



CORPORATE PARENTING PLAN

Introduction.....	1
RGU’s Commitment to Care Experienced Individuals	2
RGU’s Ambition for Care Experienced Individuals.....	3
Corporate Parenting Action Plan	4
Monitoring and Reporting	8
APPENDIX 1: Case Studies	9

Introduction

Robert Gordon University (RGU) is committed to supporting looked after children and care experienced students. This document, RGU's Corporate Parenting Plan, sets out our ambition to fulfil our duties as a Corporate Parent and improve the outcomes for those with care experience. A number of care experienced students have been consulted in the development of the Plan.

A corporate parent is an organisation or person in power who has special responsibilities to care experienced and looked after children and young people, a group that includes:

- those in residential care
- those in foster care
- those in kinship care, who live with a family member other than a parent
- those who are looked after at home with social work involvement

Children and young people who are care experienced or who are looked after have the poorest outcomes of all children and young people in Scotland. Evidence suggests that:

- 50% of the adult prison population were looked after
- 30% of looked after children become homeless
- 50% of looked after children have a mental health issue
- 4% of care leavers go onto higher education

Corporate Parenting as a concept exists to try and improve these outcomes.

Part 9 (Corporate Parenting) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act confers new statutory duties on a range of publicly-funded organisations to become Corporate Parents.

The Scottish Government describes corporate parenting 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.'

The legislation places responsibilities on Robert Gordon University (RGU) to improve the lives and futures of Scotland's looked after children and care experienced young people. It has been introduced to improve the lives of some of the country's most vulnerable young people.

RGU's Commitment to Care Experienced Individuals

RGU is committed to enabling individuals to achieve their ambitions throughout life whatever their circumstances. A key element of this commitment is the university's outreach and support for care experienced individuals.

In February 2014, the university was awarded the Buttle UK Quality Mark for its work in developing a programme of support to widen access to higher education for care experienced individuals. In securing the Quality Mark, RGU successfully demonstrated a robust strategy to ensure that care experienced students have access to a package of support including financial, pastoral and educational assistance.

Translating the strategic commitment into direct support for students, the university's initial focus was on the development and delivery of a support package to care experienced individuals. Appendix 1 provides case studies of this work in action.

Key elements of the university's support package included:

- A designated care leaver advisor, based within the university's Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access;
- Inclusion within the university's widening access programme, including eligibility to apply for Access RGU scholarships;
- Inclusion within the university's contextualised admissions process;
- One to one pre-entry support throughout the application and admissions process;
- Travel support for applicants to attend the university's programme of open days, applicants days and selection visits;
- Guaranteed 365 day accommodation in university halls of residence, with a discount in the first year;
- Entitlement to an enrolment support pack, including support for travel and study materials;
- Dedicated face-to-face and email support throughout the student's course of study;
- Access to a discretionary fund, enabling individuals to seek financial support for one-off and unforeseen issues.

Informed by feedback from care experienced individuals, the university has continued to develop its outreach and support offer.

Most positively, through this work, the university has achieved an increase in care leaver entrants and was successful in securing the Buttle UK Quality Mark for a further two years.

RGU's Ambition for Care Experienced Individuals

The university is committed to developing and implementing our ambition for care experienced individuals and actively endorses the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant. Created by an alliance of stakeholders, the Covenant is in essence an 'Agenda for Change' which, if implemented fully and consistently, will transform the way care experienced individuals are supported in Scotland.

The Scottish Care Leavers Covenant explains:

'Good parents aim to do much more than the basics for their young people and Scotland's care leavers should expect their corporate parents to do the same.'

By endorsing the principles of the Covenant and responding to the actions outlined in the Agenda for Change, RGU will aim to meet the challenge set out in the Covenant 'to go beyond mere compliance and aspire to excellence'.

In line with Section 58 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the university identifies the following as its 'corporate parenting responsibilities':

- **Alert:** Being alert to matters which adversely affect the wellbeing of our care experienced students;
- **Assess:** Assessing the needs of those students to ensure our services and support are relevant and accessible;
- **Promote:** Taking positive action which will promote the interests of care experienced students;
- **Opportunities:** Providing opportunities for care experienced individuals to participate and engage in activities;
- **Access:** Supporting care experienced individuals to access opportunities and make use of our services and support;
- **Improve:** Review performance and seek student feedback to identify and address areas for improvement

Implementing our commitment

The university will implement its commitment to care experienced individuals in two key ways:

- Through strong advocacy of, and active participation in, work which seeks to transform the outcomes for care experienced individuals. This will involve the university in both national and regional development work;
- Implementation of the university's Corporate Parenting Action Plan, in ways which engage the RGU community in implementing our Corporate Parenting duties. A copy of the Corporate Parenting Plan can be found overleaf.

Corporate Parenting Action Plan

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME
<p>Section 58 (1)(a) Be alert Be alert to the needs of care experienced students and matters which adversely affect the wellbeing of our care experienced students</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a named individual within the university who will hold the role of Care Experienced Coordinator and take overall responsibility for being alert to the needs of and managing support for RGU's care experienced students and looked after children. • Engage with current care experienced students via regular contact with the university's dedicated Care Experienced Coordinator to ensure students' views are heard and action is taken to meet their needs. • Identify and invite key internal and external colleagues to become members of a Corporate Parenting Advisory Group to ensure the university's knowledge of the issues affecting care experienced young people remains current and to identify enhancements to service provision and teaching and learning practice. • Invite care experienced students to participate in the Corporate Parenting Advisory Group. • Engage care experienced students in an annual focus group to discuss matters affecting student wellbeing and identify service improvements. • Continue to strengthen links with relevant external organisations to share best practice and inform developments to the university's package of support for care experienced students. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>A direct point of contact for prospective students, current students and key stakeholders.</p> <p>A continuity of support for care experienced students throughout their course of study.</p> <p>Clear mechanisms and working groups to ensure the university is alert to the needs of care experienced students and that appropriate support is in place to meet those needs.</p> <p>Direct engagement with care experienced students informs university policy and practice.</p> <p>Support services developed in line with national outcomes and ambitions for care experienced students.</p>
<p>58 (1)(b) Assess the needs</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide pre-entry advice and guidance through engagement with applicants and prospective applicants 	<p>Ongoing</p>	

RGU CORPORATE PARENTING PLAN

<p>Assess the needs of care experienced students to ensure our services and support are relevant and accessible</p>	<p>early in the recruitment cycle via telephone, email, face to face meetings and tailored campus visits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide one-to-one engagement opportunities for applicants to discuss, identify and address individual needs. Work with individuals and the partner organisations supporting them to mitigate barriers to entry and develop a planned package of support. • Ensure information is easily accessible to individuals and their carers/guardians. • Encourage all enrolled care experienced students to engage with the university’s Care Experienced Coordinator who will assess the needs of each student and develop an individualised package of support. • Make appropriate referrals to internal support departments to provide services relating to welfare matters, finance etc. • Actively participate in networks with local partners and national organisations to inform the development of services and support in line with identified best practice. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>A planned approach to meeting the needs of care experienced students prior to enrolment.</p> <p>A consistent and responsive service designed to assess and respond to the needs of individual students.</p> <p>An effective internal referral system to student support services. A service informed by current knowledge of policy and practice affecting looked after children and care leavers.</p>
<p>58 (1)(c) Promote the interests Take positive action which will promote the interests of care experienced students</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the issues affecting care experienced students amongst staff. • Provide staff training on RGU’s corporate parenting responsibilities to existing staff and to new staff via staff induction training. • Develop a calendar of activities in conjunction with RGU Union and Who Cares? Scotland to ensure staff and student cohorts are aware of the support services available. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>By May 2018</p> <p>Annually in October</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Well informed and trained staff who are confident in supporting care experienced students and exercising their responsibilities as Corporate Parents. Well informed and engaged student body.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate successful journeys of care experienced students through the production of written and video case studies. • Host an annual Care Experienced Awards Ceremony to raise awareness and celebrate achievements. • Work with schools and colleges to support the ambition and transition of individual students through the development of clear progression pathways. • Work in partnership with regional organisations to identify opportunities to promote the interests of looked after children in the region. • Endorse and contribute to sector developments to realise the national ambition for Scotland's looked after children and care experienced young people. 	<p>Annually</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>An inclusive environment in which care experienced students feel supported, recognised and acknowledged.</p> <p>A partnership approach and joined up thinking to support the needs and interests of looked after children as they progress through the learner journey.</p> <p>Support and services for care experienced students are informed by national policy and ambition.</p>
<p>58 (1)(d) Seek to provide opportunities Provide opportunities for care experienced individuals to participate and engage in activities</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the development of activities and a network of peer support specifically for care experienced students. • Support student participation in the annual Care Experienced Student Award to encourage students to share their journey and inspire others. • Engage with looked after children in the region via relevant school, local authority and third sector organisations to encourage participation in Wider Access activities, programmes and events. • Arrange visits to relevant local authority and third sector organisations to ensure looked after children and partners are aware of the benefits of Higher Education and the package of support available to them at RGU. Invite current care experienced students to participate in these outreach activities. • Support care experienced students to participate in regional and national conferences, awards and events. 	<p>May 2018</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Opportunities to engage in networks of peer support. Active student participation in organised events.</p> <p>Increased aspiration and awareness of the benefits of higher education amongst looked after children.</p> <p>Tailored outreach support with students as partners to ease the transition to university.</p>

			Platforms giving care experienced students an opportunity to share their experience.
<p>58 (1)(e) Take action to help children access opportunities and make use of services Working in close cooperation with partners where it is regarded as promoting the interests of those students</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with local authority partners at a strategic level representing RGU on Aberdeen City Council Champions Board and Aberdeenshire Council Corporate Parenting Strategy Group. Maintain and develop effective operational partnerships with external agencies and organisations to facilitate the exchange of ideas and good practice, ensuring children in care and their family/carer/key workers are well supported. Develop sessions to raise awareness of the university’s support for care experienced students amongst education and social work staff, school guidance staff, partner service professionals, children’s panel and foster carer networks. Engage and develop opportunities with Aberdeen City’s Virtual School Headteacher, who has responsibility for all looked after children of secondary school age in the local authority. Engage in regional partnership with University of Aberdeen and North East Scotland College to share information and best practice to support care experienced learners. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Increased opportunities for looked after children in the region to engage with the university.</p> <p>Active participation in a partnership approach to promoting the interests of looked after children.</p> <p>Increased awareness of the support provided by RGU to care experienced students amongst partner organisations.</p> <p>A co-ordinated approach across the education sector to ensure seamless pathways for care experienced learners.</p>

Monitoring and Reporting

RGU's Corporate Parenting Plan has been informed by research evidence from Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children (CELCIS) and Who Cares? Scotland and is published in consultation with regional stakeholders, including Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, and current care experienced students.

A Corporate Parenting Advisory Group will be established to provide expert advice to the university as it implements the Corporate Parenting Plan. This group will develop a view of the university's progress in relation to the Plan and will provide support to enable the university to continue to enhance its role as a corporate parent. The membership of the group will include both internal and external members; current students with care experience will have a vital role in the group.

The Corporate Parenting Plan will be reviewed annually and, in compliance with Part 9 of the Act, the university will publish an annual report. This report will take account of relevant data as well as the views of care experienced students to determine progress.

A report will be published by the university annually.

APPENDIX 1: Case Studies

Student Case Studies

Two care experienced students agreed to participate in a case study to share their experiences.

Efia - Digital Marketing, Masters

Efia is in her Masters year; she did not declare her care experience at the application stage for fear of being judged because of her background. She was adopted, and at a young age her adoptive mother passed away which resulted in her being placed in kinship care. It is to her enormous credit that Efia gained a 1st in her Degree, has positively engaged with the wider university and has been a key speaker at two regional conferences addressing the needs of care experienced students. Efia acknowledges the opportunity to meet with other students from a looked after background as being particularly valuable to her in feeling that her experiences do not necessarily mark her out as 'different' from other students. Efia also values the opportunities to have an individual within the university whom she can talk informally to for support. With support from the university care leaver adviser, Efia successfully applied for a SAAS Care Leaver Vacation grant and gained recognition through the annual Student Awards for two years running.

Shaun - Applied Sport & Exercise Science, Stage 3

Shaun has a volatile relationship with his mother and had consequently been placed in care as a child. This relationship has previously resulted in Shaun being the main care giver and main financial provider for the family over a number of years which has left him in a difficult and very vulnerable financial position and with issues relating to relationships. Shaun engaged with the university early on at the pre-enrolment stage and self-identified the areas that he required support with. The university provided Shaun with a travel pass and book voucher to ease financial concerns and organised for him to chat the university Student Finance officer to address his financial situation. After discussion, Shaun was also referred to the Student Counselling Services, which he feels has been of enormous benefit. However, Shaun also acknowledges the value in the 'smaller' things such the opportunity for more informal interactions with the care experienced adviser in the respect of simply having someone to listen to him.

Efia and Shaun have embraced the wider life of the university and have been involved in a number of volunteering and ambassadorial initiatives and events. They wish to help, assist and develop other students and as such have openly acknowledged and shared their experiences to benefit others. Both visited a local residential project to speak to staff and young people about their experiences in education and to inspire them to feel positive about their futures. The students were also invited to participate in the selection process for new social work students at the university as well as having input into the assessment of current students on the social work degree course.