



The Buttle UK Quality Mark Commitment to Care Leavers

The Buttle UK Quality Mark Model:

Working with your institution to support Care Leavers in HE

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1. Introduction to Buttle UK

Buttle UK is a grant-giving organisation that provides assistance to vulnerable children, young people and families, often when there is no other source of help available to them.

Buttle UK exists today because of the work of a clergyman named Frank Buttle and the crucial role he played in establishing adoption services and ensuring that illegitimate babies, and children who suffered during wartime, had homes. Frank was committed to fundraising and his aim was to amass as much money as possible to help give vulnerable children and young people a brighter future. When Frank died in 1953, his fund was used to establish today's trust.

Buttle UK has established and manages a range of grant programmes that are designed to provide individual children and families in desperate circumstances the support they need to overcome immediate crisis or ensure the best possible opportunity for successful training and/or education.

While Buttle UK is predominantly focused on giving support and relief through its grant programmes, it also works with opinion formers, policy makers and practitioners to influence policy and practice development and undertakes research projects to help improve the life chances of future generations of children and young people.

Previously known as The Frank Buttle Trust, the name 'Buttle UK' was formally agreed on 17 March 2011.

2. Buttle UK and Care Leavers

Children looked after and leaving care are still at a significant disadvantage compared to other children with regards to their educational attainment and progression¹. Inequality continues beyond compulsory schooling with children looked after being one of the most under-represented and disadvantaged groups within higher education across the UK. Accessing higher education is only the first stage of the learning journey. There are also issues of inclusion, retention and completion.

Recently, Government findings have identified that in England:

- only 13% of looked after children obtained five A*- C grade GCSEs including mathematics and English in 2010 compared with 58% of all children²;
- only 6% progressed on to higher education at age 19 in 2011³;
- 33% of Care Leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training as at March 2011, compared with 19% of all 19-24 year olds in the first quarter of 2011⁴.

Similarly, in Northern Ireland in 2008 only 8% of Care Leavers were in higher education⁵ and in Scotland in 2010 only 3% of formerly looked after children were⁶.

In 2011 in Wales, although 48% of Care Leavers were in education, training or employment,

¹ Green Paper 2009: Every Child Matters, Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

² Department for Education statistical first release, *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2011*, <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001046/index.shtml>

³ Department for Education statistical first release, *Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2011*, <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/main%20text%20sfr212011.pdf>

⁴ Department for Education, *Children Looked After in England 2011*; Department for Education, *NEET statistics, Quarterly Brief – Quarter 1 2011*, <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/m/main%20tables%20osr252011.pdf>

⁵ In Northern Ireland <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/wellbeing.pdf>.

⁶ In Scotland, statistics provided by Buttle UK, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/342028/0113798.pdf>. This figure includes children on home supervision orders which have much poorer outcomes than those looked after 'away from home'.

this figure does not specify the percentage of Care Leavers that were in education (either further education and higher education) and it is likely that this would only amount to a small proportion⁷.

Addressing both the Universities UK annual conference in September 2011 and the Action on Access HE Summit in November 2011, the former Labour Cabinet minister (now social mobility tsar to the coalition government) Alan Milburn said access to university *'remains inequitable'* with *'social class still determining who gets into universities generally and the top universities in particular'*. He urged that, despite some progress in recent years, young people from lower income groups were still under-represented, with those from a deprived background only half as likely to go on to university as their peers from professional backgrounds. Leavers are a notable group falling into this disadvantaged category.

3. What is the Quality Mark for Care Leavers?

In 2001, Buttle UK commissioned a five-year action research project *'By Degrees: From Care to University'* in which 129 Care Leavers participated. The aim of the research project was to explore the experiences of Care Leavers who continue into higher education in order to provide evidence-based advice to government, local authorities and higher education providers. Amongst the many recommendations that the final report⁸ of this research project presented, it was proposed that *'all higher education institutions should have a comprehensive policy for recruitment, retention and support of students from a care background.'* In addition, it was recommended that the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) form include an optional tick box to indicate that an applicant has been in local authority care: UCAS added this box to its application form in 2008.

Also stemming from the research project, in 2006 Buttle UK launched the **Quality Mark for Care Leavers** to address the specific challenges that this group of people face in higher education. Creation of the Quality Mark was grounded in a firm belief that if *'all higher education institutions work towards implementing the scheme then large steps will be made towards making the aspirations of young people leaving care achievable'*⁹. Working with Universities UK, Guild HE, the Association of Colleges and the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education, Buttle UK developed a statement of Commitment to Care Leavers in Higher Education, which operates as a charter through which higher education providers can demonstrate their commitment to supporting Care Leavers. The Commitment recognises the challenges faced by Care Leavers entering higher education and specifically seeks to:

- facilitate an increase in the number of Care Leavers entering higher education;
- help higher education institutions to identify how best to support Care Leavers;
- raise awareness of the needs of this group of students;
- enable Care Leavers to make the most of their time in higher education, including completing their courses successfully;
- contribute to a national framework to assist local authorities to fulfil their obligations to Care Leavers.

⁷ In Wales, <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2011/110915sdr1662011en.pdf>

⁸ Jackson, S., Ajayi, S. and Quigley, M. (2005) 'Going from university to care', final report of the 'By Degrees: From Care to University' research project, commissioned by Buttle UK.

⁹ <http://www.buttleuk.org/pages/quality-mark-for-care-leavers.html>

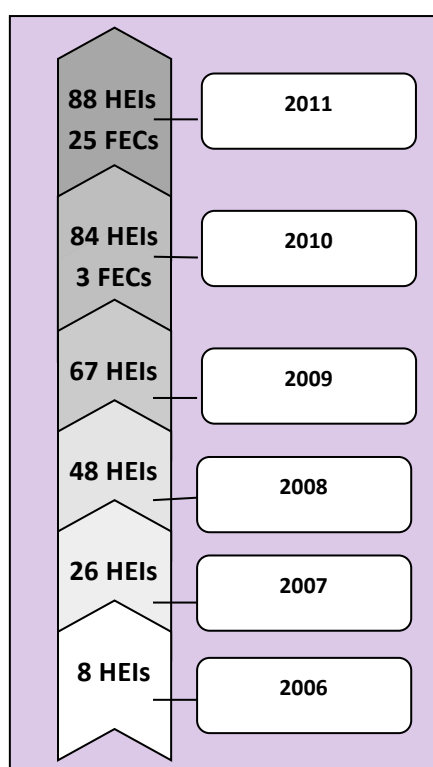
Successful participation in the Quality Mark is a clear demonstration of an institution's commitment to this very vulnerable group of students, the process of gaining and keeping the Quality Mark being one of evidencing the policies and practices that are in place to support them.

In order to achieve and maintain the Quality Mark, the institution is asked to: provide on-going evidence as to how it raises the aspirations and achievements of these young people; demonstrate that it has appropriate admissions procedures; evidence effective support at entry and throughout the student's life at the institution, and to show how it monitors the implementation of the Commitment.

The Quality Mark is a UK-wide initiative supported by all four administrations in the UK and a number of professional bodies (see Appendix A). In addition to work with the higher education sector, the Quality Mark is now available for further education following the Quality Mark's Further Education Development Programme (which ran from October 2009 to March 2011, see section 6 of this paper) funded by the Welsh Government, the Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Business and Innovation Skills (BIS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

At the time of writing, 88 universities and 25 further education colleges have the Quality Mark:

Diagram 1: Number of institutions holding the Quality Mark for Care Leavers



This equates to more than half of the universities in the UK holding the Quality Mark. In 2011 ninety-three percent (i.e. thirty nine out of forty five) of those universities due to renew did so.

In June 2011, the Quality Mark won the Civil Society award¹⁰ for the Education and Training category.

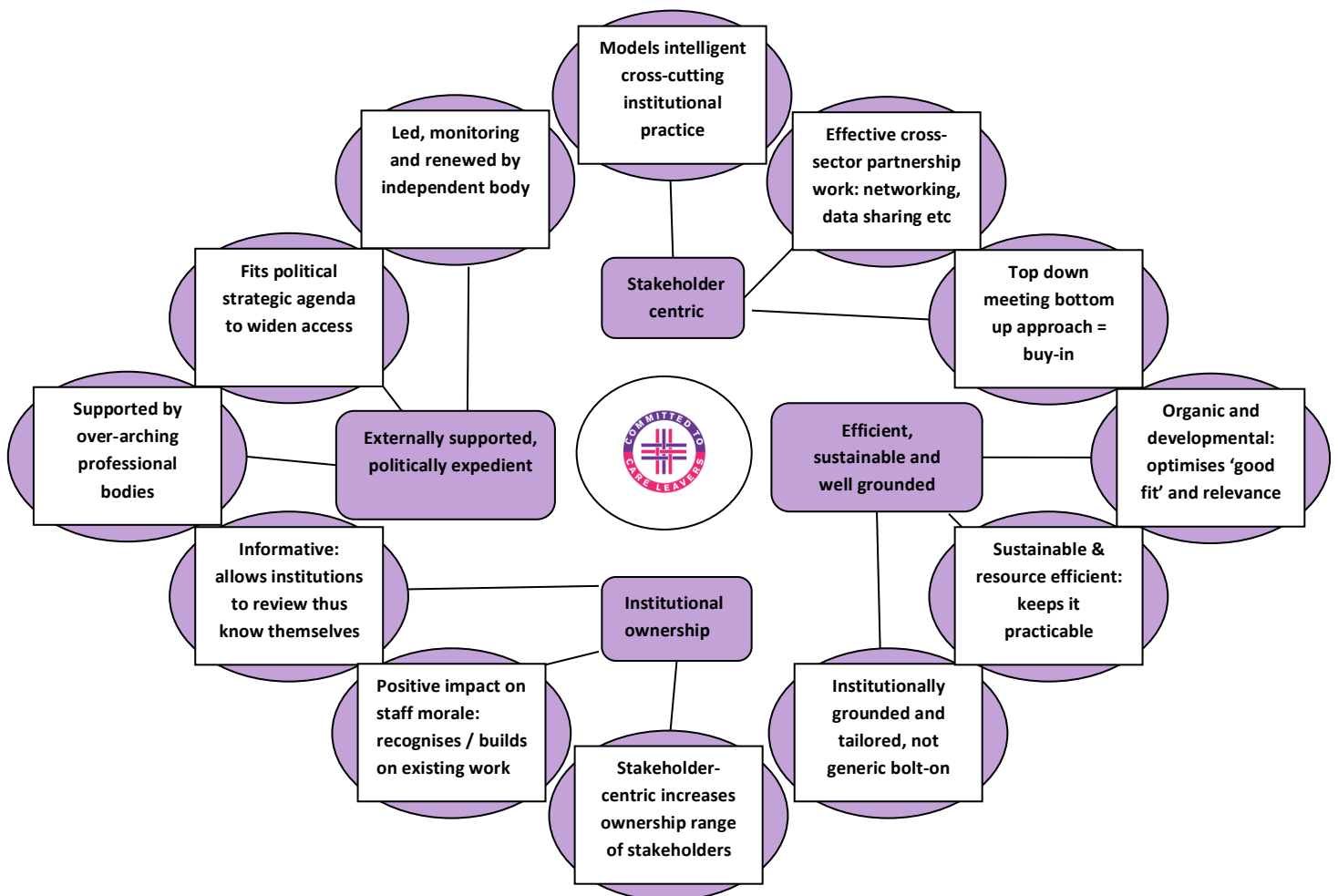
¹⁰ <http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/charityawards>

4. What's so special about how the Quality Mark works?

Unlike quality marks that require institutions to comply with a list of pre-set criteria, the Quality Mark for Care Leavers asks for a different commitment from institutions. From the outset, the Quality Mark avoids the 'partial fit' problem that frequently attends an externally - determined programme of implementation. Instead, it focuses on what processes and practices the institution itself creates, maintains and therefore truly owns. Recognising from the outset that institutions are at various stages of development in relation to their support of Care Leavers, thus that there are variable starting points, the Quality Mark asks institutions to outline their own progressive framework of action for supporting Care Leavers, as well as provide evidence of how and what these activities and actions achieve. This means that each institution can respond to the Quality Mark in such a way that showcases its own - and hopefully increasingly embedded - practice. The Quality Mark process also side-steps 'initiative fatigue' because it focuses on what already exists as meaningful core activity in any one institution rather than attempt to parachute in a one-size-fits-all series of bolt-on requirements.

Diagram 2 encapsulates the distinct approach to and ethos of quality marking employed by Buttle UK. This model is fairly unique in the world of quality marking, kite marking and 'badging', focusing as it does on what the institution brings to the table rather than the meeting of external, pre-set criteria. As such, the Buttle UK model has significant potential for being applied in a very wide range of contexts.

Diagram 2: The Buttle UK Model



As outlined in Buttle UK's own resources (e.g. its *Quality Mark for Care Leavers* leaflet¹¹ and the *Quality Mark Application Process Guidance Paper*¹²) and more widely e.g. Action on Access' *The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark: A Practice Guide*¹³, in order to receive recognition under the Quality Mark programme, institutions need to apply directly to Buttle UK, demonstrating that they meet the criteria underpinning the Trust's Commitment to Care Leavers. Whereas the summary outlined in Action on Access *Practice Guide*'s should not be seen as a checklist to be unthinkingly ticked off, nonetheless these do sum up the tenets of effective practice. An institution-wide focus on support should include unequivocal commitments to Care Leavers embedded in strategic frameworks, for example in widening participation policy and strategies. Furthermore, there should be a clearly articulated, widely publicised and sustainable plan as to how the institution will work with Care Leavers, as well as information as to how this self-devised scheme is operationally implemented and monitored: to that end, the institution will agree to submit regular monitoring and evaluation reports to Buttle UK in order to demonstrate this.

In addition, populating designated roles and responsibilities amongst staff is vital¹⁴, as is the need to raise awareness and ownership of Care Leaver support across the institution. Active, effective and mutually beneficial links and partnership working with local authorities should be progressed, as should trying to find ways of maintaining and prolonging the life of collaborative cross-sector networks such as Aimhigher¹⁵ in England, which came to an end in July 2011. Good links with existing activities that raise aspiration and attainment such as mentoring schemes, ambassador programmes and summer schools should be engendered, or these activities created where they don't already exist.

The whole student lifecycle should be actively supported throughout its application, arrival, enrolment and on-going study phases, and this should include an identified Care Leavers' coordinator who can personally support and signpost other services, attention to whether an enhanced bursary can be offered, as well as the offer of year round accommodation. The latter is particularly important to prevent Care Leavers from being vulnerable to homelessness in non-term time, especially given that many institutions typically require students to quit university accommodation in the holidays as a matter of course.

Lastly, the institution has to show a commitment to tracking, monitoring and evaluation and to submit an annual report. This does not just refer to monitoring the implementation and progress of schemes to support Care Leavers, but also to the collection of quantitative data on Care Leavers so that progression statistics can be collected, and to collect qualitative

¹¹ http://www.buttleuk.org/data/files/Quality_Mark/QM_6pp_leaflet.pdf

¹² http://www.buttleuk.org/data/files/Quality_Mark/Buttle_UKs_Quality_Mark_Application_Process.pdf

¹³ Action on Access, March 2010

¹⁴ At the strategic level senior manager team member, such as the Vice-chancellor or Principal, will be overall sponsor with responsibility for signing off paperwork and for liaising strategically with Buttle UK. Senior managers such as the Head or Director of Widening Participation, the Director or Student Services or the Dean of Students will take responsibility for management of the plan/strategy and the line-management of Care Leaver coordinator (or similar). Finally, the Care Leaver coordinator will be the first point of contact for the Care Leavers and will work directly with departments to progress the scheme that the institution has agreed upon.

¹⁵ The Aimhigher programme (and its equivalence in the devolved administrations) closed on 31st July 2011.

Aimhigher was an English programme established in 2004 from the Excellence Challenge programme that predated it. Aimhigher's aim was to 'widen participation in higher education by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from under-represented communities. Overwhelmingly these are people from lower socio-economic groups and disadvantaged backgrounds. Aimhigher partnerships build cross-sector relationships which break down the barriers which institutions and systems can unwittingly create for learners.' Higher Education Funding Council for England, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/aimhigh/>

feedback *from* Care Leavers so that their experiences and views are captured in order to further inform policy and practice.

The assessment panel, which makes decisions about applications, consists of the Chief Executive, Senior Casework Manager and Quality Mark Manager from Buttle UK. This is a considerable time commitment, which is one of the reasons why it is necessary to charge a fee for the process. There are no Trustees on the panel, but Trustees do visit selected Quality Mark holding universities on an annual basis.

5. What has the Quality Mark achieved to date? Evidence that the Quality Mark makes a difference

This section looks at how information relating to impact is generated and the conclusions that can be drawn from such data. It is evident from the feedback received from both institutions and students with a care background that the Quality Mark allows institutions to develop a better offer and good experience for Care Leavers. Not only does the Quality Mark process support higher education providers in having greater consciousness as to what it should be doing for such students, but as outlined in Section 4, it also assists higher education providers in meeting their own institutional targets.

In particular, if a focus on gaining and maintaining the Quality Mark leads to better student support practices *per se* throughout the institution, then, with the exception of students who choose to self-disclose in order to access particular bursaries, the entire Quality Mark process allows the Care Leaver to remain anonymous throughout, whilst accessing well-informed and good quality intervention programmes and support. It is reassuring and potentially empowering to know that the institution at which one wishes to study at has an informed focus on one's personal circumstances, especially if they are disadvantaged.

5.1 Processes of information capture

Buttle UK is the only body that centrally collates information on Care Leavers in higher education from higher education providers. Year on year, the statistics that Buttle UK collect and collate paint a picture of what is happening to Care Leavers in higher education. This information comes to Buttle UK in three ways:

Firstly, the institutions demonstrate their commitment by submitting a Project Plan. In order to maintain the Quality Mark beyond the initial probationary first year period of the three-year award, institutions are required to submit an Implementation Report that evidences in a reasonably qualitative way what the institution has achieved over that year. This self-review aspect of capture is in keeping with the ethos of institutional ownership of the work: there is no external inspection system akin to Ofsted, Estyn, HMIE, ETINI or the QAA¹⁶. At the end of the third year a Monitoring and Evaluation Report is submitted in order to renew the Quality Mark for a further three years. This self-evaluation report focuses on outlining what activities and processes have been progressed and with what success in terms of impact on Care Leavers. The Monitoring and Evaluation Report also reviews forward-looking plans for the coming period.

Secondly, each Quality Mark holding institution completes an Annual Statistical Return. As

¹⁶ OFSTED: Office for Standards in Education; Estyn: Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales; HMIE: Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (Scotland); ETINI: Education and Training Inspectorate Northern Ireland; QAA: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

'statistical' suggests, the Return is a generic audit tool that Buttle UK asks institutions to complete and is therefore quantitative in nature. The Return asks for institutional information, such as the number of Care Leavers that are enrolled, and for other data that can be used as a useful measure of the extent to which the higher education sector as a whole is helping Buttle UK meet its Commitment to Care Leavers. For example, institutions are asked to describe what outreach activities they provide that target aspiration and attainment raising, as well as whether 365 day accommodation is offered. The Return also asks institutions to complete a section of the Return for each Care Leaver. This is anonymous so that the identity of the students remains protected, and questions cover financial arrangements, disability, whether the student withdrew or completed, whether aid was sought or any actions taken and finally if the student was successful in gaining employment after leaving the institution.

Thirdly, Quality Mark holding institutions are asked to encourage their Care Leaver students to complete the Buttle UK's Care Leaver Satisfaction Survey in confidence.

5.2 A positive 'Quality Mark effect' for Care Leavers in higher education

To date, more than half of UK universities hold the Quality Mark. This indicates that change in the right direction is happening: not only are more Care Leavers evident in the higher education system, but also they are also better supported. It is Buttle UK's belief that large steps towards helping Care Leavers realise their aspirations are achievable if as many institutions as possible implement the Quality Mark, and that clear progress has already been made.

It is also clear from the Project Plans and subsequent Implementation Reports and Monitoring and Evaluation Reports that thoughtful engagement with the issues and implementation of support mechanisms is developing in an increasing number of institutions to good effect. For example:

- targeted interventions throughout the student life cycle;
- regular mentoring of and practical support for students who self-identify;
- active networking with major stakeholders in other sectors;
- the overhauling of institutional literature including brochures and websites;
- changes to policies to ensure explicit recognition of Care Leavers, e.g. in admissions;
- training and awareness raising for staff members;
- opportunities for Care Leavers to feedback their experiences of process and support;
- attempts to create peer networks and support groups of Care Leavers.

Buttle UK is confident that the Quality Mark makes a real difference. From the vantage point of being close to feedback from higher education institutions, Gerri McAndrew says, *'As Chief Executive of Buttle UK, one of my roles is to read everything that HE providers report to us in relation to the Quality Mark. Years of engaging with these reports gives me a secure understanding that the Quality Mark has created an immediate and potentially long term impact on institutions, with many describing a cultural change. Crucially it has enabled institutions to consider the needs of Care Leavers as distinct from other vulnerable groups. This positive impact on staff awareness within the institution has been wide reaching. Some universities have commented on an improvement in their retention rates for this particular group and the impact on how the institution is viewed by current and potential students has been highlighted, with students reporting to us that those institutions with the Quality Mark give them assurance that the institution is dedicated to understanding and meeting the*

diverse and often complex needs; more importantly it helps reduce the stigma that some of them feel.

The impact of interventions designed to improve the experiences of Care Leavers in higher education is also the subject of doctoral study¹⁷. Here, emergent findings demonstrate that the Quality Mark provides internal leverage for those student support staff responsible for developing the institution's support packages, as well as being a useful framework that gives a clear indication as to what would count as relevant support – the guidance helps them identify appropriate provision quickly.

The *Practice Guide* to the Quality Mark published by Action on Access in 2010¹⁸ also contains some excellent case study examples of progress and achievements made, particularly in relation to strategic level change (e.g. changing and updating policies); staff awareness raising; developing good partnership arrangements and co-operative working with other sectors; student life cycle support; targeted activities, interventions and schemes as well as the overhauling of existing literature and signposting and the creation of resources to both increase and improve the quality of information available to Care Leavers.

The Annual Statistical Returns that Quality Mark holding institutions submit allows Buttle UK to collate data and create reports such as the *Statistical Collection Report*. Buttle UK's statistical collection process is at a relatively early stage and Buttle UK are at pains to point out that what has emerged so far are trends and patterns that should be taken as an informative overview. In particular, the intention is to overview trends and patterns in relation to:

- the number of Care Leavers applying for, entering and progressing through higher education and the age, ethnicity and gender of these students;
- their programmes of study and employment destinations;
- financial help received (either from the Local Authority and/or the higher education institution);
- the higher education institution-based services they are offered and the services they request.

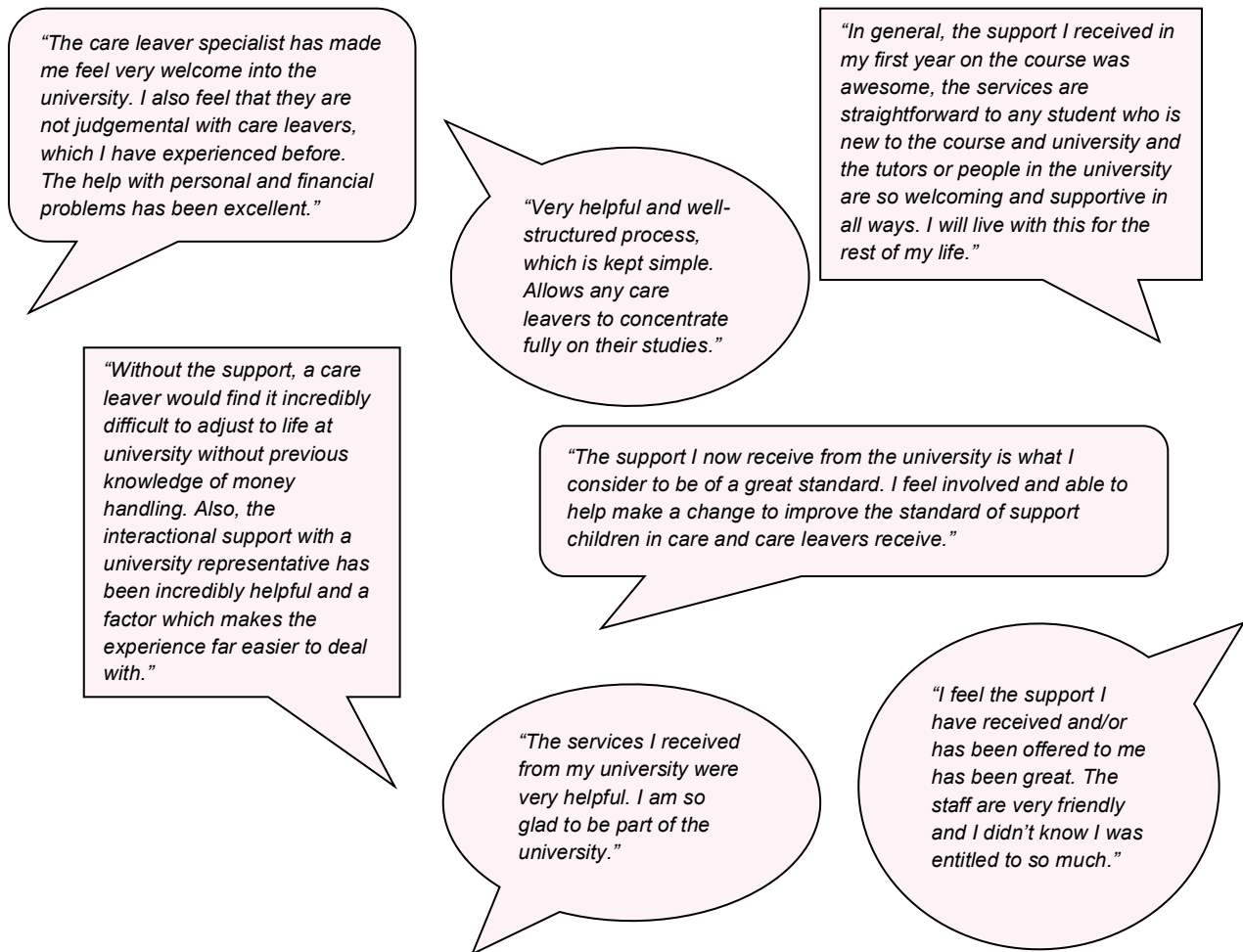
What the data collection has established so far is that the average number of applications from Care Leavers has definitely risen since 2007-08. This increase could also be due to improved methods of disclosure of Care Leaver status both centrally (i.e. the UCAS tick box) and at an institutional level. Most Care Leavers are studying at degree level (as opposed to Level 0 i.e. Foundation) and, whereas it is too early to comment authoritatively on trends in graduate employment and other destinations, this is useful and interesting data that will emerge over time. Almost all of the institutions that completed the Statistical Return for the period stated that they offered 365-day accommodation. The assistance most frequently sought by Care Leavers was in relation to financial matters.

5.3 Feedback from Care Leavers in higher education

The Care Leavers Satisfaction Survey provides Buttle UK with vital feedback from their constituency, as is demonstrated in the direct quotes below:

¹⁷ Hyde-Dryden, G. (2011, January). Overcoming by Degrees: exploring the impact of measures intended to improve care leavers' experiences of higher education. Paper presented at the Buttle UK Best Practice Conference, London.

¹⁸ The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark: A Practice Guide, December 2010, Action on Access. www.actiononaccess.org/resources/publications



5.4 What are the benefits for institutions?

Practitioners and policy makers who have fed back on the Quality Mark programme reflect that there are many advantages for institutions engaging in this approach to quality marking:

Institutions can learn by engaging with the Quality Mark process. In order to evidence to Buttle UK that effective practice to meet the Commitment is maintained, activity has to be fully practicable as well as wholly owned and prioritised: senior management backing of aspiration is meaningless in the absence of sound operational planning. In today's financial climate, that can mean having to devise clever operations via problem solving, creativity and innovation as to how best to use limited resources. It also means having the ability to first see, then capitalise on, existing and potential opportunities: for example, good working relations with other sectors such as local authorities is key. Conscious awareness of and engagement with effective problem-solving and good cross-sector working relations in one context, i.e. for the Quality Mark, can serve as a powerful model for other aspects of university life, therefore engaging with it generates transferable and re-usable models for achieving goals for the institution in question. An opportunity to practice being an intelligent and resourceful institution is particularly useful in times of relatively harsh financial constraint.

Engaging with the Quality Mark provides an exemplar of effective cross-sector working. Buttle UK is clear that successful adoption of the Commitment requires institutions to be flexible in their support systems and form active working relationships with local authorities to ensure that an appropriate plan is in place to support Care Leavers. Although

the issue of multi-sector data sharing remains a sensitive one, the Quality Mark provides an opportunity for higher education providers and local authorities to work together to meet many of the recommendations outlined in *'Going to university from care'*. Once these active working relations are established, or progressed where they already existed, this can only be a positive for all concerned.

The Quality Mark provides institutions with further exemplars. In terms of staffing, existing energies and efforts (usually located within Widening Participation and/or student support teams) can be acknowledged and form the basis of more formally recognised arrangements. The recognition of existing work is good for staff morale and may be a useful addition to the achievements aspects of performance review processes. At an institutional level, because the work that fulfils the Commitment is designed to be a good fit with the core values and strategies of the higher education provider, it has the potential to complement, promote and progress other institutional strategies and key corporate objectives, especially those related to fair access. These should all be articulated coherently together within an institution's widening participation access strategy, in Access Agreements (England, NI), Fee Plans (Wales) and Outreach Agreements (Scotland). Engagement with the Quality Mark programme provides some of the means of being able to do this. In relation to the wider student body, the programme serves as a good model that can be applied to other at risk groups.

Doing the Quality Mark is an opportunity to engender better cross-cutting working practices. Because the demands of the scheme are such that institutions have to work innovatively and flexibly to create an intelligent web of support, the Quality Mark requires that institutions look closely at how whole institution strategy is operationalised so that core aspirations are converted into good practice regardless of which part of the organisation enrolls the student. This means that the institution has to organise a smart system for well co-ordinated, cross-cutting operations (which is not the same as one-size-fits-all) that overcomes the distances, differences and variations in practice and culture that are frequently found in large multifaceted organisations. Furthermore, when successfully managed, this can be a powerful demonstration to an institution that it is capable of working cohesively as a whole.

The organic and developmental nature of the Quality Mark programme. The Quality Mark provides an opportunity for an institution to engage in an institutionally grounded, stakeholder-centric programme, which is in contrast to the over-bureaucratised culture of some initiatives. Although the programme is not without its own challenges, compared with other quality marking practices the Quality Mark seems to be viewed as one which provides gains for manageable costs because the work starts with what is real and relevant to the institution: it has been described as being a 'low cost high gain' approach. It has been noted favourably by some participants for its *'relative simplicity'* and is furthermore seen by some as capable of permitting a true cultural shift because of this, together with its emphasis on what is proactive, evolving and inclusive.

Buttle UK provides good support around the award. Buttle UK is thought to provide *'clear direction'* with regard to the programme and the requirement of annual data returns thought to help keep institutions focussed. Given the demise of Education Protects network and the Aimhigher funding in England, the network activity that Buttle UK encourages via the Quality Mark is particularly useful and relevant to institutions right now. The Quality Mark Annual Conference is well attended to the point of over subscription and is the subject of increasing

interest (2009: 128 delegates, 2011: 162 delegates). This is in itself an indication of importance of the work and the value of the conference.

Engaging in the Quality Mark allows institutions to contribute to the political sphere and to society as a whole. The greater the critical mass of institutions signing up to the programme, the greater chance that this very important issue has of staying on the political radar. This is particularly vital in times of public spending becoming increasingly restrained. With no resource to finance bolt-on activity, the only hope that disadvantaged groups have lies in the extent to which institutions ensure that support and attention is securely located in what is core and embedded and on-going. This provides a good role model for other sectors to follow suit, especially those that are in partnership with higher education: it provides a good model of joined-up working with local authorities, for example.

5.5 External validation

As was outlined in the Quality Mark annual best practice conference 2011, the Quality Mark for Care Leavers has *attracted the positive attention of OFSTED* (Felicity Dunworth, then Aimhigher Kent and Medway. Furthermore it is seen as *‘performing well in benchmarking exercises in pastoral care’* (David Beards, Scottish Funding Council) and is recognised by OFFA: *‘We are enormously supportive of the work universities do in meeting the Buttle UK Quality Mark and many universities and colleges now present this as part of their access agreements. This work provides life changing support and experiences for people from care backgrounds to improve their chances to enter and succeed in higher education’* (Sir Martin Harris, Director of Fair Access).

6. The Quality Mark for Care Leavers in further education

The Quality Mark for Care Leavers has as much relevance to the further education sector as it does for higher education. In this paper it has been suggested that the networks and cross-sector partnership working that successful Quality Mark processes require were very complementary to and supportive of regional and national aspiration and attainment raising initiatives. The potential for the Quality Mark to contribute to young peoples’ access to education on leaving school is important as the Quality Mark can help build and strengthen networks and interventions that span the further and higher education sectors. In particular recognition of this, the most recent Quality Mark Annual Conference was entitled *‘From Care to Further and Higher Education: Partnership Working through the Quality Mark for Care Leavers’*.¹⁹ Furthermore, in *‘Care Leavers in Further Education – The Lost Cohort’*²⁰ Chris Leonard outlines both the relevance of the Quality Mark for the further education and the findings from his research that demonstrate an appetite for the Quality Mark in the sector.

Acknowledging that many young people choose to stay in further education and even complete higher education qualifications whilst there, between 2009 and 2011 Buttle UK²¹

¹⁹ *‘From Care to Further and Higher Education: Partnership Working through the Quality Mark for Care Leavers’*, The Quality Mark for Care Leavers Annual Conference, Buttle UK, held at Woburn House, London on January 11th 2011.

²⁰ Leonard, C. (2011) *Care Leavers in Further Education – The Lost Cohort*, Research Report for Aimhigher West Area Partnership May 2011.

²¹ With funding and the assistance of the assistance of Welsh Government, the Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Business and Innovation Skills (BIS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

developed and carried out a programme that systematically piloted the Quality Mark for the FE sector. This pilot programme reported its findings in December 2011 in '*A Quality Mark for Further Education Development Programme Final Report*' in which the potential and feasibility for a national roll out are presented. The pilot project concluded that a Quality Mark was *urgently* needed for FE given that such a high proportion of Care Leavers go on to some sort of further education on leaving school. Provision for Care Leavers, where it exists at all, was found to be uneven and the report concluded that the Quality Mark could be very effective in helping create the change needed especially as the approach is one of recognising and promoting best practice. The development programme also witnessed a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for a Quality Mark amongst FE providers; to that end the decision was taken to do a national roll out of the Quality Mark for Care Leavers in further education. The Quality Mark national conference in May 2012 will see the official launch of the Quality Mark for further education colleges.

7. Conclusion

It would be wrong to suggest that the Quality Mark programme is entirely without its challenges: anything that concerns itself with institutions investing properly and fundamentally in change will make some demands, but this paper suggests that the gains for Care Leavers and institutions are many. That the work is premised on having ecological validity at the local level (i.e. being a good fit at the level of the institution) hopefully engenders longevity and good quality results, not to mention a replicable model that can be profitable when applied to other aspects of institutional life. Authenticity, relevance and practicability are key.

Further and higher education providers cannot meet all the needs of Care Leavers in isolation, others need to support: the key is effective cross-sector partnership working towards common goals. There are real challenges posed by data and information sharing across sectors but genuine partnerships will find effective ways round these hurdles rather than use them as an excuse not to bother in the first place. Essentially, through the Quality Mark, education providers are being extended an opportunity to contribute to cultural change in the desired direction of a sort that is far bigger than what happens within the four walls of an institution: engaging in the Quality Mark programme makes a clear contribution to social justice at a time when this was never more important.

Appendix A

The Quality Mark is supported by the following organisations:

Universities UK



GuildHE



The Office for Fair Access



UCAS



The Higher Education Funding Council for England



The Scottish Funding Council



The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales



The Association of Colleges



Colleges Northern Ireland



Scotland's Colleges



The Student Services Organisation UK



Action on Access



England

Buttle UK
Audley House
13 Palace Street
London
SW1E 5HX

Wales

Buttle UK
PO Box 224
Caerphilly
CF83 9EE

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Buttle UK
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G78 4WA

Northern Ireland

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www.buttleuk.org

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