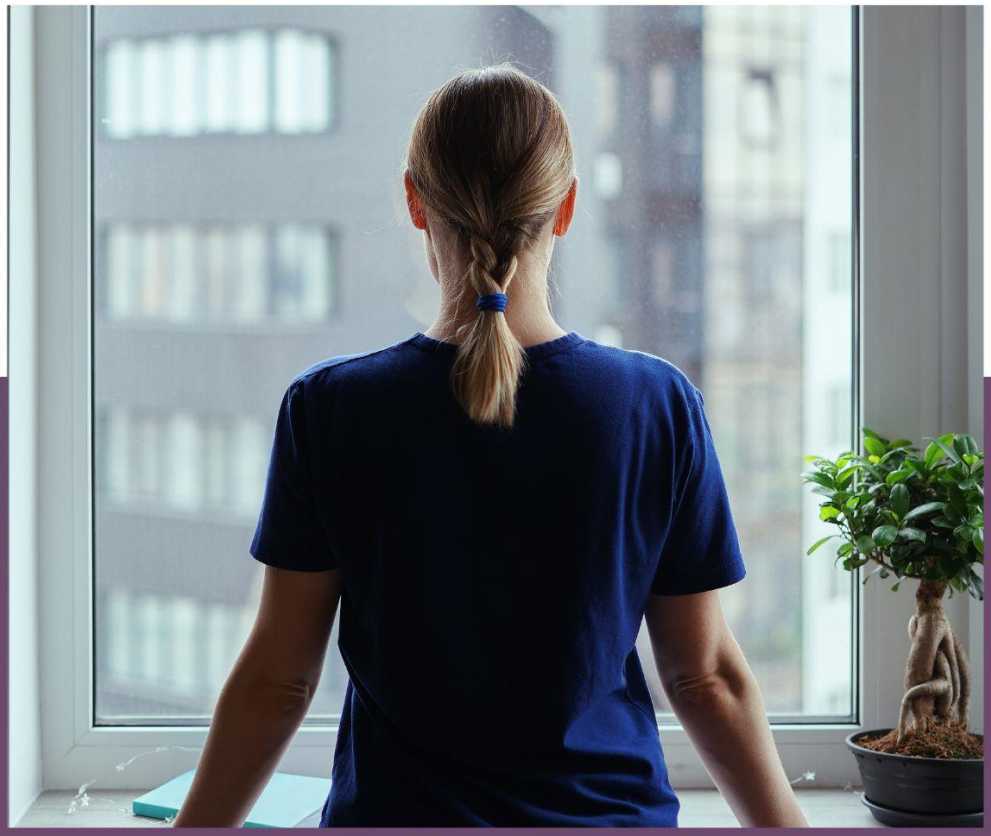
Housing Futures:
A NNECL perspective on what works for accommodation



Housing Futures: A NNECL perspective on what works for accommodation

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About NNECL

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is the only UK charity solely dedicated to transforming the educational outcomes of young people with care experience.

Our network includes over 100 universities, colleges, foster agencies, local authority leaving care teams, virtual schools, independent consultants, and charities. Through these organisations, we support over 300 individual practitioners, creating a vibrant community of more than 800 professionals collectively working with over 5,000+ learners from care and estranged backgrounds.

We are immensely proud of our **Quality Mark**, an evidence-based, impact-driven change management framework that enables universities and colleges to demonstrate their commitment to supporting the inclusion and success of students with care experience and those who are estranged. Independent evaluation of the Quality Mark found that institutions pursue it not only to assess current practice but also to explore opportunities for improvement in working with students with care experience. Institutions reported enhanced approaches in areas such as risk management, widening access to higher education, supporting student thriving, and improving educational outcomes, benefits they largely attributed to the Quality Mark.

In recognition of its impact, the Quality Mark was awarded The Children and Young People's Now Leaving Care Award 2025.

Purpose of Paper

This ‘what works’ paper provides an overview of accommodation provision for care-experienced and estranged students enrolled in further and higher education. Its aim is to highlight key challenges and showcase effective practices identified through submissions to the NNECL Quality Mark. The paper draws on current student experiences and concludes with recommendations for the post-16 education sector, as well as for local and national government.

At NNECL, we are committed to transparency in our Quality Mark process, clearly demonstrating how universities and colleges are assessed and the standards they are expected to meet. By sharing examples of effective practice from Quality Mark holders and highlighting outcomes that make a real-world difference for care-experienced and estranged students, we aim to support institutions in recognising their strengths, identifying areas for improvement, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement across the post-16 education sector.

Definitions

NNECL recognises that definitions are constantly changing. Some current definitions are listed below but it is acknowledged that these may evolve and extend in the future:

Care Experienced
This term refers to anyone who has been, or is currently, in care. This care may have been provided in many different settings, including living with foster carers; living in a residential children's home; being looked after at home under a supervision order; living with friends or relatives in kinship care. This is NNECL’s preferred definition.

Estranged
Estranged students are those aged 18 to 24 who are not communicating with either of their parents due to an irreconcilable breakdown in the relationship with them. Estranged students often also lack the support of their wider family. Individuals may be estranged and are living independently before entering higher education or may become estranged during their studies.

Care Leavers
The level of state support young people receive depends on their status as care leavers. Definitions of status and terminology vary to some extent across the four countries of the UK. A UK care leaver is defined as a young person, typically between 16 and 25, who has been in the care of a local authority on or after their 16th birthday. The formal definition can vary slightly but generally includes those who were ‘looked after’ for at least 13 weeks since turning 14, and left care after their 16th birthday. Care leaver status may also include young people who were in care just before a special guardianship order was made.

Background

It has long been recognised by academics, politicians, and policymakers that the low participation of care-experienced and estranged young people[1] in Further and Higher Education (F/HE) represents a significant societal failure.

The Rees Centre's 2020 *What Makes Life Good* report recommended improving accommodation support to help care leavers feel safe and settled.

A 2023 report from the Centre for Homelessness highlighted that homelessness outcomes remain significantly worse for care-experienced individuals, emphasising the critical link between housing and broader life outcomes.

A 2025 Rees Centre report, found that only 14% of those ever in care entered higher education by age 22, compared with 48% of the general population.

The most recent UCAS data for 2024 records there are 7,290 care experienced students enrolled on undergraduate university courses across the UK.

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes annual figures[2] for the participation of 'looked after children' and these tell us that 15% entered university by the age of 19 in 2022/23, compared 47% of other young people. The difference remains stark, although the former figure has risen steadily from 9% in 2009/10, affording some grounds for optimism.

The DfE's figures present a partial picture. Firstly, they relate only to care-experienced learners in very early adulthood, yet we know that many will go to university later in life[3]. Secondly, they exclude learners who undertake their higher education outside of universities, for example, through private providers or further education colleges. Thirdly, they also cover only those learners who spent the whole of Year 11 in care – a description that neither equates to the legal definition of 'care leavers', nor captures those who left care earlier in childhood.

For those who do enter FE or HE, care-experienced students face challenges far beyond those encountered by their working-class peers. While individual experiences vary, common obstacles include inadequate financial support, limited guidance to navigate complex systems, and insecure accommodation both during and outside term time.

The importance of stable accommodation for wellbeing and academic success is well documented. Back in 2019, the DfE issued guidance to higher education providers aimed at improving access and participation for care-experienced students. The guidance highlighted the substantial barriers these

[1] For definitions see appendix 1

[2] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education

[3] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2019.1582014

students, including low participation rates, high dropout rates, and difficulties in securing stable accommodation. DfE recommended that the most selective and well-resourced institutions provide suitable, free accommodation for the full duration of a course, including holidays, or offer an equivalent bursary to cover private accommodation costs.

Each of these policies and report findings reflects an understanding that stable housing is critical to student retention and success and that financial support alone is insufficient. By encouraging universities to provide practical, year-round support, the recommendations seek to mitigate risks such as homelessness and financial insecurity, which disproportionately affect care-experienced students. Aligned with broader initiatives such as the Care Leaver Covenant and supported by the Office for Students, recommendations underscore an immediate need for higher education providers to create equitable opportunities and improve outcomes for care leavers.

Our work was cited as effective practice in Josh MacAlister's 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

The 2025 Education Select Committee report further highlights the importance of year-round accommodation, noting that many care leavers lack a "home" to return to during holidays or term breaks. The Committee's recommendations reinforce that universities should provide sustained support throughout students' education, not only at the point of entry.

In December 2025 Minister MacAlister and Minster Smith wrote to all University Vice Chancellors in England asking them to review the support they offer for care leavers and to consider a range of measures to drive up access and attainment. Undertaking our Quality Mark was one of the recommendations.

DfE reported that as of 31 March 2024, there were 83,630 'looked-after' children in England. The number of children starting to be looked after during the year ending March 2024 was 33,050, while 33,620 children ceased being looked after during the same period. Some of these children went back to their families or were adopted, leaving 5,539 (16%) children who formally left care that year, at age 18 and became care-leavers.

Recent data from the Office for National Statistics indicate that across the UK, the average age at which young people move out of home is 24. At 18, a pivotal age when most young people still benefit from family support, care leavers are forced to live independently, often without adequate life skills, guidance, or training to navigate this transition. Unlike their peers, they exit a formal support system only to face unsupported living arrangements, compounding the challenges they face in education and employment.

Recognition of all these challenges and conflicting data sets are embedded in the work of NNECL and underpins why accommodation is a key criterion within the Wellbeing section of the NNECL Quality Mark.

Care-experienced Students: Key Facts

Higher Education Participation

- Only 14% of those ever in care enter university by age 22 (48% of general population)
- 15% of care-experienced 19-year-olds enter university (47% of peers)

Current Undergraduate Cohort

- 7,290 care-experienced students (under age 25) enrolled in UK universities (2024)

Care-Leaver Population

- 83,630 looked-after children in England (March 2024)
- 5,539 children left care at age 18 in 2024

Context

- Average age leaving home for young people in the UK: 24
- Care leavers face independence 6 years earlier than peers

Local authority care leaver responsibilities

- **16-19 Bursary:** Young people aged 16-19 in full-time education can receive a £1,200 bursary.
- **Higher Education Bursary:** Students entering higher education (before age 25) are entitled to a one-off bursary of at least £2,000 from their local authority, which does not have to be repaid.
- **Apprenticeships:** Care leavers can get a £3,000 bursary during their first year of an apprenticeship.
- **Leaving Care Grant:** A grant of over £2,000 is available from the local council to help with the costs of setting up a first home.
- **Personal Advisor:** Care leavers will have a Personal Advisor until they are at least 21 years old, and up to the age of 25 years if the care leaver chooses. Personal Advisors work with the young person to make sure they receive the care, support and entitlements they need when they leave care.
- **Suitable Accommodation:** Local authorities have a legal responsibility to provide suitable accommodation to eligible and relevant care leavers and offer support to care leavers until at least age 21, and until age 25 if they are in education or training. This support is coordinated through a pathway plan and a Personal Adviser and can include help with rent, life skills, and education.

DfE data also shows that 55% of care leavers aged 22 years requested and received support from their local authority at some point during the year. This proportion decreases as age increases, for example the figures are 40% of 23-year-olds, 31% of 24-year-olds and 20% of 25-year-olds.

Local authorities in England must operate a virtual school, led by a Virtual School Head (VSH), to promote the educational progress of 'looked-after' and previously 'looked-after' children. Although not a physical school building, the virtual school works with education providers to ensure these children receive the support needed to achieve in line with their peers.

The VSH monitors attendance, attainment, and progress; oversees Personal Education Plans (PEPs); manages Pupil Premium funding; and reports on its impact to Ofsted. The role also includes supporting children with a social worker and offering guidance to schools, carers, and other professionals. VSHs aim to strengthen multi-agency links, ensure training and support systems are in place, and champion the needs of children in or formerly in care, including those adopted or under special guardianship.

Virtual schools hold budgets such as Pupil Premium Plus, which can be used to fund targeted educational interventions, including tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment activities. These resources provide an opportunity to support attainment and engagement, addressing some of the challenges children in care may face. While virtual schools cannot fully address all social, emotional, or health-related factors, these budgets allow them to play a key role in supporting educational outcomes.

Post-16 Education Sector Overview

Universities and colleges are independent organisations, with unique cultures shaped by their history, geographical location, student and staff demographics, research and teaching specialities etc. Although all are subject to government policy, and to widening participation, the strategy of increasing access to further and higher education for students from under-represented and often under-invested in groups. The methods and tools used to support students vary according to institutional circumstances.

Many higher institutions own their student accommodation in which they have invested significantly over time. Those who do not own accommodation recognise the role it plays in their students' wellbeing and expend substantial resources working collaboratively to ensure suitable accommodation is available. Further education colleges generally do not own accommodation, have a low demand for on-campus housing and operate on the assumption students will live locally in their own accommodation.

Historically higher education institutions providing their own accommodation have assumed that out of term time students will return to a family home, and many universities find alternative uses for their accommodation during these periods to raise income. The same assumption is made by Student Finance England which only provides funding for students during term time.

In 2024 the Social Market Foundation conducted a review of how universities support care experienced and estranged students to succeed. With regard to accommodation, they found a variety of disparities between care experienced or estranged students and their peers.

Care experienced and estranged students were less likely to lives in halls and more likely to live alone. They live further away from campus with the suggestion being that those receiving support from a local authority, may prioritise taking housing offered by their authority.

This review also found care-experienced and estranged students are more likely to rely on the private sector and that they can face difficulties raising a deposit if unable to source a rent guarantor. There are also accommodation challenges for care-experienced and estranged students when they are newly graduated and looking for work.

All of the issues above present obvious challenges for care-experienced and estranged students who are much less likely to have stable accommodation away from university or college. Although many institutions have now realised the need to provide year-round accommodation and have sought to plug some of the other gaps, resourcing challenges remain as does the issue of where the responsibility for fixing these problems should ultimately lie (see below).

The NNECL Quality Mark

Launched in June 2021, the NNECL Quality Mark is an evidence-based and impact-driven change management process for universities and colleges to demonstrate their support for the inclusion and success of students with care experience and who are estranged.

The Quality Mark, cited as good practice in the final recommendation of Josh McAlisters 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England, supports staff in NNECL member institutions to transform their organisations experience for care leavers. The Quality Mark framework has seven sections which cover the student lifecycle from outreach through to graduation (and beyond), institutional culture and leadership and continuous improvement. The submission form is accompanied by an institutional plan containing actions to maintain or enhance provision going forward. The accreditation focuses on both a whole-institution and cross-institutional approach to supporting students which is why there is a section dedicated to collaborative practice (both internal and external). Each section of the Quality Mark is inherently linked to the other parts so that whilst accommodation sits in the Wellbeing section, criteria from the others (for example collaborative activity) are highly relevant to it.

The 2024 Social Market Foundation report found significant disparity across the university sector in the support provided for care experienced and estranged students. For example, the report noted that wealthier institutions with fewer care experienced and estranged students, could afford a higher level of individual support than institutions with larger numbers of these students.

Because of this disparity and the inherent differences between institutions noted earlier, it is important to note the Quality Mark does not prescribe how support should be provided. It does benchmark from a base level of provision but beyond that looks for evidence of why an institution has chosen the interventions it uses, whether they work in practice and whether they are sustainable.

The Quality Mark was independently evaluated at the end of 2024 by The Lines Between who found that colleges and universities pursue it not only to assess current practice but also to explore opportunities for improvement in working with students with care experience. Institutions reported enhanced approaches in areas such as risk management, widening access to higher education, supporting student thriving, and improving educational outcomes, benefits they largely attributed to the Quality Mark.

Accommodation within the Quality Mark

Accommodation sits in the 'Student Wellbeing' section of the Quality Mark, along with provision for physical and mental wellbeing and financial support. The 'criteria statement' institutions are asked to evidence is:

Support with accommodation is provided appropriate to the needs of students who have care experience or who are estranged.

In response to this criteria statement, institutions are asked to explain how the accommodation they provide is tailored to the needs of students who have care experience or who are estranged or how the institution assists these students to find and maintain suitable accommodation. The Quality Mark guidance makes a range of suggestions based on practice that NNECL has identified across the sector. However, as previously mentioned, it does not prescribe any particular practice recognising the diversity of contexts institutions are operating in.

The Quality Mark is Learning Framework

To inform this paper we reviewed 23 Quality Mark submissions in detail as well as drawing on qualitive and quantitative learning from our Quality Mark evaluations. To date 50 Quality Marks have been awarded.

Evidence from NNECL Quality Mark

Provision of Accommodation

As noted earlier, many institutions recognise the need for care-experienced and estranged students to have accommodation 365 days a year. The majority of Quality Mark holders do offer this. Some of the Quality Mark holders rated ‘enhanced’ or ‘exceptional’ for their provision are able to offer priority access to, or choice in their accommodation. However, even for students able to stay in university or college accommodation all year, it is noted that they usually still have to move within the institutional accommodation, either because their rooms are required for other purposes, or to allow for ‘deep cleaning’.

Assistance on Arrival

Within the Quality Mark submissions there is a range of evidence of how students are welcomed to their accommodation and helped to settle in. Some institutions provide personal tours of their on-site accommodation prior to students joining their organisation. Others offer flexible moving dates to care-experienced and estranged students, recognising this can help from a number of perspectives.

Some institutions offer assistance with the practical side of moving in too, like using a pool car to help new students transport their belongings. Within the Quality Mark submissions there is also an impressive range of welcome packs provided to care experienced and estranged students. These include items from toiletries, household utensils and vouchers through to larger items such as bedding and cooking equipment.

Financial Support for Accommodation

Institutions voluntarily commit to the Quality Mark framework and in doing so have underscored their dedication and commitment to supporting care-experienced and estranged learners. These institutions deeply understand that financial support is one of the levers essential to student success. However, these institutions also face a constant challenge: balancing the number of students they can assist with the level of support they are able to provide.

Amongst the institutions which provide their own accommodation, some can discount accommodation fees to care-experienced and estranged students and/or offer grants towards accommodation elsewhere. One institution has been able to offer free accommodation to these students, but this offer is exceptional. Where deposits are required and/or the prepayment of accommodation fees, some institutions have developed frameworks so they can either waive the need for a deposit to be paid by the student or delay the payment of fees.

Many care-experienced and estranged students live in private accommodation and the need for a guarantor can be an enormous challenge for these learners. Our membership suggests up to 70% of care leavers could live in private accommodation. A number of the Quality Mark holders work with Housing Hand (the largest rent guarantor service in the UK) to assist these students. Other institutions are able to act as the guarantor themselves and some submissions to the Quality Mark had working towards developing an in-house guarantor service on their Action Plan.

Where Quality Mark institutions have long-established ongoing relationships with privately owned student accommodation providers, there are also examples where they have been able to arrange for the provider to drop the requirement for a guarantor.

Support Within Accommodation

The Quality Mark submissions we have assessed to date contain evidence of a wide range of support provided to care experienced and estranged students within their accommodation. Some institutions have residential advisors or support coordinators who keep an overview on the wellbeing of students in university or college accommodation. These staff often also organise social activities and special events such as Christmas dinner.

Institutions recognise the broader benefits of enhancing community around their accommodation and the need to build a sense of belonging here as well as on campus. Some Quality Mark holders proactively encourage care-experienced and estranged students to take part in these activities.

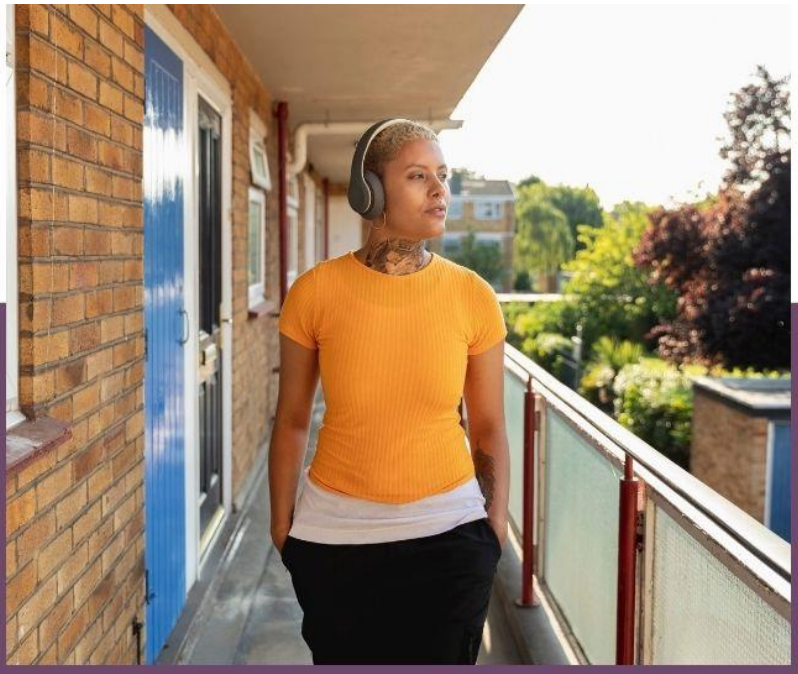
Support in Institutions without their own Accommodation

Whilst institutions which own their own accommodation are able design their own particular concessions to care-experienced and estranged students, the Quality Mark evidence submitted about the work of staff in institutions without accommodation to support the housing needs of their students is often striking in the range of activities undertaken.

Independent student support teams in both colleges and universities assist students to bid for local authority social housing. They help students gather the necessary paperwork for housing applications and sometimes accompany them to housing appointments. This work can include conducting home visits to assess the suitability of living arrangements and provide continued support. Crucially when housing arrangements break down, these staff are also often the ones who work with social workers and other professionals to safeguard students and prevent homelessness (see Emergency Accommodation).

Support Beyond Study

Although universities and colleges are obviously obliged to focus on the period that students are studying with them, they also recognise the broader role they play in students' lives and that graduation brings with it the need to find housing. Within Quality Mark submissions there are thoughtful examples of the accommodation support provided to care-experienced and estranged students beyond their formal study period.



A small number of institutions offer students accommodation for a short period after they have graduated as they begin to navigate the next chapter of their lives. Where this is not currently possible, Quality Mark holders are proactively exploring how to introduce this offer at their institution.

Other 'above and beyond' offers of support include the provision of secure storage of students' belongings and opening accommodation during holidays for students returning to an area from other institutions.

Emergency Accommodation

As noted earlier, care-experienced and estranged people are heavily over-represented in homelessness figures in the UK, and it is not uncommon for these students to end up in need of emergency accommodation. Some Quality Mark holders are able to provide short term emergency accommodation whilst helping students to make alternative arrangements.

Many institutions without their own accommodation work closely with local partners to develop collaborative strategies for emergency housing, ensuring they can respond effectively when crises arise. These partnerships often involve organisations such as Centrepoint, DEPAUL, Nightstop, and other local emergency accommodation providers.

Several case studies submitted as part of the Quality Mark highlight the critical role that staff, particularly in FE institutions, play in identifying and securing emergency accommodation for students. The evidence provided shows that staff often step far beyond the duties outlined in their job descriptions, taking on responsibilities that reflect both the urgency of students' situations and the gaps in local provision. Their actions underscore the indispensable contribution of frontline practitioners in safeguarding care-experienced and estranged learners.

Commuting Students

The Social Market Foundation report in 2024 noted that care-experienced and estranged students are more likely to live away from campus and commute to their studies than their peers. This is reflected in some of the Quality Mark submissions who discuss how they support students who commute.

Institutions described how they organise timetables with this in mind whilst others help with cost of commuting where possible, this can be via a bursary or actual transport such as a city loop bus. A few institutions reported working with external agencies to support commuting students with their housing needs.

Collaborative Activities

Proactive and effective collaboration, between institutional departments and between institutions and other agencies is crucial to improving outcomes for care-experienced and estranged students which is why **Collaboration and Partnership** activity is an individual section within the NNECL Quality Mark.

Quality Mark holders have demonstrated that they have already invested significant time and resources into developing collaborative partnerships that improve access to emergency accommodation. Beyond this, submissions showcase a wide range of other effective collaborative practices that enhance accommodation support for care-experienced and estranged students in the context of their local community, the housing available in their location and the financial support they have been able to raise, often from alumni.

Recognising that there can be no single template for effective practice, collaborations enable institutions without their own accommodation to access the housing provision of other educational providers and to negotiate collectively with the growing number of independent student accommodation providers in the UK (about which more below). Quality Mark holders demonstrate that solutions must reflect the local context and the level of accommodation available. Submissions showcase a variety of collaborative models between education and accommodation providers, highlighting the essential role of partnership working and the potential for this area to become even more effective in supporting care-experienced and estranged students.

Independent Student Accommodation Providers

In the UK there are a range of public and private companies which specialise in student accommodation. These vary in size from those providing accommodation for tens of thousands of students per year.

For the most part these providers **do not feature in Quality Mark submissions** as institutions prioritise using their own accommodation for care-experienced learners. There is potential for independent student accommodation providers to work more effectively in future with universities and with colleges to support care-experienced and estranged students. The student accommodation providers that feature in Quality Mark submissions are:-

- **Unite Students:** Largest provider, 65,000 places across the UK
- **UPP:** Supports 35,000+ students each year across the UK
- **Campus Living Villages (CLV):** 14 university partners across the UK

Many charities, both national and local, support care-experienced and, in some cases, estranged students. One such organisation, the Unite Foundation, specifically addresses the challenge of student accommodation through a national scheme.

Since 2012, the Unite Foundation (UF) has awarded 883 scholarships to care leavers and estranged students under 25, providing up to three years of rent-free accommodation (#HomeAtUniversity), including within halls owned by Unite Students. Approximately 70 scholarships are awarded annually, supporting around 1% of care-experienced and estranged undergraduate students under 25. The scholarships have a positive impact on successful applicants' accommodation stability. Roughly 25% of applicants will receive an award (four applications per scholarship). The scheme was referenced in three of the 23 Quality Mark submissions revisited for this paper. Awards are administered by UF with universities able to signpost the scholarship scheme to students.

UPP have worked in the higher education sector since 1998 and support over 35,000 students per year. UPP also have a charitable wing – the UPP Foundation which was established in 2016 to support universities, charities and the wider higher education community. It does this through grants for innovative pilot projects, and by providing 'impactful thought leadership'. UPP invested in NNECL's feasibility study of the Quality Mark and its roll out.

Another substantial provider of student accommodation is Campus Living Villages (CLV) who have 14 university partners in the UK. CLV provide 52 week contracts for care leavers and allow them to stay in the same accommodation over the summer. They can arrange booking without an upfront deposit and will delay payment until after the first student loan instalment is made. If needed, CLV's 'Protected Returner' scheme also enables students to remain in the same accommodation for all three years of study.

Key observations

It is important to celebrate the work of organisations committed to supporting care-experienced and estranged students. Staff in institutions holding the Quality Mark consistently go above and beyond to provide students with suitable accommodation throughout their studies. However, this raises important questions:

- How many formal care leavers, who are entitled to statutory support, are living in private accommodation, and what has their experience been? Who is acting as their guarantor in these cases? If universities are unable to provide support, are care leavers disproportionately relying on private guarantor services designed for international students, and therefore being penalised for circumstances beyond their control, that their local authority has a legal responsibility to address?
- What is the cost of this additional pressure on dedicated staff, who frequently go the extra mile, particularly in times of crisis?
- As universities and colleges increase the number of care-experienced and estranged learners, what additional support will be available to Independent Student Teams, who are already working beyond capacity?

This review of accommodation for care-experienced and estranged learners within institutions demonstrating effective practice highlights the need for further research into the growing number of independent student accommodation providers and how they could better support these students in a more coordinated way. We also found strong evidence of the positive impact of collaborative working within regional clusters, which could be replicated to extend support to more students without significant additional costs.

A further critical concern is whether alternative solutions are inadvertently masking underlying systemic issues. Quality Mark–holding institutions often step in to fill gaps left by local authorities, which are legally obligated to provide statutory support already funded by taxpayers. While this support is invaluable for students, it may unintentionally obscure the scale of need from local authorities. With 7,290 care leavers enrolled in undergraduate courses, the majority of Quality Mark holders still spend substantial time helping students access support they should be receiving from statutory services - highlighting both the dedication of institutions and the urgent need for systemic accountability.

Emerging recommendations

Ensure sustainable support for staff
Institutions must recognise the pressure placed on internal Support Teams and explore ways to reduce workload through additional resourcing, training, and wellbeing support, particularly during crisis situations.

Gather data on care leavers in private accommodation
NNECL members support over 5,000 care-experienced and estranged learners, providing a strong foundation to understand student needs. NNECL should determine how many care leavers are living in private accommodation, explore their experiences, and identify who acts as their guarantor.

Strengthen coordination with independent accommodation providers
Further research and engagement with the growing number of private student accommodation providers could create more coordinated pathways for care-experienced and estranged students, ensuring continuity and quality of housing support across the sector.

Promote and replicate collaborative models
Regional clusters across the NNECL network and beyond show the value of collaboration. Scaling up support must be evidence-based, extending proven approaches to more students without major additional costs.

Clarify statutory responsibilities
Local authorities must be held accountable for providing the statutory support they are funded to deliver. Clearer communication and reporting mechanisms between institutions and local authorities can help ensure that gaps in provision are identified and addressed, rather than masked by institutional interventions.

Monitor and evaluate systemic impact
Ongoing data collection on the experiences of care-experienced and estranged students, and the support provided by both institutions and statutory services, is essential. This will ensure that effective institutional practices complement, rather than replace, statutory responsibilities, and that the scale of need is fully understood at a policy level.

Implementing these recommendations will create a more sustainable and coordinated system of accommodation support for care-experienced and estranged students. Staff will be better supported, reducing burnout, while students gain more reliable access to safe, affordable housing. Improved coordination with independent providers and clearer local authority accountability will extend support efficiently. Ongoing monitoring will drive continuous improvement and ensure interventions reach those who need them most.

NNECL will share agreed actions and a timeline in early 2026. If you'd like to support this work, get in touch.

Short Submission Summaries

University A
Care-experienced and estranged students are entitled to year-round accommodation while they complete their studies. They are also entitled to access university owned housing for 10 weeks after graduation to support them as they transition out of student life. Accommodation options and supports look different across the different Colleges at the University – some allow students to stay in their term time accommodations, while others require them to move to a different building (as many accommodations are used for outreach programming during holiday periods). This also varies depending on the type of accommodation the student chooses to live in during term time.

University B
All new students have priority access to university owned accommodation. Students are offered summer rent payments to assist with payment for out of term costs. The university has a guarantor support scheme in place for care experienced and estranged learners. Students receive a Welcome Pack to assist with transitions to student living – which includes essentials for their new room within their accommodation.

University C
All care-experienced and estranged students are entitled to year round accommodation and are considered priority for university owned rooms. The university works flexibly with students who experience financial difficulties and can offer a variety of payment plans to help support students. When care leavers share details of their local authority this can enable a smoother transition into Halls.

University E
University E does not have its own accommodation, and most students are commuter students. The university has an Accommodation Officer to provides tailored advice to students on their housing needs. The University is able to offer accommodation guarantee for first year undergraduate students when accommodation is not already available through their local authority. Reflecting that most students are commuters, where possible the timetable is arranged so that students do not need to travel to campus every day, and they try to avoid classes over peak travel times.

University F
Formal care leavers can apply for a bursary to cover their accommodation costs. All care experienced students are prioritised for university owned accommodation which is available year round and they do not need to make a pre-payment to secure it. The University will also act as a guarantor where students are living in private accommodation off-campus. Care-experienced students receive a complimentary welcome pack which includes bedding, saucepans and other useful products.

University G

University G does not own any of its accommodation and has an agreement in place across the city to work with a range of providers. As part of the overall contractual conditions, the university has negotiated 52-week accommodation with partner providers. This has been in place for a number of years and works well in allowing choice for students. In addition, Student Advice and Wellbeing has developed and operates a Deposit & Guarantor Waiver for students who require it. This means lack of funding or a named guarantor is not a barrier to education.

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