

# National Ambition for care leavers

## Transcript

Fiona Burns and Nick Stansfield of the Scottish Funding Council

Fiona Burns

One of my first roles was to work with Buttle UK quality mark who were pulling out of Scotland, and to ensure that there was a good legacy left behind from the work that they had done. At that point, one of the things that struck me very strongly was that we just didn't know who these care experience people were. We didn't have the numbers on them by college, didn't know how well they were doing. But there seemed to be a general view that we didn't have enough of them in the college and university system, and that they weren't doing particularly well. So the first priority was really to get that evidence. And once that had built up a bit, we could then put in place improvement measures, which is effectively what the national ambition is about. So we knew how many care experience people we had in the college and university system, and we could identify that the success rates on the core system were simply not good enough. And in the university system, the retention needs were much lower compared to other student groups. So we could set about an improvement programme, which is essentially what the national ambition was, when it was set over a three year period, which we are pushing forward through our outcome agreements. And I think one of the things I'm most proud about throughout that whole time, is we said, well, what does good look like? And we took lots of different examples to our access and inclusion committee who oversee our work. And what they said was, there should be absolutely no difference between them and their peer group in terms of their outcomes. And of course, they're absolutely correct. And that's what really sits at the heart of the national mission. But we're not gonna get there overnight, so that these are steps and the National ambition.

Nick Stansfield

Our main ambition is that there's no difference between our care experience young people and their peers by 2021. And we're supporting our colleges and universities through a variety of means. We currently fund Who Cares? Scotland, the corporate parenting project, to help our colleges and universities who are, of course, corporate parents, to make sure they've got the right things in place to support the care experienced students for every stage of their learner journey. We want institutions to create the right environment. So, students are happy to self-declare themselves as care experienced, we

knew there was an issue of under-reporting in the sector. We knew that perhaps they didn't declare they're care experienced for a variety reasons, but maybe because they didn't see the point of letting the institution know. There is a question on the UCAS form, but many wouldn't tick that box. And we're really emphasising to institutions to make sure they have updated application forms, to ask that question, and make sure that prospective students know of the benefits of declaring their care experienced. We've certainly seen an increase in the numbers of care experienced from the first year which was 2013 to 14. In that year, we knew there were 750 declared care experienced students in the college sector, the latest figures from 2016-17, we've now got over 3000 care experienced students in the college sector. So that's a huge jump.

#### Fiona Burns

One of the things that we've done to achieve that is through our work with Who Cares? Scotland and the funding of that particular programme. They have done training in all of the colleges and universities, really bringing it to the attention of senior management in particular, about the importance of knowing exactly who these people are within your institution so that you can support them. So that nationally we can see that it's improving, that the National Ambition is working. And they did it really well, Who Cares? Scotland in their training, because they have the actual care experience people that report on their experience of being at that institution and what it really is like when nobody knows your background, or nobody's really supporting you, and the difference that just simply declaring that can make as long as it is the good support systems within the institutions.

#### Nick Stansfield

We ask institutions, what they're doing to support care experienced students each year through the outcome agreement. There's much more outreach work and better relationships that they have with their schools, and colleges. And they're much better at sharing data with agencies like Skills Development Scotland and the local council. And we know that they have updated application forms. And they're just much more aware of the issues that the care experienced young people may encounter. So, they can put the right support mechanisms in place. We know that they are guaranteeing interviews for care experienced young people, and they're offering feedback on their applications. And they're much better at providing support through mentoring through naming person at the institution who they can always contact and letting them know the financial support that's available and accommodation, if that's relevant to them. And we've also worked with a charity called Become and they've developed a website called Propel, which is for care experienced young people. On that website they can look at all institutions in Scotland and see the levels of support that's available to them.

#### Fiona Burns

Which is really like a PR mechanism, isn't it for the institutions themselves to be able to show their free accommodation that they provide. And you can compare institution by

institution. So the ones that are doing really, really well will start to shine through, which is good, I think.

Our outcome agreement process, which we've had in place since 2012, care experienced people are central to that. There is a very strong national measure within it there is strong ambition within it. So all institutions, colleges, and universities have to outline the number of care experienced students that they have now, and the numbers that they are aiming to have in the next three year period. And we expect that to go up. We also in the college system, we ask for the successful completion rates, because we know that they were really low before. And again, we expect the ambitions to show increases in that. And I'm absolutely delighted to report that in the recent draft outcome agreements that we have, we're seeing really good progress on that - so really, really good ambition, which the colleges and universities ought to be applauded for. We also ask for universities to identify improvements and the retention rates of these students, because again, that's an area that is particularly low, but they are responding. The colleges and universities are responding really well, at the college system. In particular, we're seeing significant increases in numbers, which is just brilliant that we know who they are, and that the numbers are increasing, and the success rates are going up as well. So we're not there yet. We've got a long, long way to get to before we get the national ambition of the no difference between care experienced people and their peer groups, but it's certainly progress and you can see the progress, which I think is what was lacking before because you didn't even know who they were. So you couldn't monitor that on a national scale.

©CELCIS