

# Barriers to Graduation for Care Experienced Students



# Care Experienced Students and Graduation

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Graduating from college and university is a huge achievement for a student. Attending a ceremony in formal clothing, receiving your qualification in front of peers, family, friends and supporters. Having professional photographs taken which capture your achievement. Celebrating with peers at a graduation ball, spending quality time together to mark the end of this chapter. These are experiences which form a rite of passage for students as they complete their studies and consider what they might go on to do next. It should be a time for students to feel proud, positive and excited after having worked so hard and achieved so much.

However, for some Care Experienced students, graduation has proven to be a difficult time. We know from our work with Care Experienced learners that many face barriers to achievement in education, from primary school through to college and university. Moving placement, lack of space or equipment to study, challenges with mental health, finances, housing...these are just some of the barriers Care Experienced learners have shared with us as being factors which make it difficult to study.

With this in mind, it is incredibly important that Care Experienced learners are supported to participate fully in graduation. Graduation should be a time where Care Experienced learners feel no different to their non-Care Experienced peers and instead feel celebrated, included and supported in taking their next steps.



# Corporate Parents and Graduation

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As Corporate Parents, further and higher education institutions have legal duties towards Care Experienced students, designed to ensure that they are supported to thrive and succeed, throughout their studies. Supporting Care Experienced students to graduate is a significant part of this support.

We know just how capable and brilliant Care Experienced people are, and how much education matters to them. We also know how big a difference Corporate Parents can make, from holding relationships with Care Experienced people which are positive, consistent and meaningful, to considering how policy and funding might be utilised to better support Care Experienced students now and in the future.

We spoke to some Care Experienced people who have graduated from both college and university about the barriers they faced when graduating and how these could be overcome.



*"Graduation should be the best day of your life. For Care Experienced people, there is a risk that it might become a reminder of what they don't have. My university leaned on our relationship, making sure I had what I needed to have the best day possible and the Widening Access Coordinator even came along to see me graduate. That meant the world to me on the day and we have retained a relationship ever since. I think that staff should think about what they would want for their children or yourself, and do that. It's that simple."*

**Ryan McCuaig, Chair of the Board for Who Cares? Scotland**

# What are the barriers to graduation? What can you and your institution do to remove them?

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## Graduation Fee



It can be difficult for students to keep on top of finances at the end of their studies whilst also managing ongoing living costs. Some Care Experienced students rely solely on the Care Experienced Bursary for their income. The graduation fee is an added expense that may not have been budgeted for.



A fee reduction or waiver would support students to be able to graduate without the added worry of being able to afford to do so. Many institutions have already waived the graduation fee for Care Experienced students and we really welcome this easy barrier removal.



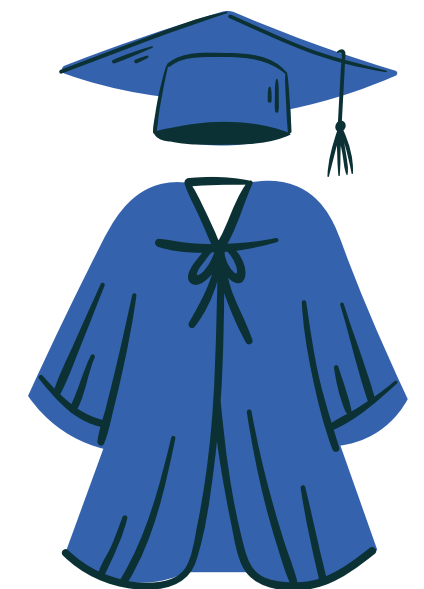
## Hire of Gown for Graduation



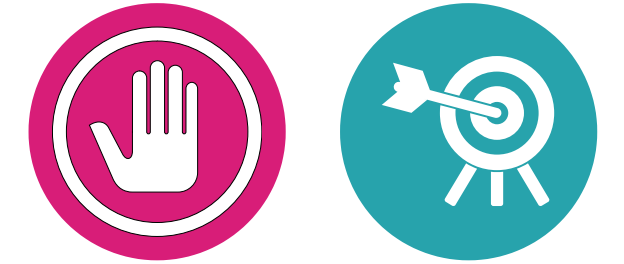
Wearing a gown to graduation is both a tradition and a compulsory part of the dress code. However, the rental process to hire a gown can be expensive and inconvenient.




Some students told us their university and/or college provided their gown hire for free. Providing gown hire for a reduced rate or free would be highly beneficial for Care Experienced students to allow them to fully participate in the day along with their peers.




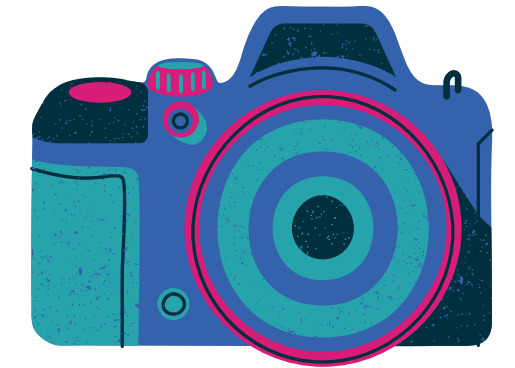
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## Professional Photos


 Having a professional photo taken at graduation is an opportunity to document achievement and create a meaningful memento. However, these photos can be expensive. Some students we spoke to were unable to purchase theirs due to the cost.

 A fee reduction or waiver for Care Experienced students would ensure that they and their loved ones are able to enjoy and take pride in their photos for years to come, as well as having the same experience as their non-Care Experienced peers.



## Ticket Allocation

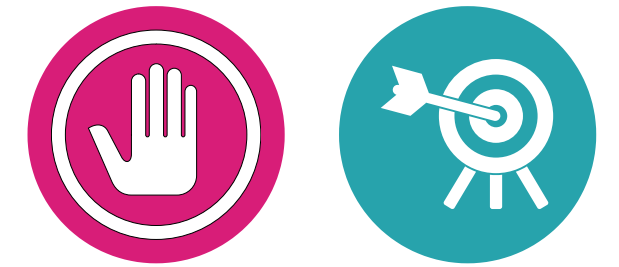
 One graduate told us that she was allocated two tickets. She was very close to both her foster family and her birth family, so faced a dilemma which caused tension. We have examples of people receiving free extra tickets and others having to pay, which again was an added cost they hadn't budgeted for.

 When allocating tickets, please speak to your Care Experienced students to understand who they would like to invite along, and bear in mind that each Care Experienced person is unique, as is the network of people around them.





# What are the barriers to graduation? What can you and your institution do to remove them?



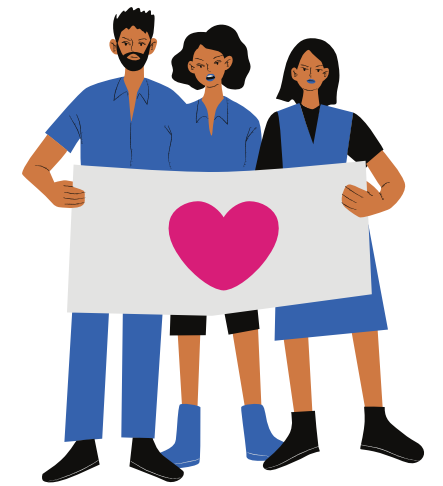
## Emotional support



Some Care Experienced students may have no one to attend their graduation with them, depending on their individual circumstances.



A lecturer or Care Experienced student link should contact Care Experienced students prior to graduation to ask how they are feeling about it, do they have anyone attending on the day? Offer them support, offer to attend with them on the day to cheer them on. Try to ensure they feel emotionally supported so they can enjoy their graduation day along with their peers.



## Preparation



For some Care Experienced students, it can be hard to know what to expect on graduation day. They might be the first member of their family to graduate, so it could be a new experience for both the student and their family.

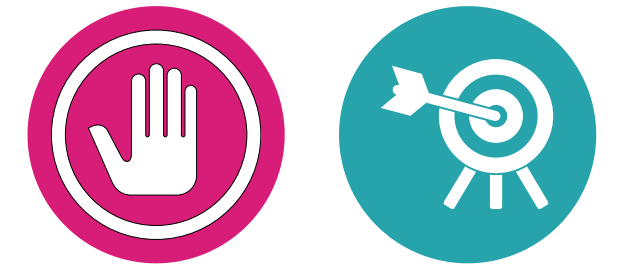


Let Care Experienced students know what to expect on the day of graduation. Talk over the ceremony, show them a video of previous graduations and answer any questions they might have. This can go a long way in alleviating any anxiety around how the day will go.




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## Dress Codes

 The strict dress code can be limiting. Not all Care Experienced students own or can afford to buy the items the dress code requires: black shoes, black trousers/skirt, white shirt/blouse, etc.

 Allocate funding to provide students with a voucher to put towards clothing for their graduation. Make links with charities that provide/hire kilts/formal attire to people attending graduation. For example, [Smartworks](#), a women's charity based in in Edinburgh.



## Graduation Ball

 It can be expensive for Care Experienced students to attend when they are expected to purchase a ticket and appropriate clothing to wear. Some have missed out on this opportunity due to the cost.

 A reduction in ticket prices or free tickets would be beneficial for Care Experienced students. Similarly to recommendations around dress codes, having links with charities or shops who provide kilt hire/formal attire might also help some students to be able to attend.



## Reach out, listen, support, celebrate

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On the lead up to graduation, reach out to your Care Experienced students. Be proactive and let them know you are there to support, guide and answer questions.



Listen to what your Care Experienced students want and need (if anything) when it comes to graduation arrangements.



Remember that for Care Experienced students, graduation is a time to celebrate extraordinary success, achieved in many cases without the family support typically received by peers.

