

Welcome to the November **Action on Access eBulletin**.

What is happening now in the sector? We are still in National Care Leavers' Month for the whole of November with its theme of 'Rising as Me: Overcoming challenges, transforming and finding your identity.' You can see the information [here](#). We were pleased that Denise Rawls, Executive Director NNECL, the Network for the Education of Care Leavers, contributed one of the Guest Articles in last month's edition of our eBulletin in anticipation of National Care Leavers' Month (the other excellent article delineated Professor Liz Thomas' interesting research on commuting students). It was my pleasure on Monday to attend the London Canal Museum for NNECL's annual conference which was really informative; at times moving hearing students' stories. It was remarkably well-attended. There, we heard of the NNECL milestone that the 50th University had been awarded its Quality Mark in recognition of the progress and plans to improve care-experienced student experience and outcomes. It was awarded to the University of Cambridge.

Incidentally, more information about the NNECL Quality Mark and the other 49 holders can be found here: www.nnecl.org/pages/nnecl-quality-mark

More information on the support available to students at Cambridge who are care-experienced or estranged from family: [Support for care-experienced and estranged students | Undergraduate Study](#) here.

This month our Guest Article comes from Uni Connect Go Higher West Yorkshire. They proudly describe their work with estranged students - the excellent, evolved student support networking and training work across their partnership including their new collaborative Estranged Students Pledge. In the article also they draw your attention to [Estranged Students Solidarity Week](#), 'Invisible no more' commencing 24 November.

This month's **eBulletin** is another monstrous issue - at 53 pages - stuffed full of comment, information, resources, conferences and vacancies. From feedback received, I am confident that this length of eBulletin does not present a problem for you, however, listening to your advice, in future editions, we will make the Contents list more user-friendly and navigable. As always, we have included many contributions received from our subscribing members. It was heart-warming to recently receive this testimonial ... "*I told an ex-colleague of mine that I had been emailing you and she considers you (as does everyone I know in the WP sphere) as a celebrity of the sector!*" OK, celebrity may be a bit over the top but it shows the value that our Network members receive from us.

This **eBulletin** brings to your attention two very recent important policy and strategy documents. First, the Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (and I have added several commentaries and interpretations on its potential impact on and importance for Higher Education). The second is the Office for Students' 2025-2030 Strategy published yesterday (how up to the moment is that?) which will focus on three areas of priority: quality; student experience and support; and sector resilience. There will be a strong focus on ensuring that students receive a high-quality education and get the experiences they have been promised. The OfS also expect all institutions to possess the developed and effective governance needed to navigate successfully increased financial and strategic risk. It is gratifying to see that "*quality of opportunity will be embedded at every level of the OfS' work with an aim that students from all backgrounds can reap the benefits higher education can bring.*" In other OfS news, John Blake's four years as Director of Fair Access and Participation are coming to an end. End of an era. See the item below.

This month's eBulletin strongly features: skills; vocational and apprenticeship qualifications; student employability; tertiary collaboration; mergers and shared services; Lifelong Learning; and international and transnational HE. This not only as a consequence of the curriculum reform promised in the White Paper but also the slew of 2025 legislative and policy announcements from this Government raising questions, problems and solutions for the future direction of UK's Higher Education. These issues indicate and reflect on the manner in which HE is, and must be, responding to current winds of change.

The Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper curriculum reforms are the latest manifestation of the strength and direction of those winds of change. This direction is reflected in the title: "Education AND Skills." The reforms should be considered and judged in the light of:

- the Education Secretary's primary focus on 16-19, on NEETs and not HE
- the Minister for Skills' dual role across the DfE and DWP
- the launch of Skills England
- the tightening/stability of University and College HE finances
- the changing directions of Government Education funding, e.g. landmark package of reforms £800M extra funding for 16–19 Year olds
- the June Spending Review
- fund-reducing Grant letter to the Office for Students.

Please share this **eBulletin** with colleagues in your institution or organisation, any of whom may join our **AonA Network** by registering for free [here](#). **Or, even better,** share it with colleagues in other Universities, Colleges or in third sector Stakeholder organisations that you know who may not yet be subscribed to the **AonA Information Hub and Email Briefing Service**. They can now read an **eBulletin taster Editorial** available each month on the *AonA* website.

And to reiterate, I will be changing up and refreshing the Contents List for the next eBulletin.

~~ Andrew