use this to inform future developments, but this is an area of further development.
Support for Go Global Mobility	Encourage students to engage in exchange or intercampus mobility opportunities by raising awareness of Go Global and working to address any barriers students may face. This will include guaranteed access to Go Global travel grants.

	Students who have transferred campus under Go Global will continue to receive support remotely from their named contact in Edinburgh and they will also be linked into a named advisor at our Dubai or Malaysia campus, as appropriate. A number of grants available to WP students for a fully funded Malaysia Summer School experience. Provides students an incredible chance to interact with fellow students from around the world, fostering cross-cultural understanding and awareness.
Learning Analytics to Monitor Student Engagement	Our new Student Engagement Dashboard will allow us to monitor student engagement and help us identify students who are struggling earlier so will allow us to reach out to care experienced students earlier and in a more targeted way. The Engagement Dashboard is designed as a supportive not punitive tool and messaging to students about the Dashboard has emphasised that. This approach is supported by our Student Union.
Supporting Non-linear Student Journeys	We recognise that care-experienced students may not make linear journeys through higher education so may need advice on taking breaks from studies or alternative study options which we can advise them on. Students returning from a break in study, or after taking a year out to take assessments, are invited to a Returners Event and offered the opportunity of a one-to-one meeting to help them make the transition back to full time study. The Returners Events are held at the start of the September and January semesters. Where students can meet and talk to a range of staff and current students.
Accommodation Enhancements	Accommodation provision enhancements are being discussed across the Hub for Success partnership to ensure a clear and consistent accommodation offer across partners.
Wider Wellbeing Support	We recognise the mental health, disability, and wider wellbeing support needs that can be prevalent amongst care-experienced students and have provided additional training to Student Wellbeing staff to inform their practice in supporting care-experienced students, for example, there is now a dedicated member on The Disability team with widening participation support responsibilities.

4. Graduation and Beyond

Action	Details
Graduation Costs Support	We offer a £150 grant to support care-experienced students with the costs of participating in their graduation ceremony. This was introduced in 2022-23 and funds have been secured for its continuation.
Graduation Guest	Care-experienced students can request that member of staff from Student Wellbeing Services be their guest at their graduation ceremony and students are invited to a small celebration event with staff.
Careers Advice After Graduation	Working with the Careers Service to prepare care-experienced students who are due to graduate to move onto their next destination with advice from a Careers Advisor before and after graduation about finding job vacancies, exploring postgraduate study and funding, and CV writing. Care-experienced students can also sign up for two-day Career Accelerator course.
Lifelong Access to Career Support	Our Careers Service provides lifelong support for Heriot-Watt graduates in matters such as job applications and interview preparation, professional development advice and advice on changing career path.

Priority Areas for Development in 2024-25 and 2025-26

- Student Voice – continuing to ensure that our practice and support is informed by our care-experienced students and the greater sharing of care-experienced student stories throughout the University.
- Stability in staffing and resources – building on our experience and good practice to develop staff in student-facing roles to support care-experienced students effectively.
- Staff training – we will continue to offer and develop training in support for care-experienced students to a wider range of student facing staff, including staff working in accommodation, residence life and student finance.