Tenders Sought for Research Projects

What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for students with a background of care or family estrangement; what practical recommendations would support positive outcomes for this group?

About the Unite Foundation

Too few young people estranged from family or leaving care realise their potential at university. We want to change that. Our scholarships award students free purpose-built Unite Students accommodation for three years of study, supporting them to succeed while knowing that they have a place to belong at university. Together with our university partners and supporters, we make sure that our students have opportunities to thrive at university and beyond.

For more information about the Unite Foundation and its work, see http://www.unitefoundation.co.uk

To complement and build on our direct support for students, the Unite Foundation wishes to commission leading research to understand better the factors affecting students who come from a background of care or family estrangement. We plan to use this robust evidence base to guide our own decision making, and to share it widely for the benefit of all institutions and organisations who are working with this group of students.

The resulting report should provide a broad overview, of academic and practical use, which will set the Foundation, and others, on the path to delivering better retention and graduate outcomes for the target group. It will provide a baseline from which further studies can build, as well as moving the current agenda forward now by answering previously unexplored questions.

Overview of requirements

We are open to proposals that go beyond the core brief, but based on the experiences of our scholars and the available literature, we are especially interested in three key areas of enquiry:

1. Access to higher education

- What are the key areas of disadvantage experienced by care leavers and estranged young people when applying to and enrolling in higher education?

- What specific interventions have been successful in enabling care leavers or estranged young people to access higher education in greater numbers?

- What are the institutional factors affecting these findings, and can particular effects be isolated? For example, is access for these groups more equal to that of other students at different types of universities, in particular disciplines, or amongst students with higher levels of school attainment? What does the existing literature and practice tell us in this regard?

- Based on this evidence, what practicable recommendations can be made to government, institutions, students and the Unite Foundation to support the target group of students to access higher education?

2. Retention and completion

- To what extent and in what ways do retention and completion outcomes for care leavers and estranged young people differ from average, and from other groups of interest to widening access policy but who have family support (e.g. students on free school meals, students from low participation neighbourhoods)?

- What specific barriers do estranged young people and care leavers face in remaining in higher education through to the completion of their course?

- What specific interventions have been successful in improving persistence and belonging?

- How do personal factors such as mental health difficulties, levels of peer support and statutory recognition of disadvantage impact the findings?

- What are the institutional factors affecting these findings, and can particular effects be isolated? For example, are outcomes more equal at different types of universities, in particular disciplines, or amongst students with higher levels of school attainment? What does the existing literature and practice tell us in this regard?

- Based on this evidence, what practicable recommendations can be made to government, institutions, students and the Unite Foundation to support the target group of students to complete their course?

3. Graduate outcomes

- To what extent and in what ways do graduate outcomes for care leavers and estranged young people differ from average, and from other groups of interest to widening access policy but who have family support (e.g. students on free school meals, students from low participation neighbourhoods)?

- What specific barriers and risks do estranged young people and care leavers face around the time of graduation and for up to two years after graduation?

- What does the existing literature and practice tell us about how best to prepare students with a background of care or family estrangement for life after graduation?

- What are the factors affecting these findings, and can particular effects be isolated? For example, are outcomes more equal at different types of universities, in particular disciplines, or amongst students with higher levels of school attainment? What does the existing literature and practice tell us in this regard?

- Based on this evidence, what practicable recommendations can be made to government, institutions, students and the Unite Foundation to provide more effective support the target group of students in preparing for life after graduation?

We would prefer to let this as a single contract, but would consider letting this as two or three separate contracts if this proves more effective. When tendering for the work, please specify clearly which topic(s) your proposal will address.

Methodological Requirement

The Unite Foundation seeks original, ambitious and robust proposals. Bids will be judged on the proposed approach, expertise of team and value for money.

We expect that a mixed methods approach will address the key questions most robustly, combining review of existing literature, new analysis of sector and institutional data sets and qualitative research with students and institutions.

Deliverables

- A substantive report, published in the Unite Foundation branding, outlining the policy context, key findings and practical recommendations.

- Partnering with the Foundation on the release of the report, including a launch event and sector and media engagement, newspaper articles, blog posts, academic papers and conference presentations on the key findings.

- A willingness in principle to work additionally (beyond this tender) with the Foundation to interrogate the coverage and impact of the report and, hopefully, its eventual positive effects on the target group.

Acceptable bidders

The successful bidder will have a track record of conducting credible, influential research into widening access and student success in higher education. They should be an individual or group experienced in producing well-evidenced, newsworthy, conclusions. They will need to show evidence of experience in any research methods proposed and effective data analysis leading to robust conclusions.

The following sets out the acceptable standards of bidders for this research and how these should be evidenced:

- Experience of working flexibly with clients to deliver complex research and analysis;
- Clarity in communicating progress of work to clients and explaining issues that arise in a timely manner;
- Risk management expertise including track record in escalating risks to clients for discussion;
- If necessary, experience in working with other organisations as part of larger research programmes.
- A track record of generating robust research findings resulting in newsworthy conclusions and recommendations.
- Experience in the management of ethical issues arising from conducting research with potentially vulnerable adults.

Commissioning process

This research will be commissioned via a single procurement phase, for which succinct proposals are invited. Assessment of tenders will be on the basis of the criteria at the end of this document.

The contract, once let, will be with the Unite Foundation and will run from the date of issue until no later than 31 July 2019.

Research will be published on the Unite Foundation's website and should be drafted in the Unite Foundation branding and format.

Proposals to carry out the work should be submitted in Word or PDF format and include:

- Your proposed approach to the research (2 sides max) to cover the following:
    - An overview of the research design and how it will address the key research questions
    - Details of the proposed research methods, including how you will ensure access to datasets and research participants where relevant;
    - Methodological constraints and possible solutions;
    - An overview of ethical issues that may arise as a result of the research and how they will be addressed;
    - How you can add value and why you should be selected;
    - How the findings would be presented;
    - Project risks and mitigations;
    - Timeline and critical dependencies.

- Examples of relevant experience and individual/staff expertise, professional memberships and qualifications. Proposed distribution of duties should be clearly stated if the bid involves sub-contracting or collaboration between different providers. (1-2 sides max).

- Summary of costs & disbursement schedule (1 side max).

References should also be provided and do not form part of the maximum page limit.

Communication of complex information in a straightforward way is necessary to this project. ***Therefore, tenders that exceed 5 sides of A4 (excluding references) will not be considered.***

Tenders should be submitted to info@unitefoundation.co.uk before **5pm on 31 October 2018.**
Costings

A total of £90,000 (excluding VAT) is available for the whole of this contract.

All costs should be quoted <u>exclusive</u> of VAT but please indicate if the project will attract VAT.

If your proposal includes costs for sub-contractors these costs must be shown <u>inclusive</u> of any VAT element (e.g. sub-contractor's costs to you are £5,000 plus VAT, your proposal should show sub-contractors costs as £6,000 inclusive of VAT @ 20%).

Assessment of bids

Tenders will be evaluated against the criteria below. A primary weighting means the criteria will be given greater consideration in assessment of bids.

Criteria	Potential examples
An original, robust and ambitious method	• Clear articulation of a method that will deliver the core research requirement: to **understand better what factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for students with a background of care or family estrangement; and what practical recommendations would support positive outcomes for this group?** Clear articulation of a method that will deliver the additional research requirement. • Articulation of proposed data collection and analytical techniques to be used in the project • Evidence of ability to access required datasets and research participants • The ability to link to recent national or international research into participation and success for under-represented groups
Team and organisational experience in conducting and presenting qualitative research	• Experience of named researchers in relevant research techniques • Experience of presenting findings in a clear way and compelling way • Experience of specific research in this area and familiarity with the existing literature • Evidence that ethical issues likely to arise from the research have been adequately addressed
Cost and value for money	• Cost and overall value for money • Value add to the project

Timetable

Call for proposals published	2 October 2018
Closing date for receipt of proposals	31 October 2018
Preferred bidder(s) notified	w/c 5 November 2018
Work commences	On or before 31 November 2018
First draft of report due	31 March 2019
Final report due	30 April 2019
Publication and launch activity completed	31 July 2019