



MEDIA RELEASE

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Attention of: education correspondents, news desks

Scotland's universities to guarantee offers to care experienced applicants who meet minimum entry requirements

Scotland's 18 higher education institutions¹ have today (25 July) set out a new commitment that care experienced applicants² who meet minimum entry requirements will be guaranteed an offer of an undergraduate place at university. This bold, sector-wide move will be in place for the next admissions cycle, starting this autumn for people looking to start university in autumn 2020, and is aimed at driving a significant increase in the number of care experienced people going to university.

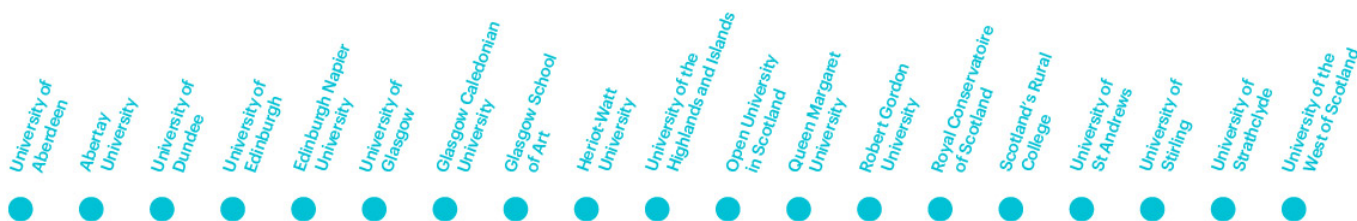
The guarantee was formally announced at an event at Glasgow Caledonian University with support from the Rt Hon First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, the Principals of Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of St Andrews and care experienced people, a number of whom may be applying to university in future.

The guaranteed offer is significant because undergraduate degree places are in high demand and competition for places means that universities aren't typically able to offer places to all applicants, even if and when they meet standard entry requirements. The average offer rate for applications to study at university from Scottish domiciled applicants is between 50-55% meaning that, on average, only half of applications are likely to result in an offer.³ Universities' decision to guarantee an offer to care experienced students who meet minimum entry requirements is informed by their belief in the importance of recognising the context in which care experienced applicants have achieved the entry qualifications needed for university.

¹ The Open University in Scotland (OU) is not included in this number as it does not have conventional entry requirements like other universities and so does not need to take this step to support access.

² Universities Scotland and its 19 members have chosen to use a definition of 'care experienced' to refer to anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short, including adopted children who were previously looked after. 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. There is no age restrictions on our definition of care experienced. This definition has been agreed after extensive consultation.

³ [UCAS offer rate from End of Cycle 2018, table P26.](#)



The First Minister **Nicola Sturgeon** said:

“I warmly welcome this commitment to guarantee a place at university for care-experienced students who meet the new entry requirements.

“Education is by far the most effective means we have of improving the life chances of our young people. I am firmly committed to widening access to higher education and ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background, have an equal chance of entering university.

“It is important that every young person has access to the learning that will provide them with the skills and qualifications they need to meet their aspirations and succeed in life.”

Commenting at the launch of the pledge, **Professor Pamela Gillies**, Principal of Glasgow Caledonian University said:

“Today’s announcement demonstrates that universities across Scotland recognise the importance of those who have had an experience of care and the huge potential they have. It was a pleasure to welcome the First Minister to Glasgow Caledonian University to formally launch our pledge to care experienced people who are considering applying to university.”

The guarantee is based on a move by universities earlier this year to set new minimum entry requirements which now apply to applications from care experienced people and people living in the most deprived 20 per cent of areas across Scotland, known as SIMD20.

The guaranteed offer, based on minimum entry requirements, is a constructive step to recognise the often very challenging circumstances in which people with care experience achieve their qualifications and the causal link that is known to exist between lived experience of care and educational attainment. There is a significant gap in the educational attainment of people with experience of care which means that 12% of “looked after” school-leavers have achieved at least one Higher or equivalent qualification compared to 62% of all school leavers. At the moment, only 4% of looked after school leavers go directly into higher education, compared to 41% of all school leavers.⁴ In the face of this substantial inequality, we feel it is only right to recognise the achievement of people with experience of care who succeed in reaching minimum entry requirements.

Professor Sally Mapstone, Principal of the University of St Andrews said:

“This is a decisive and, I hope, catalytic step jointly taken by Scotland’s universities. It gives due recognition to the substantial achievement of people with experience of care who are successful in getting the grades for university having overcome very challenging circumstances at a young age.

“We hope it will enable more people with care experience to feel confident applying to university, knowing that their application is encouraged and will be supported. It is important that all of Scotland’s universities have made this guarantee together. That should provide the greatest possible clarity and

⁴ Scottish Government (2019) [Education outcomes for looked after children 2017-2018](#) The definition of “looked after” is not the same as “care experienced” but there is no data available on school leaver attainment for care experienced young people. The figure of 12% refers to school leavers who have been looked after for the full preceding year. Therefore, it is a partial data set. Data is also available for school leavers who have been looked after for part of the year. 11% of this group achieved one or more Higher qualifications or equivalent.



visibility of this change to people with care experience wherever they live in Scotland and wherever they want to study.

“We’re not aware that any other university sector guarantee offers to care experienced learners in this way and we hope it contributes to the Independent Care Review’s ambition of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.”

Universities have taken this step collectively as part of their commitment to widen access to under-represented groups. 335 care experienced people started university in Scotland in 2016/17, which is 0.5% of all entrants to university.⁵ In contrast, 2% of all children in Scotland are “looked after” or are on the child protection register.

It’s hoped that that universities’ guaranteed offer of a place based on new minimum entry requirements exclusive to care experienced and MD20 applicants, will be a prove to be a powerful combination of both action and words that together signal the commitment universities have to creating opportunities for those with care experience and encourage a rise in applicants.

Welcoming the announcement, Duncan Dunlop, Who Cares? Scotland CEO said:

“We welcome the guaranteed offer as it recognises that the barriers Care Experienced people face to accessing higher education can be felt lifelong. The fact that the guaranteed offer has no upper age limit demonstrates a commitment by universities to seek out ways to support Care Experienced learners beyond the statutory requirement of age 26.

“We will continue to consult with our members to fully understand the impact the guaranteed offer has, and will make, for them over the coming years and communicate this to Universities Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government. The success of the guaranteed offer will not solely lie with individual institutions doing the right thing by Care Experienced people, but it will require a whole sector approach that sees Corporate Parents understanding the guaranteed offer, signposting university as a valid option and supporting Care Experienced people through the process to apply and succeed.”

ENDS

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Images:

Two images taken from the announcement can be found attached.

The images show: Fiona Duncan, Chair of the Independent Care Review (top row, second from right) Professor Pamela Gillies (second row from top, centre), First Minister Nicola Sturgeon (centre), Professor Sally Mapstone (bottom row, third from right). Everyone else in the image is a university student or aspiring student with experience of care.

⁵ Scottish Funding Council (2019) [Report on Widening Access 2017-18](#)

