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Richard Lochhead MSP,  
Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science,  
Scottish Government, St Andrew's House,  
Regents Road,  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Wednesday, 08 July 2020

Dear Minister,

### **Care Experienced Bursary – Extension**

We welcome the funding that has been brought forward through hardship funds for higher education students and the new flexibility offered to colleges to support further education students to address students' financial concerns this summer.

We recognise, however, that this is an emergency response brought about as a result of COVID-19. It also places an onus on young people to ask for the support they require. We also know that digital poverty and a lack of a wider support network can make it difficult for young people to understand what support is available and how to access it. This will mean that some will fall through the cracks.

As you will know, care-experienced young people often lack the family support networks of their peers, making it more challenging for them to weather financial shocks and changes to their income, particularly as many already face additional financial deprivation. This will, unfortunately, continue to be the case beyond the current crisis.

There is therefore a need, and an opportunity, to build a longer term solution on this issue that ensures a better normal for care-experienced students. Care experienced young people cannot and must not get lost in this pandemic, particularly considering the progress that has already been made to improve support.

**We believe that the simplest and most effective solution is for the Care Experienced Bursary to be increased to cover 12 months of the year. This would ensure that no care-experienced student in further or higher education would face holiday hardship between term times.**

Attached to this letter are case studies showing the impact of the drop of income during the summer, including homelessness and pressures leading students to reconsider continuing their studies.

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We would hope that this change would also be part of a wider effort to ensure no student faces hardship between terms, which may include extending other bursaries and loans.

We would also be keen to have a further discussion on how the Scottish Government can encourage all Corporate Parents, including colleges and universities, to create job opportunities for care leavers in the coming months.

We welcome the speed with which new solutions have been developed to tackle the issues that have arisen due to COVID-19, we hope that the same urgency and purpose is applied to our efforts to build back better.

Yours Sincerely,

Jo Derrick, CEO, Staf



Claire Burns, Director of CELCIS (Acting)



Duncan Dunlop, Chief Executive, Who Cares? Scotland



Lorraine Moore, Manager, The Hub for Success



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## Case Studies on the Care Experienced Bursary

1:

Steven and Sarah are 24 and 26 respectively, Steven is a care-leaver and Sarah is care-experienced (she was a care-leaver prior to her 26 birthday). Both students met through their place of study and while living in halls. During the Covid-19 lockdown, Stephen was asked to leave student accommodation due to a number of complex reasons, Sarah felt an obligation to go with him and both left their accommodation and moved in with a friend and when this became challenging they moved to sleeping in a car, the police intervened and they then found themselves trying to get accommodation. Sarah got some support from leaving care services, although she found it difficult to engage, leaving care services encourage students to apply for UC during summer periods. They then moved into a private partially furnished accommodation and applied to UC in preparation for the bursary stopping, because they were organised early and applied to UC, their bursary was taken into account as income and as such they were awarded a joint payment of £173 for the month of July with no indication of support for housing costs – they had to apply for a welfare grant (a loan from their first payment) to keep them going – this will be deducted from the £173. Stephen and Sarah both have places for their next place of study and have worked incredibly hard, however they have reported that the financial pressure, the impact of being homeless, the uncertainty about who will support their housing costs is taking its toll and they are now considering other options. In this instance, should the bursary continue throughout summer, this would provide a safety net and allow the students to continue on their educational pathway without the added pressure and stress of having to find an income.

2:

A 19-year-old Care Experienced student contacted WC?S during the Covid-19 pandemic looking for financial support and advice. They had received their last payment of the Care Experienced bursary in June. They have applied to Universal Credit but still haven't heard back from them regarding the claim. The student lives in kinship care and due to the pandemic they are unable to work and at the time of contacting WC?S only had £10 left to last them until they heard from Universal Credit. WC?S was able to offer some crisis financial support and arranged for them to receive a food parcel to ensure the family had food. WC?S also signposted the student to apply for the Scottish Welfare Fund for a crisis grant whilst waiting for the UC assessment to be completed. The student is returning to study after the summer holidays.

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### 3:

A Care Experienced young person in contact with WC?S was attending university and receiving the Care Experienced bursary. They were told in July that the next payment would not come through until September, due to no payments being available over the summer months. Due to mental health difficulties, the young person has not been able to sustain employment during the summer. The young person was entitled to aftercare support and WC?S were able to contact the throughcare team to request financial support in order to meet rent costs. The young person had moved out of their halls of residence as they were not available to them over the summer. The throughcare team were able to cover some of the costs, however, this shows how worrying it can be for Care Experienced students with mental health difficulties to navigate their financial situation during the summer when the bursary stops. As the young person was a bit older at 22 years old, they may not have known they could ask their throughcare team for support, or that financial support was available.

### 4:

A Care Experienced 25-year-old student with a young child contacted WC?S during the Covid-19 pandemic with concerns about their financial situation. They were worried about their Care Experienced bursary payments ending over the summer holidays, especially as they are a single parent living in a private tenancy with their child. They have applied for Universal Credit, but due to applying early and receiving the Care Experienced bursary, this was taken into consideration whilst assessing their claim. WC?S was able to offer some crisis financial and signpost other funding that was available. The student was able to apply to SAAS for discretionary housing payments to help towards paying their rent, which was really useful. They also applied to various grants and funds, as they were unable to gain employment as limited child care. The student is hoping to return to studying after the summer holidays.

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