



CLASS Cymru

Developing an online resource to support care-experienced students

Executive Summary

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CASCADE Infrastructure Partnership



Our expertise brings together an exceptional partnership. CASCADE is the leading centre for evaluative research in children's social care in the UK and sits within the School of Social Sciences (SOCSI), a leading centre of excellence in social sciences and education research with particular expertise in quantitative methods. The Centre for Trials Research (CTR) is an acknowledged national leader for trials and related methods, the School of Psychology was ranked 2nd for research quality in the most recent Research Excellence Framework and SAIL provides world-class data linkage. Together we believe we can create a step-change in the quality and use of children's social care research that is unparalleled in the UK. Specifically, we can deliver high quality trials and evaluations; link data to understand long-term outcomes and involve service users (our public) in all elements of our research. Our intention is that these three strands will interact to generate an unrivalled quality of research.

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Summary

Emerging from research within CASCADE looking at access to, and success in Higher Education (HE) for care-experienced students in Wales, CLASS Cymru is a website comprising of key information designed to help support care-experienced young people in Wales as they progress to university. With clear, simple guidance, this is a one-stop-shop for both professionals and young people themselves to find relevant guidance and information to effectively support this key period of transition.

This project is funded by Cardiff University's Innovation For All strand.

Aim and Objectives

- To design and build a practical website offering information, advice and guidance for care-experienced young people and those who support them to facilitate their transition to higher education.
- To use preliminary research findings to develop content relevant to key user groups including care-experienced young people, social workers, education staff (at school, Further Education (FE) and HE level) and foster carers.
- To co-produce content alongside these user groups.
- To commission the design of a simple, user-friendly website to host this content.
- To conduct preliminary evaluation of this website.

Expected Outcomes

- Development of the CLASS Cymru website, in consultation with its future users.
- Use of website by care-experienced young people, foster carers, social workers, university staff and others.
- Continuation of website progression beyond the project period, with annual reviews of content and usability facilitated by CLASS Cymru.
- Improved policy and practice around Widening Access and Participation in HE for care-experienced students.
- Awareness raising, particularly amongst education staff, of the potential needs and experiences of their students.

Introduction

This Executive Summary gives an overview of the CLASS Cymru project, based at CASCADE in Cardiff University. It is funded through Innovation for All and has emerged from research within CASCADE exploring access to, and success in, Higher Education for care-experienced young people in Wales.

Innovation for All

Innovation for All is a funding stream distributed via Cardiff University and supported by Research Wales Innovation Funding (RWIF) from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). This project was in receipt of the Innovation for All Impact Fund's Kickstart Funding in 2021.

CLASS Cymru

CLASS Cymru stands for Care Leaver Activities and Student Support in Wales. CLASS Cymru began around 10 years ago as a network to share best practice around supporting care leavers in university. The network has been consistently involved in the research underpinning this project, and also lends its name to the finished website.

Care-experienced young people and HE

In October 2019, the project 'Understanding the higher education experiences of care-experienced young people in Wales' was funded by HCRW (£295,618) after successful completion of a competitive tender. The project has built on previous research including that conducted by Mannay et al. (2016; 2017) within Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences, which recommended that educational experiences of care-experienced young people could be improved with better access to resources and educational-related opportunities (Mannay et al. 2015).

The project has been undertaken within CASCADE. It has consulted care-experienced young people (n=22) and a range of professionals (n=25) from the HE and FE sectors, Local Authorities and third sector staff to explore the support in Wales for care-experienced young people to access and succeed in HE.

In this project young people and practitioners have highlighted the lack of clear signposting online when exploring the possibilities of higher education, and a desire to have somewhere reliable to source information and advice.

The following key findings from this research have led to the proposal and development of the CLASS Cymru website:

- Care-experienced young people and those who support them often do not know where to find specific, up to date information regarding HE.
- HE Institutions often have a wealth of information available online, but it is not always easy to navigate.
- There is an appetite for working together across Wales to make this information more accessible.

Developing the CLASS Cymru website

Beginning in October 2021, and following ethical approval from Cardiff University’s School of Social Sciences, consultation groups were formed of previous research participants, CLASS Cymru network members and care-experienced students. These groups were consulted on three main stages of website development:

- Content ideas
- Review of design concepts
- Review of overall content

Based on research findings, initial focus groups were held to draft content ideas for the website. In January 2022, groups were held online with three care-experienced students and eight professionals working with care-experienced young people. Within these groups an overview of the project was discussed, along with more focused discussion around what should be contained within the website.

An initial idea was piloted where the website would be based around five key stages of the journey to HE, where we asked what do care-experienced people need to know:

- Before even thinking of university?
- When applying to university?
- During the transition period into university?
- During university?
- After university?

Some of the comments that came up included the need for support where care-experienced young people turn 18 but are still in school; whether contextual offers apply to qualifications like BTecs; accessibility of finance and impact of student status on benefits; and for more support and understanding from relevant adults (such as PAs and teachers). On the basis of feedback gained through these focus groups, Table 1 shows the initial layout for website content.

Before considering uni	Applying for uni	Transition to uni	During uni	After uni
Why consider uni	Making choices	Countdown to uni	Student life	Graduation
Who to talk to	Bursaries and funding	Year out options	Taking care of yourself	Jobs
		Changing plans		Further Study
		Checklists		Benefits and LA Support
<i>Links</i>	<i>Links</i>	<i>Links</i>	<i>Links</i>	<i>Links</i>

Table 1: Website headers and dropdown menus

As well as the timeline approach, participants highlighted that it would be useful to have direct links to information for key audiences. The homepage of the website was therefore designed to have direct links to information for the following groups, stating “I am looking for information for…”

- Myself
 - I am currently in school/college
 - I am not currently in education
 - I am over 25
- Someone I support
 - Information for foster carers
 - Information for social workers and PAs
 - Information for teachers
 - Information for university staff

Specific downloadable resources have been developed relevant to these groups. Prior to initial focus groups, we contacted Frank Duffy¹, a graphic design specialist based in South Wales, to design both the downloadable resources and the website. They came up with three initial concepts which formed the basis of the next round of focus group discussions.

In April 2022, the consultation groups of care-experienced people and professionals were re-convened to discuss website designs (initial design concepts can be seen in Figure 1).

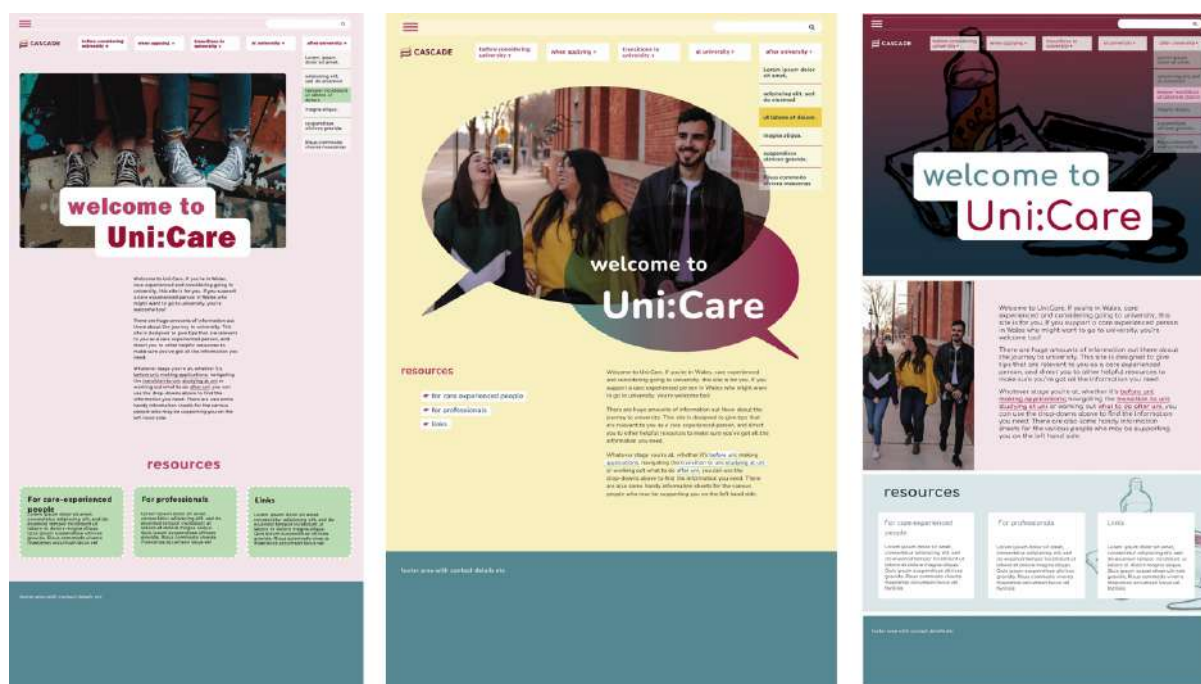


Figure 1: Website design concepts by Frank Duffy

One key finding from this round of focus groups was that although professionals liked the name Uni:Care (the initial name of this project), care-experienced members of the consultation groups were strongly against it, and wanted a name that did not include ‘care’ in the title. This is how the name was changed to CLASS Cymru, to reflect the content of the site without the obvious

¹ <https://frankduffy.co.uk/>

connection to care experience. Website designs were then further refined based on feedback around layout, colour schemes, photography and illustration.

Work between CASCADE, Frank Duffy and web developer Gwyn Fisher² continued throughout summer 2022 to finalise the CLASS Cymru website, with further iterations being shared with consultation groups for feedback. All pages are available in both Welsh and English.

In October 2022, the CLASS Cymru website³ went live, and was launched with an event at Cardiff University's Centre for Student Life. With attendees encompassing practitioners, care-experienced students and young people, academics and charity staff, the event gave an overview of CLASS Cymru and the wider research it was based on, as well as giving opportunity for attendees to network and make new connections.



Figure 2: The CLASS Cymru homepage

The Future of CLASS Cymru

The CLASS Cymru website is currently funded up until Autumn 2024 and will be maintained by staff from both CASCADE and the Centre for Student Life. With regular consideration of user experience, the site will be updated to reflect what users find helpful. The team can be contacted via the contact form on the website or by emailing info@classcymru.co.uk. All resources that are available for download from the website are also available as hard copies and can be requested via the email above.

² <https://agaveweb.com/>

³ <https://classcymru.co.uk/>

A Final Note

We would like to thank everyone who has taken part for their involvement in this project, which would not have been possible without the support of care-experienced young people, the CLASS Cymru network, and the professionals who have been involved at all stages.





CASCADE

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