

UHI | INVERNESS

The Promise Plan 2023-26

An interim report on progress

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the promise
scotland

Executive Summary

UHI Inverness made a commitment in 2020 to Keep the Promise, following the findings of the independent review of the care system which encompassed the voices of over 5,500 individuals with care experience. Our previous Corporate Parenting Plan, 2020-2023, demonstrated that commitment and outlined our endeavours to ensure our learners with care experience have every opportunity to meet their full potential whilst being supported in an environment which values and respects them as individuals. Our 2020-2023 plan laid a strong foundation to build from and a culture of compassion and care at UHI Inverness.

Our current plan, 2023-26, builds on much of our previous work and seeks to further embed our progressive culture and processes which prioritise the needs of those with care experience, as well as those who are estranged and require extra consideration.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress made across our 2023-2026 plan at this mid-way point and to identify any new areas of work during the second stage of this plan.

Much of the focus of our current plan thus far has centred around our responses in the post-pandemic period to best support the evolving needs of learners with care experience. We recognise the pandemic disproportionately affected certain groups of individuals, which included our learners with care experience. Research shows that many were significantly affected by the impact of isolation and reduced service provision. In the recovery period in the years since the pandemic, we have made efforts to rebuild our in-person outreach activities and enhance the social aspects of campus life as a means of narrowing the attainment gap and further improving the outcomes and life chances of our care experienced community.

Since 2023 and the start of our current plan, we have widened the collaborative work we do with our network of community Promise partners across our region. Working with them, we have established effective mechanisms to identify and support individuals with care experience from the earliest point in their journeys to establish meaningful learning pathways and to support their transition into UHI Inverness. Once enrolled, a well-established tailored package of support is offered, led by our Access & Transitions team, and delivered by a wide range of professional and curriculum services across the learning journey.

UHI Inverness remains committed to the Scottish Funding Council ambition of equal outcomes for all learners with care experience by 2030.

Our actions to date have led to positive impacts on the retention and successful outcomes of learners with care experience and places care experienced learner outcomes ahead of the last published sector benchmark. However, we are cognisant of the continued gap in outcomes between our learners with care experience and their non-care peers. The next stage of our plan will bring greater focus on what more needs to be done to reduce that gap.

Following feedback from the care experienced community and stakeholders, our regional Corporate Parenting Board took the decision to rebrand as The Promise Board. Similarly, our Corporate Parenting Plan going forward will be titled our Promise Plan.



Our 2023-26 Corporate Parenting Plan spans three overarching themes to direct our continued work and commitment to The Promise:

Theme 1

Increase opportunities for the learning, development, and progression of learners with experience of care to impact positively on their outcomes and life chances.

Theme 2

Expand opportunities to hear and represent the voice of learners with experience of care and ensure they are represented in ways which are meaningful to them. We will also seek to develop the quality of communication we have when working with and referring to learners with experience of care.

Theme 3

Improve the financial support for care experienced learners

To increase opportunities for the learning, development, and progression of learners with care experience to impact positively on their outcomes and life chances.

The Promise in Action

Robust engagement and attendance monitoring processes are now well embedded to ensure that learners with care experience receive the earliest intervention following absence.

We have embedded new programme design principles for all Level 4/5 programmes to support more flexible pathways for all learners. This has contributed to the improved outcomes of learners with care experience.

Target setting for our priority groups is now embedded across our KPIs for all further education full-time programmes at a school level. This has led to greater analysis of our data to support improved understanding and learner outcomes.

We have established strong relationships with the local authority's housing team and the UHI halls of residence and have been able to offer support to learners with emergency housing needs.

We are now into the second year of our Raising Aspirations programme which is designed to increase our engagement within our key secondary schools with those furthest from education. Our first cohort will transition to UHI Inverness in August 2025.

We now waive the graduation fees for graduands who have experience of care or who are estranged and support them to celebrate in ways which are meaningful to them.

The Promise in Progress

In analysing our data, we have identified an area for further exploration around our conversion rates from application to enrolment. We have identified a potential discrepancy between the volume of applications submitted by learners with care experience and their subsequent conversion to enrolment. Despite a high number of applications in AY 23/24, our conversion rate between offer and enrolment were notably lower, suggesting potential barriers or challenges. We have identified it is crucial to develop a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors which might have contributed to a lower conversion rate and lower enrolments in AY 23/24. This will form part of our future focus.

We have engaged in the CDN Trauma Informed College programme and have established a steering group to take forward our work to develop a trauma informed and responsive workforce and campus.

With stronger partnership working, we have a greater capacity to ensure learners with care experience are offered the opportunity to engage in career planning, employability coaching and interview preparation. In collaboration with Highland Council Employability team and Skills Development Scotland we are working towards a every learner with care experience receives this support as standard.

To increase communication, representation, and the voice of individuals with experience of care



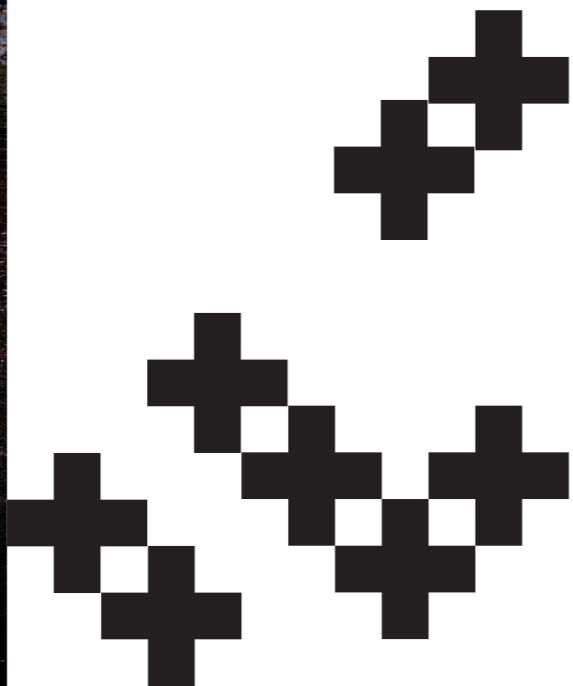
The Promise in Action

All curriculum and professional service managers engaged with the Each and Every Child professional development programme in 2024. This has supported a greater awareness amongst staff of how we communicate when speaking about care experience to reduce any unintended stigma.

We continue to create and promote opportunities for learners with care experience to get together, should they want to, by holding regular study groups, and social group sessions across the academic year led by the suggestions of our learners.

We continue to raise staff awareness of our responsibilities to learners with care experience through our new staff induction and opportunities for on-going professional development. We have embedded the voice of staff members with care experience into marketing materials and encourage learners with care experience to share their stories, should they wish to. This has supported positive case studies surrounding the care experienced voice.

We continue to act on the voice of learners with care experience by working with the Quality team to monitor their feedback through various student surveys and focus groups.



The Promise in Progress

Although we have significantly increased the number of learners with care experience who provide feedback through annual student surveys, we are continuing to develop the number of care experienced learners engaging in the Student Voice Representative (SVR) role and the new Student Ambassador role. We have identified that we need to start tracking the data we hold on SVRs and Ambassadors so that we can measure the volume of those who are care experienced.

In addition to our website detailing the support available for applicants and students with care experience, we have identified the need to develop paper-based welcome packs. This will be a new addition for 2026. UHI Inverness currently plays a pivotal role in the regional Promise board and hosts the local biannual Promise Partners steering group. Both provide opportunities to collaborate and share practice across the local authority area. We also hosted Care Day in 2025 offering a variety of activities and the opportunity for the care experienced community to connect with local community support services. We have identified that we need to find further opportunities for us to open our doors to the wider care experienced community and our partners to showcase the transformational power of further and higher education and the opportunities available to our care experienced community.

"From the moment they set foot at UHI Inverness they benefit from the support of a 'named' individual. This not only provides individuals with emotional support from staff who can quickly respond to their needs, but it also ensures that learners feel valued, respected and listened to. Relationships continue to be key within our delivery, with a coffee and breakfast daily soft start approach and minimal staff changes."

Nina Gatt, the Depute Curriculum Leader of Social Care, Health and Childcare at UHI Inverness



Improving financial support for care experienced learners

The Promise in Action

We have a well-established suite of cost-of-living support on campus including a free breakfast and lunch available to all learners, an on-campus food bank, The Larder, and The Cubby which provides free toiletries and warm coats. We also have readily accessible free sanitary products in all on campus toilets. We continue to ensure learners with care experience are aware of these support mechanisms, particularly throughout the summer.

Thanks to the generous support of Cash for Kids, UHI Inverness is now able to offer Home Starter packs to learners with care experience who move into the UHI halls of residence. This initiative has allowed us to provide essential 'set-up' support to all residents with care-experience who may require it, with a particular focus on offering assistance to those in need of emergency housing placements during the academic year.

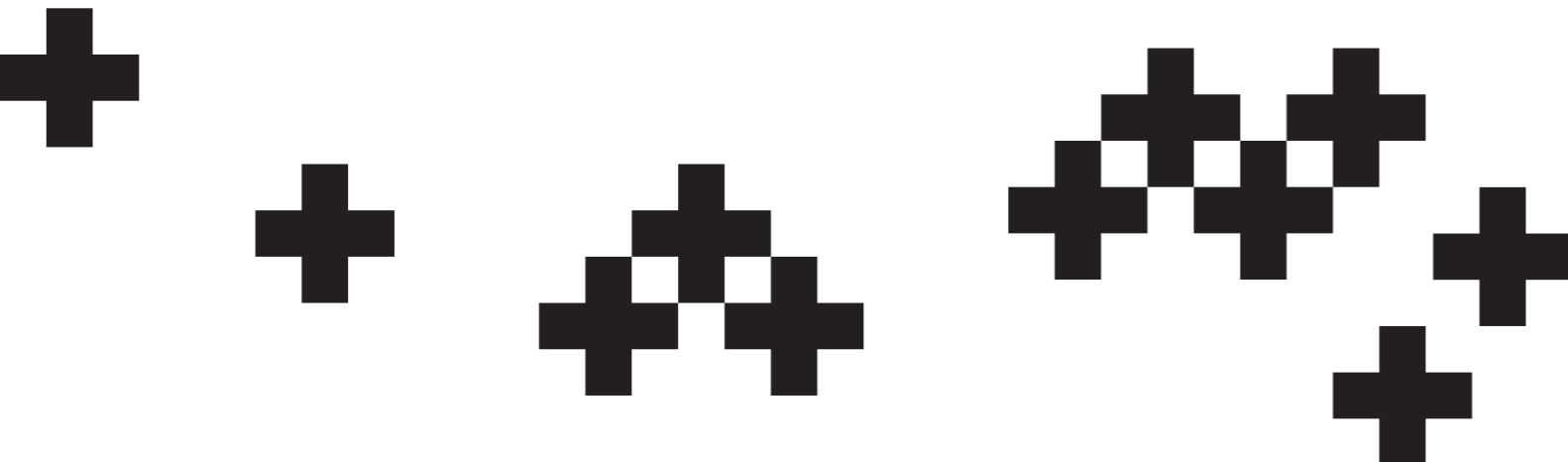
We also continue to prioritise learners with care experience for hardship and discretionary funding. This funding can be paid directly to our residence services to help prevent the accumulation of debt. In addition, we meet regularly with the funding team to review applications from learners with care experience that may have stalled due to challenges in obtaining evidence. In such cases, we collaborate with external partners to expedite these applications and ensure timely support for our students.

The Promise in Progress

We have established a new monitoring system with the UHI residencies team to ensure any learner with experience of care who defaults on their rent payment is flagged at the earliest point and offered early financial support to prevent them from falling into debt. This new system is in its infancy and needs to be further embedded with the support of the UHI finance and residencies teams.

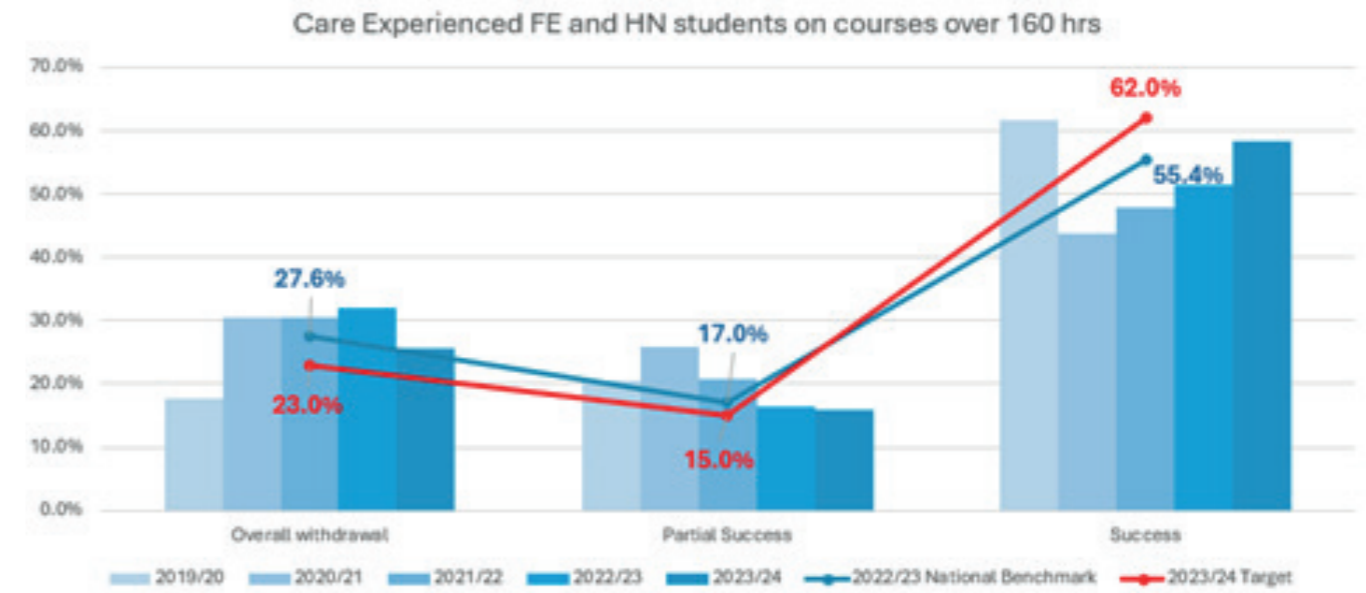
We are aware we have further work to do to ensure our Funding team, and wider relevant teams, have clarity around the SFC Bursary Guidance and in particular, the duration of bursary support available to learners with experience of care. This will help to ensure that no learner runs out of funding to support the pace of their onward progression and any knowledge and skills gaps arising from their compulsory education are taken account of.

Similarly, we have further work to do with all learners with care experience to make sure they are aware of, and can readily access, an additional year of FE funding to allow for a repeat year at the same SCQF level and to support greater flexibility of choice over their learning.



Impact of our Work

Our work to date on our Promise Plan has led to significant positive impacts on our learner retention and outcomes. Across FE and HN provision (over 160 hrs) in AY 23/24, outcomes improved by 6.8% for learners with care experience. This has largely been due to an improvement in learner retention and a reduction in partial success. Overall, this places UHI Inverness outcomes at 58.3%, +2.9% above the latest published sector benchmark.



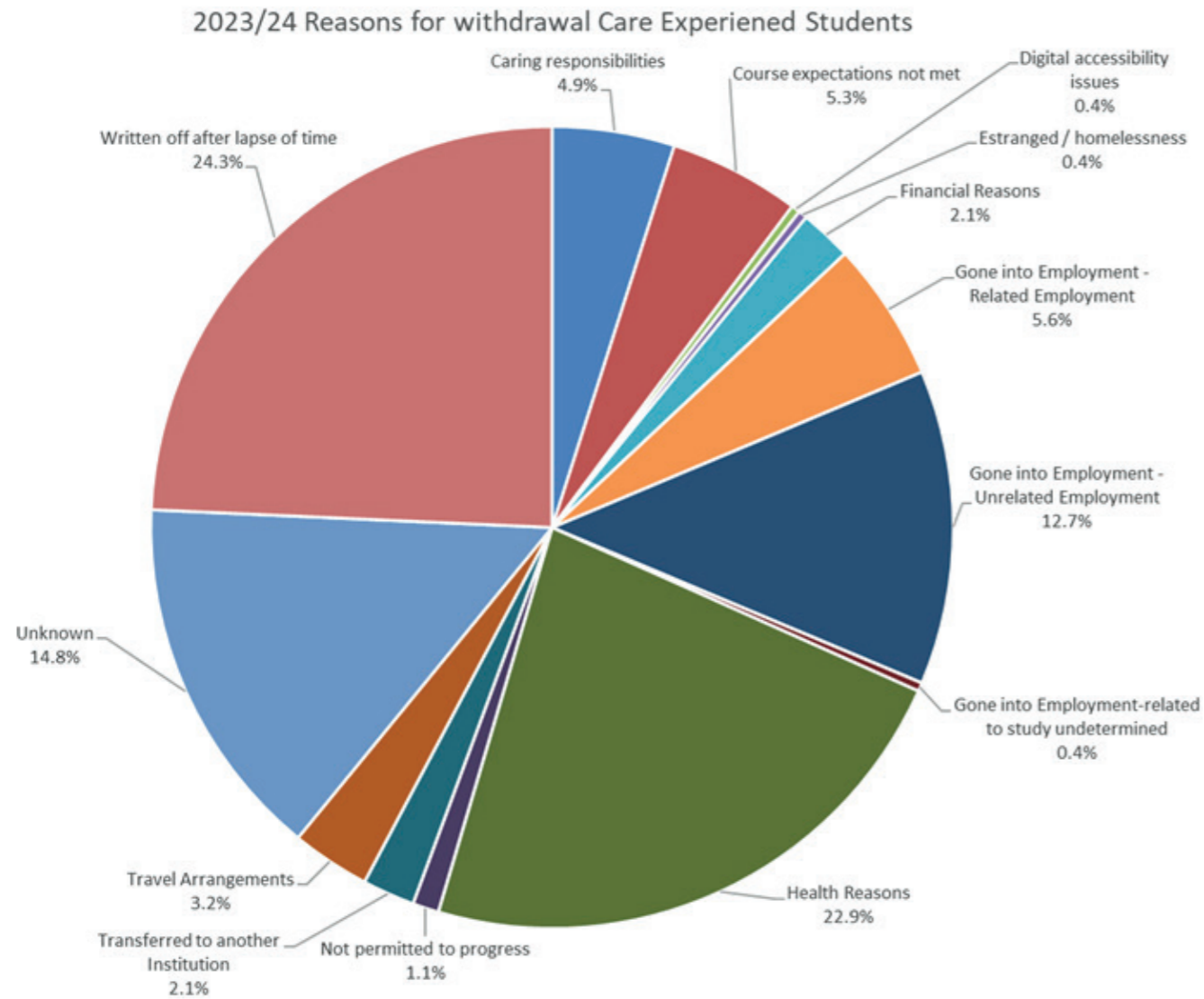
“I now often have care experienced students in my classroom, and I empathise with everything they are coping with. It’s hard enough being a teenager or young person, never mind dealing with being care experienced too and I think UHI Inverness does an amazing job supporting students.”

Tracy Kennedy, the Depute Curriculum Leader of Arts, Drama and Humanities at UHI Inverness



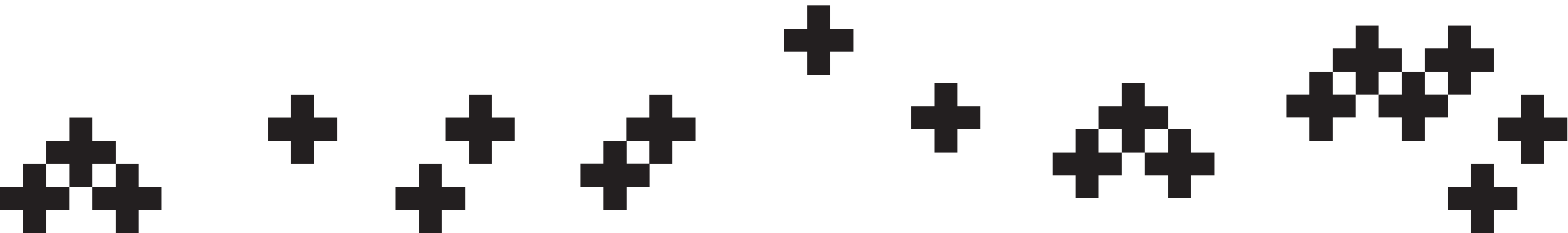
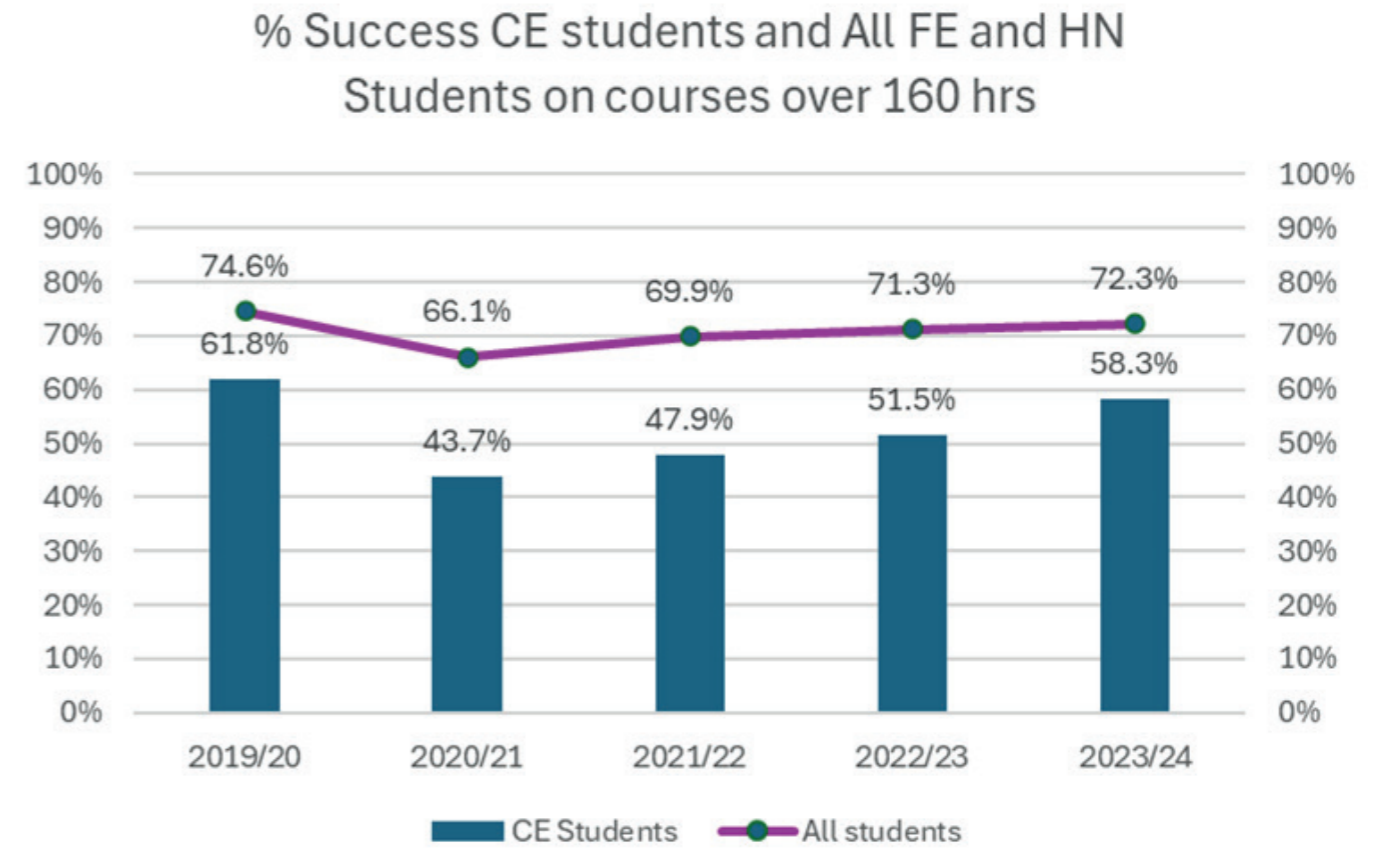
Reasons for Withdrawal

An analysis of the reasons for withdrawal show that a high proportion of learners with care experience withdraw due to health reasons but a large proportion also withdrawn for unknown reasons/withdrawal written off. Our future work will give greater focus to ascertaining the reasons for withdrawal where they are not known and identify any significant differences between learners with care experience and their non-care peers.




Closing the Gap

As well as an improvement in successful outcomes, there has also been a reduction in the outcomes gap between all learners and those with care experience in AY 23/24. The gap has reduced by 5.8% since the previous AY. We are pleased the outcomes gap has continued to narrow since its peak in AY 20/21, but we are acutely aware of the continued disparity in the outcomes of learners with care experience which we will continue to address in the final year of our 2023-26 plan.





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