



AccessHE
AccessHE Care Experienced and Estranged Students Forum Meeting
held on
9 May 2017 (2.00 – 4.00pm)
at
Birkbeck, University of London

MINUTES

Attendees:

Melanie	Aarons Royal	Lewisham Leaving Care Service
Nienke	Alberts	AccessHE
Jack	Abbotts	AccessHE
Priya	Clarke	NNECL
Guy	Cowen- Hutton	AccessHE
Rebecca	Denmark	University for the Creative Arts
Michael	Griffiths	Kingston University London
Donna	Lingard	Croydon Virtual School
Jamie	Mackay	AccessHE
Anne	McGrath	University of Westminster
Isabel	Patrick	London Metropolitan University
Liz	Routhorn	London Metropolitan University
Beth	Taswell	City, University of London
Karen	Tucker	University of Sussex
Karen	Western	Brunel University London
Amy	York	UCL

1. Welcome to the meeting and introductions from the Chair

Guy Cowen-Hutton (GCH) welcomed the group to the meeting, introduced himself and invited others to do the same.

2. Apologies for absence

Josh Du Sautoy (St Mary's University), Rufus Lacey (Become), Rupa Lakhani (UCL), Janet Lewis (Brent Virtual School), Jon Rainford (Conservatoire of Dance and Drama), Jenny Tait (University of West London)

3. Notes of the last meeting held on 19 January 2017

GCH referred the group to the minutes of the previous meeting and highlighted that a representative from Stand Alone is hoping to attend the next meeting. It was also heard that [Become](#) will be attending the forum soon to discuss their [Propel website](#). Furthermore, it was explained that AccessHE will continue to look into the possibility of providing core training to members at the forum. Additionally, GCH explained that AccessHE have compiled a list of contact details for the heads of virtual schools and that this can be circulated with the minutes of the meeting. Finally, it was heard that [NNECL](#) are arranging a practitioners' conference again in 2017 and so it has been decided that AccessHE will not look into organising a similar event, although there may be the opportunity to contribute at the event, as AccessHE did last year. The NNECL conference date has not yet been released. The rest of the minutes were passed as accurate.

Action:

- ***AccessHE to circulate the list of contact details for virtual school heads with the minutes of the meeting.***
- ***AccessHE will continue to look into the possibility of providing core training to members at the forum.***

4. Professional development opportunity: chairing the forum

GCH informed the group that, due to leaving her job at St Mary's, Lou Byrne will be stepping down from her role as Chair of the forum. The group placed on record their appreciation for her efforts and GCH stated that AccessHE will now be seeking a replacement Chair, emphasising the importance of having a Chair drawn from the AccessHE membership in order to inform the direction of the forum. More information on the role will be forthcoming. AccessHE would like to confirm a new Chair by the start of the next academic year at the latest.

Action:

- ***AccessHE to invite nominations for Chair of the forum and circulate further details about the position.***

5. Tackling the problem of UASC: findings from the AccessHE report

Nienke Alberts (NA) explained that the AccessHE research report, '*Falling through the cracks: Enabling Access to HE for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children*' (available here: <http://www.accesshe.ac.uk/resources/publications/>), came out of discussions at this forum and that it was launched at an event on 8 May. The group were informed that 3,175 children applied for asylum without a relative or guardian in 2015 and that this group show a significantly higher educational attainment than care leavers in general. 14% of looked after children get 5 A*- C at GCSE compared to 55% of the general population, whilst UASC average just half a grade lower than the general population. Furthermore, previous research

has identified education as a central aspiration for this group of young people. UASC are therefore likely to do well in HE if they are given the opportunity to go.

NA explained that she had in-depth discussions with 4 UASC about barriers to HE and received completed questionnaires from 23 local authorities and 2 third sector organisations on the same subject. 14 HEIs also completed questionnaires on the support that they currently offer to this group.

The main barrier that was identified was immigration status and the cost of HE; asylum seekers are categorised as overseas students, paying tuition fees of between £10,000 and £30,000. In comparison refugees, those with indefinite leave to remain or those with humanitarian protection are viewed as home students. Other barriers include a lack of knowledge about immigration status and higher education in schools and gaps in formal education.

Currently, little support is available for UASC, although they may be provisioned to some extent under Looked After Children or Refugee programmes.

The recommendations the report makes for HEIs are as follows:

- Target outreach activities at UASC.
- Ensure a member of staff has knowledge on UASC.
- Fee waivers and bursaries for UASC.
- Additional support with accommodation for UASC.

GCH then asked the group for any feedback they may have to the research or any observations about support for UASC in general, which was as follows:

- The group questioned which members of staff completed the HEI survey and were informed that it was primarily sent to outreach and WP teams. NA acknowledged that it was not systematic as it was individuals that responded.
- It was suggested that it is useful to have an understanding how many care leavers at HEIs are UASC. Student Information Databases (SIDs) and Student Finance teams could be used to obtain this information.
- [Article 26](#), [STAR](#) and [Become](#) all have resources with help available.
- Bursaries may be available but can be hard to find. Also WP teams may not always be aware of their availability or indeed be in a position to suitably advise.
- HEIs cannot give a definitive answer on issues surrounding immigration status and have to refer students on to specialist advisers.
- UASC students can progress through the education system happily but problems arise when they reach the point of applying to university, as they are not always aware of what they are entitled to.
- Looked after Children have their Pathway Plans updated every six months up until the age of 21. Also immigration status is discussed at reviews with social workers but perhaps the situation is not being taken on board?

- Young people who have the long term goal of going to university are normally well known: the main issue is with those who decide later on.

The group were then asked if there is anything AccessHE could do to help them in supporting this target group, suggestions were as follows:

- Create a checklist of things that practitioners could ask UASC students.
- A list of key contacts at HEIs.
- Invite STAR, Article 26 or Refugee Support Network to come to the forum and speak or provide a training session.

GCH asked members to contact him if they have any further suggestions.

Action:

- ***AccessHE to circulate the report with the minutes of the meeting: [Falling through the cracks: Enabling Access to HE for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children](#)***
- ***AccessHE to create a checklist of things that practitioners could ask UASC students.***
- ***AccessHE to compile a list of key contacts at HEIs.***
- ***AccessHE to invite STAR, Article 26 or Refugee Support Network to come to the forum and speak or provide a training session.***
- ***Members to contact AccessHE if they have any further suggestions on how AccessHE can help them support this target group.***

6. Proposal to host the Life After University event

GCH explained that the Life After University event, held last November at LSBU, was arranged to address the lack of support that is available to care leavers approaching the end of their time at university: an issue raised at the forum. The group heard that, after positive feedback at the last meeting, it was decided that the event will take place again in the next academic year. After offers from the University of Westminster and London Metropolitan University, the group decided that the event will be hosted at the University of Westminster. The group fed back on the programme for the last event, it was as follows:

- It may be better to hold the event in February, as this avoids the busy first term and exam period. Some universities also do not resume lectures until the end of January so it was felt February is the best option.
- The programme was strong it was just the number of attendees which could be improved.
- The accommodation workshop and Barclays Life Skills sessions were particularly useful.
- Open the event up to all university students, not just those in their final year.
- Students that book on could be given regular reminders of the event or be drip fed the programme.
- Offer incentives for students to attend. For example, 'leave with a CV' and include a CV writing workshop. A LinkedIn workshop was also suggested.

- The event could be called a *pathway event* as this would resonate with the target group as they are used to discussions on pathways.

GCH explained that the group will be revisiting this at the next meeting of the forum, at which point the advertising for the last event will also be reviewed. The group were also asked whether any members would be able to deliver a session at the event and it was heard that colleagues from London Metropolitan University could perhaps deliver one on mental health.

Actions:

- ***AccessHE to liaise with the University of Westminster to establish a date and draft programme for the event.***

7. News from our partners

GCH asked those present to give updates on the work they are doing in the area. Priya Clarke (PC) explained that NNECL are holding a meeting in two days and that she will update AccessHE of any developments afterwards. It was explained that PC is now Co-Chair and Beth Taswell is now the London Representative for NNECL. The group heard that NNECL are currently in the process of acquiring charitable status and a firm set of trustees. Finally, it was explained that the [NNECL website](#) continues to offer the facility to host information for care leavers and the NNECL newsletter continues to be sent out.

8. Any other business

a) Rights and entitlements document – where are we?

GCH informed the group of a resource being created by Chris Colson of the University of Greenwich, documenting the rights and entitlements of care leavers across different local authorities. GCH explained that he was last updated as to its progress in February and was informed that it needs to be verified by a solicitor before being made available. The group were informed that GCH will enquire as to the status of the resource and report back to the group.

Finally, Amy York informed the group of a seminar taking place at UCL on 21 June. ‘Risk factors and facilitators for access to higher education among care-leavers’ will be delivered by Professor Claire Cameron. Details on how to book as well as more information on the rest of the ‘Social Mobility and Access to Higher Education’ seminar series can be found here. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/widening-participation/activities/social-mobility-and-access-to-higher-education>

Action:

- ***AccessHE to report back on the progress of the Rights and Entitlements resource.***

b) Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting will held on 20 July, 2-4pm.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm

AccessHE is a Division of London Higher