



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

MEETING NOTES

Attendees:

Jack	Abbotts	AccessHE
Helen	Arber	The Unite Foundation
Priya	Clarke	NNECL
Guy	Cowen- Hutton	AccessHE
Josh	Du Sautoy	St Mary's University
Chrissie	Farley	Kingston University London
Lauren	Hedges	AccessHE
Isabel	Patrick	London Metropolitan University
Liz	Routhorn	London Metropolitan University
Jenny	Tait	University of West London
Beth	Taswell	City, University of London
Karen	Tucker	University of Sussex
Karen	Western	Brunel University London

1. Welcome to the meeting and introductions from the Chair

Lauren Hedges (LH) welcomed the group to the meeting and introduced herself, then invited others to do the same. The group were informed of the forum's change of name, from 'Looked After Children' to 'Care Experienced and Estranged Students'.

2. Apologies for absence

Melanie Aarons- Royal (London Borough of Lewisham), Lucia Byrne (St Mary's University), Chris Colson (University of Greenwich), Jon Rainford (Conservatoire of Dance and Drama)

3. Notes of the last meeting

LH referred the group to the notes of the last meeting and addressed the action points which were decided upon. It was explained that AccessHE are still in the process of looking at external speakers to invite to the forum and that Stand Alone had given a presentation at the previous meeting on the Stand Alone pledge. The group were encouraged to submit suggestions as to organisations they would like to speak at the forum to AccessHE.

LH updated the group that Brunel University have made some of their NNCO money available to fund AccessHE research into the barriers to accessing HE faced by Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC). The report to be published in February and Nienke Alberts, the AccessHE research officer will present it at the next meeting of the forum. Finally, with regard to providing core training for foster carers, the group were informed that AccessHE will carry this forward. The rest of the minutes were passed as accurate.

Actions:

- ***AccessHE to continue to pursue external speakers to present at the forum, members should contact AccessHE if they have ideas on who to invite.***
- ***AccessHE to look into the idea of providing core training for foster carers.***

4. Life after university event review- Paper 1

GCH provided an outline of the event and explained that it was designed to support care experienced students as they begin to consider life after university. The group heard that the event was originally aimed at those in second year or above but was eventually opened up to all students. The wide range of organisations that presented at or supported the event were detailed and they are as follows:

- Care leavers' association
- University of Greenwich
- AccessHE
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Working Chance
- St Mary's University, Twickenham
- Drive Forward Foundation
- Squire Patton Boggs law firm
- J Walter Thompson advertising agency
- Hackney Ways into Work
- Brunel University London
- Barclays Life Skills

The sessions that were delivered covered the following areas:

- Rights and entitlements
- Leaving care

- World of work
- Postgraduate study
- Panel session involving employers
- Money skills
- Mental health and wellbeing

GCH explained that whilst attendance was disappointing - 4 students attended on the day out of 15 who had booked a place - those who did attend seemed to benefit from the experience. It was agreed by the group that low attendance is a challenge which is often encountered with the target group in question. It was explained that feedback from those that had attended the event had been largely positive and external organisations who had taken part were keen to do so again. It was also noted that AccessHE presented a workshop on the event and its model at the NNECL Conference in November where the response was similarly positive.

The group were then asked for their feedback both as to what worked well at the event, as some members of the forum attended, and as to how the model could be improved for next time. Positive feedback was as follows:

- Information about accommodation and rights and entitlements was useful to the care experienced students that attended.
- The session delivered by Barclays Life Skills was very helpful on the subject of money management.
- The variation in speakers at the event and the subjects that were covered is a particular strength of the model.
- The group agreed that the event should be run again and could continue on an annual basis.

Suggestions and recommendations for the next event were:

- It was felt the timing of the event could be changed in order to ensure that the maximum amount of students attend. A date in January or February was suggested as it would be after both Christmas and the first exam period of the year. A summer date was also suggested as although students will be not be attending university at the time care leavers are more likely to still be in the area in which they study. It was also put forward that it could be held on a Wednesday afternoon as lot of students are available at this time.
- Brunel University and London Metropolitan University expressed their interest in hosting the event, although it was agreed that a central location would be preferable. The group were informed that the students that attended the last event were from institutions on different sides of London which supports the need for a centrally located venue.
- AccessHE could notify support workers and careers departments at universities in addition to advertising to students as they may encourage students to attend and advertise the event, respectively.

- Promotional material should be explicit about what students will gain from the event if they attend.
- AccessHE could contact those students who booked a place but did not attend on the day to see their reasons for not doing so and to take this into consideration next time.
- Students could be given the option to register to attend the event or to just receive information afterwards. This could perhaps include the presentation slides or an audio or video recording of the event.

Actions:

- ***AccessHE to run another 'Life after university' event in the 2017/18 academic year.***
- ***AccessHE to follow up with HEIs about the possibility of hosting the next event.***

5. Estranged students

LH began by updating the group on the work of [Stand Alone](#) and explained that they are holding a conference on the topic of 'Outreach and Transition to HE' at Liverpool John Moores University on 10 February 2017. This is part of a series of best practice conferences being staged by the charity. Furthermore the group heard that AccessHE, alongside Stand Alone, are currently conversing with [Cardboard Citizens](#) and it has been suggested that a group of estranged students could potentially write a play which draws on their experiences. This could then be presented to local schools and colleges, although it was stressed the idea is only in its infancy.

The group were shown the different sections on the [Stand Alone Pledge website](#), in particular highlighting the map showing how many estranged students there are known to be in each university. The group were asked about their experiences in trying to implement the pledge and for any ideas AccessHE can feedback to Stand Alone. Some members explained they had signed up to the pledge whilst others had not. The general feeling was that the pledge is viewed favourably by senior management at HEIs. With regard to the website, it was suggested that it could include a section offering academic support for students who are currently studying and AccessHE agreed to report this back to Stand Alone. The group also enquired as to whether Stand Alone had approached Students' Unions and were informed that they are currently working on a campaign alongside the NUS which will link with Students' Unions. It was explained that this will be rolled out in coming months and that the campaign will link back to the pledge.

A member of the group informed the forum that they had been contacted by UCAS, with a view to finding out how their institution caters for estranged students. LH informed the group that Stand Alone are currently liaising with UCAS about including a tick box in the application process, in order to identify estranged students at this stage. However, it was raised that HEIs may find it difficult to verify whether or not students were estranged if they selected this box. It was agreed that the definitions of different levels of estrangement need to be clear in order for HEIs to assess experiences and provide bursaries and other forms of support.

The group were then asked about their current efforts to support estranged students and again difficulties in identifying and also contacting the group were expressed. It was suggested that HEIs could contact Student Finance for help in identifying these students and it was clarified that they currently use the word 'independent' rather than 'estranged'. However, it was made clear that despite these difficulties, HEIs are directing resources to provide support for these students. The group were referred to the 4 sections detailed in the Stand Alone Pledge: finance, accommodation, mental health and outreach and were asked as to which areas HEIs felt were the most difficult to address. Primarily mental health was highlighted as a concern as it was felt resources in that area are very stretched across the board. Additionally, finance and accommodation were highlighted as areas in which it is difficult to provide support for estranged students specifically.

Finally, it was agreed that the provisions made by local authorities for estranged students varies significantly from one local authority to another. A member of the group explained that their HEI had written to all local authorities in London to request information on this subject but had only received 5 responses. However, it was mentioned that legislation may be coming in which would ensure that all local authorities make this information available.

Actions:

- ***AccessHE to provide Stand Alone with the forum's feedback on the Stand Alone website.***
- ***AccessHE to feedback to Stand Alone about the areas of the pledge HEIs feel are most difficult to address, primarily mental health but also finance and accommodation.***

6. NNECL update

LH updated the group as to the work of the [National Network for the Education of Care Leavers \(NNECL\)](#) and explained that the network is continuing to explore being incorporated as an independent charity and is still being hosted by the University of Winchester. The group heard that NNECL is seeking other sources of external funding and to develop a membership offer to become a financially sustainable independent charity in the next 3 years. Additionally, it was explained that due to the end of NNCO funding there has been a cut-back in staffing and the trustees are currently reviewing priorities, budgets and staffing moving forward.

Next, the group were informed that in the aftermath of the NNECL Conference in November a number of online resources were made available, they are as follows:

- [NNECL Guide for Care Leaver key contacts in HEIs](#)
- [NNECL Guide for Local Authority workers](#)
- [NNECL Film](#)

LH then referred the group to Priya Clarke (PC), a NNECL representative for London, and PC offered to visit member HEIs and speak about the activity of NNECL. Furthermore it was highlighted that the NNECL website can advertise any relevant events at HEIs. The forum also heard that PC will soon be talking to the heads at various virtual schools and to contact

her if anyone would like any issues raised. At this point it was highlighted that contact details for many virtual schools are outdated and it was suggested that AccessHE could try and compile an updated list. Finally, the idea of AccessHE holding a London based practitioners' conference was mooted with the caveat that they do not want to conflict with NNECL's work. PC informed the group that NNECL would be happy to collaborate with AccessHE in this area, although it was noted that NNECL are still planning on running their own conference in 2017.

Actions:

- ***AccessHE to look into formulating an updated list of contacts for London virtual schools.***
- ***AccessHE to look into the possibility of hosting a practitioners' conference possibly in collaboration with NNECL.***

7. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 2 May 2017, 2-4pm.

8. Any other business

LH raised the possibility of inviting [Become](#) to attend a forum meeting to speak about their [Propel website](#) and the group agreed this would be interesting. The [University of Greenwich's rights and entitlements resource](#) was also mentioned and LH informed the group that AccessHE could potentially collaborate with Become to offer a similar resource specifically for care leavers.

Action:

- ***AccessHE to look into the possibility of creating a rights and entitlements resource for care leavers possibly in collaboration with Become.***

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.

AccessHE is a Division of London Higher