

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Llwybrau at addysg a hyfforddiant ôl-16](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 28

Ymateb gan: Cymorth i'r Rhai sy'n Gadael Gofal a Myfyrwyr Cymru

Response from: Care Leaver Activities and Student Support in Wales (CLASS Cymru)

CLASS Cymru (Care Leaver Activities and Student Support in Wales) is as a network of professionals across Wales who work with care leavers and other care-experienced and estranged young people in their educational journeys towards higher education, meeting to share best practice and improve support.

CLASS Cymru's response to consultation questions:

Are some groups of learners disadvantaged by the current system (e.g. pupils from low-income households, learners with travel needs)?

Across Wales there is a postcode lottery in terms of support for care experienced and estranged students transitioning to post-16 education and training in Wales. Currently, there is no systematic process in place which supports care experienced and estranged students to make transitions to post-16 education, training and higher education. This leaves significant gaps in provision, data, knowledge and understanding of the barriers to accessing and continuing in further education.

Young people in care rely on the information given to them by their social workers and local authority. However, as we expressed in our reply to the 'Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform consultation paper' in 2023 we know that provision is inconsistent and patchy, and whilst some local authorities go above and beyond, others are reluctant to provide the minimum support required of them. Consequently, many young people are making decisions without having access to the full range of support available (including practical, financial and social). Since that paper was issued, we have seen no further changes, and the same issues continue to arise.

The issues faced by estranged young people are particularly distinct given that they do not have the same legal status as care leavers and therefore are not eligible to the same support as them. What's more, given the uncertainties amongst many educational professionals regarding the term estrangement, this further compounds issues faced by these young people. Estrangement is not seen as an 'underrepresented group' in Wales and therefore little outreach and widening participation work is directed at this group of students, nor support offered to them.

Information and guidance is often not made visible to estranged students, making support difficult to access. An example of this would be the Educational Maintenance Allowance funding for further education. Whilst estrangement is included in the eligibility criteria, the application form does not provide sufficient guidance around understanding and accessing it. We would therefore like to see that estrangement is included in the support and provision for underrepresented groups in areas where widening participation work is carried out across Wales.

Whilst the term 'care experienced' is now being widely used as we learn more about the experiences of care experienced young people, there remains a gap in attention to the needs of those who have experienced adoption. As a group of learners, we would like to see more support for those who have been adopted to ensure that their needs in post-16 education and higher education are met. The stats collected by Welsh Government on Children looked after by the Local Authorities: April 2022 to March 2023 shows that 244 children were in place for adoption in Wales and The Wales Adoption Cohort Study by Cardiff University shows that 47% of children placed for adoption experience at least 4 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) before placement, compared to 14% of the general population. However, adopted young people are often not eligible to support in further and higher education, given that they are legally not considered a care leaver and so are not eligible to forms of support aimed as care leavers.

We would therefore like the Corporate Parent Charter Mark to have clear aims and objectives for education institutions through the education cycle regarding the provision of support for care experienced, estranged and adopted young people. We would like this to include clear expectations around what is provided for these groups of students. This could be a great opportunity for Wales to work together to produce the best experiences and outcomes for our care experienced, estranged and adopted young people.

Are there any other equality issues?

Religion is a major factor of accessing financial support for both care experienced and estranged students especially for young people who are unable to take out the loan element of funding due to principles relating to their religion or culture. For example, many Muslim students struggle financially to continue their studies because they are not able to take the full loan amount available to them due to religious conventions around using loans. For young people making decisions about their educational pathways, this could be a barrier to attending higher education later on. To mitigate this, local authorities should provide financial support. However, this doesn't consistently happen because some local don't think it is fair to other care leavers who have to taken out the loan. Where financial support is provided, this can remove barriers and support people to understand alternatives such as external funding.

Is there sufficient post-16 destination data collected to understand trends and inform what education institutions deliver? If not, what data is required to fully understand the post-16 landscape?

Data on post-16 transitions is limited for those who are care experienced and estranged. Even though information is gathered through pathway plans and careers advisors this is not recorded and so the picture is uneven and unclear. Consequently, the appropriate resources are not provided as there is no evidence regarding where support is most needed.

The Student Loans Company provide data on how many students apply for funding for higher education, including those who are care leavers and estranged. It would be valuable to gather data on applications made to the Education Maintenance Allowance and Welsh Government Learning Grant. Since both estranged and care experienced young people are listed as eligible, it would be useful to gather data on the numbers of young people accessing this to inform understanding of where support is needed.

CLASS Cymru would be happy to support a working group to compare this data from further education to higher education and track the changes and transitions. With funding support the CLASS Cymru network could then work with Colleges and Universities to look at in house recorded data and pull this together also.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency in Wales this year is collecting the data for estranged students and for the past 2 years has collected verified data for care experienced from institutions. We understand that Stats Wales collects data for Further Education institutions in Wales but at present does not collect data for care experienced and estranged students. We would like to see these fields included in their data collection so future data can be compared with the Higher Education Statistics Agency data. This would result in a better picture of the transition journey for care experienced and estranged between further and higher education in Wales.