

Corporate Parenting Plan 2025

- ✓ Informing Choices
- ✓ Funding Futures
- ✓ Supporting Success



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Ministerial Foreword



‘You will grow up loved, safe and respected’ is The Promise that Scotland made in 2021 to its Care Experienced population.

Supporting Care Experienced people to enter college and university is a commitment that is at the core of this, and as Minister for Higher and Further Education, I want to ensure good practice in this area continues to move forward.

The SAAS Corporate Parenting Plan is an important piece of work that sets out how the Agency will work to support Care Experienced people. This includes the students it supports externally, but also staff members who may be Care Experienced.

I am pleased to see the commitments of the 2021 Corporate Parenting Plan have been successfully delivered, including the option for students to receive payments over the summer.

This was something that students had requested in the Scottish Government’s [Summer Support Review](#) and has been transformative to many students, helping them to budget successfully.

The launch of the Summer Accommodation Grant in 2024 has been an additional support mechanism for these students. The new grant has been made more accessible to students than its predecessor and provides them with support towards informal and formal accommodation costs over the summer months.

SAAS continue to be committed to supporting Care Experienced people and I am looking forward to seeing where this new chapter in the Corporate Parenting journey takes SAAS.

Graeme Dey, MSP
Minister for Higher and Further Education;
and Minister for Veterans



Chief Executive's Introduction



I am delighted to see the development and progress of SAAS' Corporate Parenting plans since our first plan was released in 2017.

I am proud of the progress that has been made, particularly in relation to our most recent 2021 Corporate Parenting Plan.

Many significant achievements have been made since the launch of this plan including a bespoke team to process applications for Care Experienced students and a new payment option.

This is the first plan that has been developed since I became SAAS CEO in January 2023 and I am looking forward to overseeing the new goals from business areas across the Agency. In our new plan, we recognise that to go further with our Corporate Parenting ambitions, an agency-wide approach needs to be taken to embed Corporate Parenting within every team.



The plan will help to contribute to other important areas of Scottish Government work – this includes the [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and the [Scottish Government's 4 key priorities](#):

- 1 eradicating child poverty
- 2 growing the economy
- 3 tackling the climate emergency
- 4 ensuring high quality and sustainable public services

My Executive Team have collaborated on commitments spanning all areas of SAAS. We will closely monitor progress, and the strong support from senior leadership will drive their success.

The new commitments outlined in the plan represent an exciting step forward for SAAS in delivering agency-wide initiatives, and I look forward to seeing progress in the future.

If you are a Care Experienced person reading this plan, I would like you to know that SAAS are here to support your learner journey.

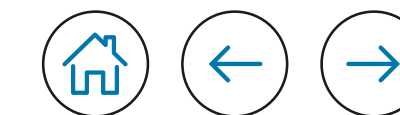
I would also like to thank our stakeholders who fed into this plan and support Care Experienced people on a daily basis – your support is invaluable in helping SAAS reach as many students as possible.

Catherine Topley

Chief Executive
Student Awards Agency Scotland

Corporate Parenting in SAAS

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, came into effect on 1 April 2015. Part 9 of this relates to Corporate Parenting.



What is Corporate Parenting and why is it important to SAAS?

The Statutory Guidance on Corporate Parenting defines it as: "An organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted" (Scottish Government, 2015).

Under the act, Corporate Parents have key duties and responsibilities to Care Experienced people. Overall, they have a responsibility to promote the wellbeing of Care Experienced people.

To do so, they must understand the lives of Scotland's looked after young people and care leavers and respond to their needs as any parent should.

In terms of the legislation, Scottish Ministers are named as a Corporate Parent. SAAS is not a Corporate Parent in its own right. Executive Agencies, such as SAAS, are organisations set up to perform a specific function(s) of Scottish Government. The key function of SAAS is to distribute public funds to eligible students of Higher Education on behalf of the Scottish Ministers.

Why are SAAS involved?

With SAAS' purpose aligning with the governmental aim to support Care Experienced students in higher and further education, we are embracing the principles of Corporate Parenting by providing a service which is efficient, responsive and proportionate to the needs of our students.

Widening Access for Care Experienced Students

‘ Every student has faced the inevitable time where they need to reach out to family for a **bit of financial support**, but this isn’t available for a lot of Care Experienced students. The bursary SAAS offers their students makes the transition into higher education and adult life so much easier.’

- Anon.



[Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2022 to 2023](#) published by Scottish Government 7 August 2024 showed that since 2009 to 2010, the proportion of care leavers looked after within the year who were in a positive destination after leaving school had increased.

The proportion in a positive initial destination increased from 58.1% to 86.4%, while the proportion in a positive follow-up destination increased from 42.0% to 71.1%. However, in 2022 to 2023, looked after leavers continued to be less likely to be in a positive initial or follow-up destination than all school leavers (70.2% and 92.8% respectively).

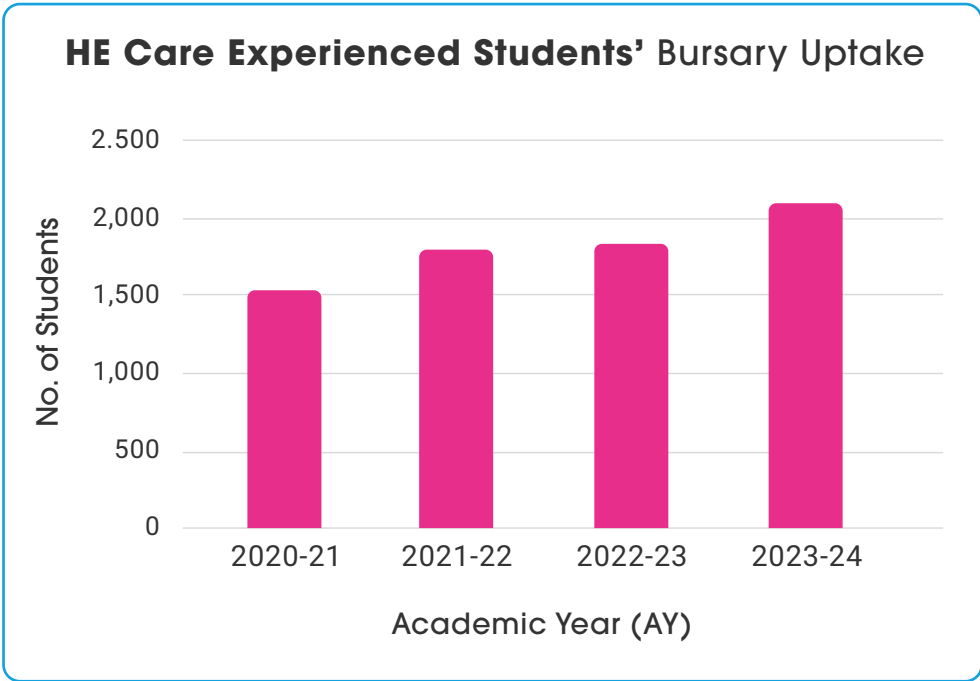
As a result of the ongoing disparity between care leavers and all school leavers going on to a positive destination, it is vital we continue to strive for improvements as corporate parents.

Examples of positive destinations include:

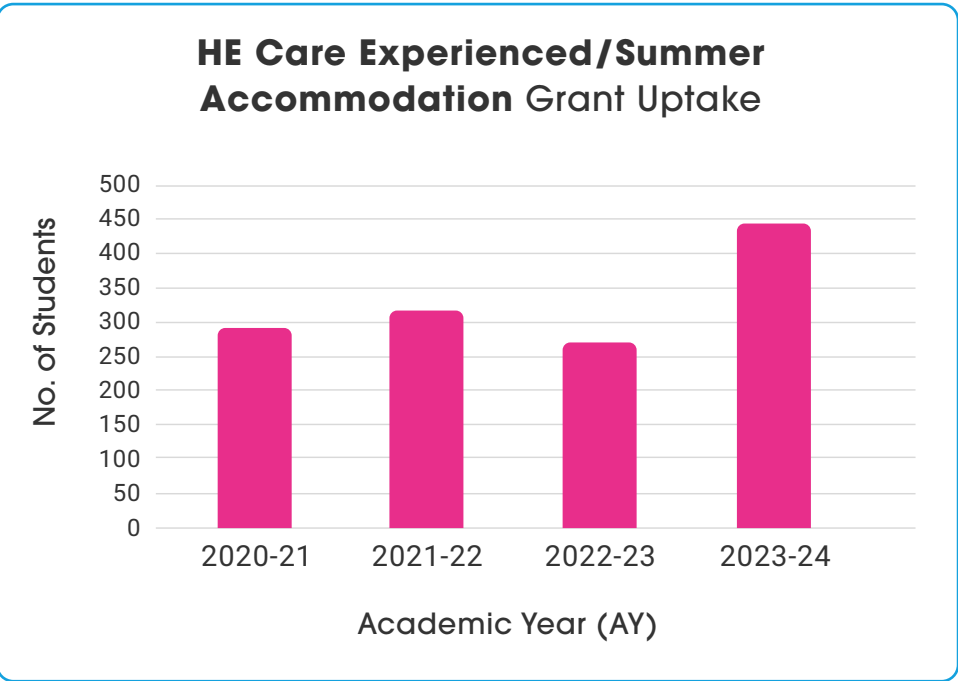
- higher or further education
- training or voluntary work
- employment or activity agreements

SAAS is key to this, offering funding not just for care leavers, but all Care Experienced people, to help support them into the positive next destination of higher education at college or university.

Graph 1 shows an increase in the Care Experienced Students’ Bursary uptake from 2020 and 2021 to 2023 and 2024 whilst graph 2 shows Summer Accommodation Grant uptake, formerly Care Experienced Accommodation Grant over the same period. The introduction of the reformed Summer Accommodation Grant for Summer 2024 has resulted in increased uptake of Summer Accommodation Grant compared to the former Care Experienced Accommodation Grant when compared to previous years.



Graph 1 / SAAS Statistics



Graph 2 / SAAS Statistics

Key Milestones

Over the past 3 years...

2022 2023 2024

TIMING OF PAYMENTS

Care Experienced Students were able to choose if they received their bursary payments over the duration of the academic year, or the full year, allowing them access to summer support if desired.

£900 BURSARY UPLIFT TAKING BURSARY TO £9,000

EXPANDED STUDENT SUPPORT WITH REFORMED SUMMER GRANT

Care Experienced Accommodation Grant reformed to be Summer Accommodation Grant, standardising payment amounts and simplifying the grant for students. As the grant was introduced at the end of the AY 2023 to 2024, it is clear from the increased uptake that the simplified grant has encouraged increased uplift.

Care Experienced Students also have the option to access student loan support in the form of a £2,400 Special Support Loan, increasing the package to £11,400 – the student equivalent of the living wage.

The requirement for Care Experience to have taken place within the UK was also removed, allowing Scottish-domiciled students who have been in care outside of the UK access to the bursary for the first time.

Funding Package Overview for Care Experienced Students



Care Experienced Students' Bursary

The Care Experienced Students' Bursary (CESB) is a non-income assessed, non-repayable award of £9,000 per year for eligible undergraduate students.

To be eligible for the CESB you must:

- be in full-time study, completing an eligible course of higher education
- meet the SAAS residency conditions
- have been looked after by a Local Authority before you turned 18

Special Support Loan

Care Experienced Students can also access a student loan (in the form of a Special Support Loan) of £2,400 per year. This brings their total support package up to £11,400.

The purpose of the Special Support Loan is to provide students with increased support to cover their general study costs, travel costs and child care costs. An added benefit of the special support loan is that those students who remain entitled to welfare benefits whilst they study can access this additional support without any further reduction in their benefit entitlement.

Summer Accommodation Grant

Care Experienced students who need help with their accommodation costs over the summer period may be eligible to apply for the Summer Accommodation Grant. The grant is a fixed amount.

Those who have formal accommodation arrangements, such as renting a flat, are eligible for £1,330. Those who have informal accommodation arrangements, such as staying with family or friends, are eligible for £665.



Further details and support can be found on:
www.saas.gov.uk



Application Process

- 1 Complete an application through your SAAS account, ensuring you select 'yes' when asked if you are Care Experienced.
- 2 Your application is then routed to one of our specially trained caseworkers to be reviewed.
- 3 You will be contacted and asked to fill in a Care Experienced evidence form.
- 4 You will need a professional person* to sign this form and confirm the information provided is correct.
- 5 You can upload the form using the Document Uploader on your SAAS Account where it will be reviewed in line with your application.
- 6 An Award Notice will be made available on your account confirming your funding.

* A professional person can be someone from the local authority who looked after you, such as a social worker, doctor, nurse, lawyer, solicitor, college/university student adviser, teacher, nursery teacher, notary public, counsellor, police officer, minister of religion or family mediation worker.



2021 Corporate Parenting Plan Review

Our 2021 Corporate Parenting Plan provided an opportunity to build on the successful implementation of the CESB.

Our ambition was to drive operational improvements, to work with stakeholders to improve the educational experience for Care Experienced students, and to ensure all staff understand our responsibilities.

Key achievements • 2021 plan:



Within SAAS we have introduced a specialised processing team called the Specialist Support Team who are responsible for processing Care Experienced student applications.

We have also utilised a new process for allocating applications and supporting documents from Care Experienced students, which allows them to be actioned by the same caseworker where possible. This provides consistency for the applicant.



In addition to offering support via the CESB, SAAS also provide assistance with summer accommodation costs for Care Experienced students.

We have made improvements to streamline the process and eligibility to accessing the summer accommodation grant in order to make it easier for students to understand the support they are entitled to. This will help them plan and budget for the summer period more easily.



We continue to offer bespoke online outreach events to support Care Experienced students. These are designed to provide information on the support available to allow students to make an informed decision about entering higher education.

We also provide online sessions to support Care Experienced Students to complete their applications, and the evidence process. We know based on feedback that this process can be a barrier to accessing and applying for support.



In 2022, we launched a new payment option for students in receipt of the CESB. The new option meant most students were able to decide if they would like to receive their funding paid over the course of the academic year, usually 9 months which is the standard period, or if they would prefer to receive payments over the summer period too, in 12 monthly instalments.

All students would still receive the same amount of money, but this allows students additional flexibility when managing their finances. We implemented this new option in consultation with Care Experienced people, and sought their feedback to tailor our approach to information and guidance.

To support the launch we offered a range of help videos, guidance, and information drop in sessions. Approximately 25% of Care Experienced students selected to receive their payments over the summer.



We have developed a suite of bespoke resources to support Care Experienced students including information and guidance, videos, and bespoke graphics. These are promoted on the SAAS and Student Information Scotland website. We also utilise social media channels to advertise and promote the support available.



From the 2024 to 2025 academic year, our outreach team have taken a digital-first approach to our outreach activities. As part of this approach we attend some in-person events where there is not a digital alternative, and priority is given to participating in events which support widening access.



SAAS have worked with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to align the eligibility criteria for the Further Education Care Experienced Students' Bursary with the SAAS CESB, as well as evidence requirements. This ensures the process is the same for students accessing the bursary progressing from FE to HE.



We continue to engage with sector partners regularly, including the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS), to discuss and provide Operational policy updates, and discuss and share best practice.

SAAS are also members of the Care Experienced National Policy Group, chaired by the SFC and has representation from the further and higher education sectors and organisations including WhoCares? Scotland, CELCIS and the Hub for Success.

Working in partnership with these organisations is a key priority for SAAS to ensure we understand the needs of Care Experienced people, and to help us embed Corporate Parenting principles and keep The Promise.



To ensure staff across the Agency are aware and understand Corporate Parenting we have included this in our corporate induction training for all new staff. This supports staff in understanding the role they will play within SAAS in being a Corporate Parent.

POLICY, STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE

Commitments • Actions • Approx timescales

Commitments for the New Plan

For our **2025 Corporate Parenting Plan**, we have agreed that following the external facing improvements that have been made to our application process and funding support, we are going to embed Corporate Parenting within every part of the Agency. Each area has commitments and actions.

YEAR 1 • 2025 to 2026



Awareness sessions within the Agency

- ▲ Training and staff awareness, as well as informing staff about 'The Promise'.
- ▲ Organise events during Care Week to increase awareness around Corporate Parenting within SAAS and to promote SAAS support towards Care Experienced students.

YEAR 1 • 2025 to 2026

Engagement with stakeholder groups and those with lived experience through groups such as STAF, Hub for Success and WhoCares?Scotland

- ▲ Implement an efficient feedback loop so that SAAS consistently capture what Care Experienced students say about their interaction with our Agency. Consideration will also be given to running a formal feedback survey.
- ▲ SAAS will work with WhoCares?Scotland and other organisations that support Care Experienced young people to identify where and when people are looking for support with student finance.
- ▲ Collaboration with stakeholders to explore ways to better signpost Care Experienced students to services that may be useful to them. This could include additional information on student Award Notices.

YEAR 1 • 2025 to 2026

Mainstreaming of Corporate Parenting into SAAS policy development

- ▲ Consider how Corporate Parenting can feed into the Post-16 Education and Skills Reform agenda.
- ▲ Consider the outreach that The Promise team has done and exploring ideas set out in other areas.
- ▲ Review and enhance information for Care Experienced students on Student Information Scotland/SAAS websites (including on transitions).

YEAR 2 • 2026 to 2027

Improved, and sensitively appropriate, service for Care Experienced cohort

- ▲ Further targeted Funding Awareness sessions around key touchpoints such as Freshers Week, exam period/results.
- ▲ Create informative webinars or videos that Care Experienced students can access anonymously and with no interaction with the Agency.
- ▲ Signpost Care Experienced student graduates to support for adulthood.

YEAR 2 • 2026 to 2027

Use of inclusive language

- ▲ Test our understanding of 'inclusive language' with stakeholders/those with lived experience.
- ▲ Review the language we use on materials, in interactions, and applications, to ensure it is inclusive and non-triggering.
- ▲ Support The Promise Team to explore how we build on the work to address stigmatising and inappropriate language and consider how we contribute to a Scotland-wide approach that could bring consistency to the language of care and how it is used. This links to the [Consider Our Language commitment](#) (pg 159).
- ▲ Standardise our approach and language especially where processes can have a traumatic effect if not handled sensitively (e.g. recovery action).
- ▲ Develop systems and inform staff to design content that is sensitive to Care Experienced students (e.g. digitised Care Experience Evidence form).

YEAR 3 • 2027 to 2028

SAAS engagement across Scottish Government family shows us as a leader on Corporate Parenting

- ▲ Promote the adoption of a passport approach across SG teams, while continuing to support and encourage the wider implementation of passporting for Care Experienced individuals.
- ▲ Re-establish connections with Corporate Parenting teams across the Scottish Government Executive Agencies by taking the lead in organising collaboration.

Commitments for the New Plan

Continued

CORPORATE SERVICES

Commitments • Actions • Approx timescales

YEAR 1 • 2025 to 2026



Improved, and sensitively appropriate, service for Care Experienced cohort

- Promote links to wider Scottish Government networks for Care Experienced members of staff.

YEAR 2 • 2026 to 2027



Improved and sensitively appropriate service for Care Experienced cohort

- Standardise our approach and language, especially where processes can have a traumatic effect if not handled sensitively (e.g. recovery action).

YEAR 2 • 2026 to 2027



Widening access to employment

- Promote summer placements/internships for Care Experienced people as part of targeted recruitment advertising.
- Actively promote inclusive and targeted recruitment adverts that will welcome applicants from such backgrounds, working with stakeholders to advertise these posts to ensure maximum reach.

OPERATIONS & DIGITAL

Commitments • Actions • Approx timescales

Commitments for the New Plan *Continued*



YEAR 1 • 2025 to 2026

Engage with other SG digital departments on how to support these commitments

- ▲ To effectively support Care Experienced students, Digital Transformation will actively collaborate with other government departments and agencies.

Cross-departmental working groups, regular communication channels, and data-sharing agreements (while maintaining privacy) will help create a seamless experience for students.

This cooperation can also generate new ideas and approaches, ensuring the department's digital initiatives remain relevant and responsive to evolving needs.

YEAR 1 • 2025 to 2026



Mainstreaming of Corporate Parenting into SAAS operational business as usual

- ▲ Ensure all Operations staff have training on Corporate Parenting duties to understand the needs and challenges of Care Experienced students when corresponding with them in processing and contact centre teams.
- ▲ Include Care Experienced students as 'key customers' in future-state process mapping in order to mainstream corporate parenting into current and future application process. Invite views of Care Experienced students about application process.
- ▲ Task the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) employee group to assess further initiatives/ awareness raising related to Corporate Parenting. Specifically, arrange 'lived experience' talks to raise awareness.
- ▲ Task the Quality Assurance team to ensure internal guidance and knowledge base contains well-informed and clear guidance for Operations staff members when engaging with Care Experienced students.

YEAR 2 • 2026 to 2027

Have informed staff to aid in the design and content of systems

- ▲ Staff within the digital transformation must be trained on the specific challenges Care Experienced students have faced/may face in accessing public services.

By creating a culture of understanding, we can ensure systems are designed which are trauma informed and support.

This can be achieved through ongoing training, workshops, and consultations with subject-matter experts, as well as collaborating with care professionals.

Informed staff can better anticipate user needs, contribute meaningful input into system design, and ensure content is inclusive and considerate of this group's experiences.

YEAR 2 • 2026 to 2027

Effectively govern the sign-off of workflows related to Care Experienced Students

- ▲ Ensure governance over workflows related to Care Experienced students is supported by best practice user research, meaning Care Experienced students' lived experiences and voices are captured when changes are made to workflows.

YEAR 3 • 2027 to 2028

Build effective, inclusive and sensitive systems

- ▲ SAAS must design systems that are accessible, user-friendly, and understand the needs of Care Experienced students. Systems should be flexible, recognising the challenges these students may face, and offer tailored support options.

Additionally, building feedback loops with users can ensure the systems evolve to remain effective and sensitive to their needs.

Progress Monitoring and Lessons Learned

To measure the implementation and effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Plan, each directorate will track and measure progress quarterly as part of SAAS’ business planning process.

Additionally, at year-end, SAAS will include a final report of yearly activities in its Annual Report, which can be accessed via the [Corporate Publications page](#) on the SAAS Website.

Updates will be shared with wider Scottish Government groups and regular engagement with stakeholders and analysis of feedback will identify progress and/or issues.



“I am entering my fourth year of my degree... Thanks to the support of numerous friends, family, professionals and the financial support of the Care Experienced Students’ Bursary from SAAS, I have been able to realise my potential – and I’m just getting started!”

JULIAN (4th Year)

Digital Marketing Student
Robert Gordon University





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