

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Support for those who have been in care should extend to further education

The recent move by Scotland's universities to guarantee a place and associated supports for care-experienced people is to be greatly welcomed. It aims to widen access to higher education by taking into account the adverse challenges that many in this position face while growing up. However, is this enough to attract greater numbers down this route of education and subsequent employment?

Both existing and proposed support relating to accommodation, finance and mentoring is admirable and welcome. However, perhaps the issue requiring more focus and attention is taking those who are care-experienced to the point where they feel willing and, more importantly, able to apply to university.

For many care-experienced young people, the very notion of university can trigger feelings from personal inadequacy and anxiety to bewilderment at the thought of someone suggesting such a thing. The latest information suggests that in 2016-17 just 335 students who had experience of care went to university, reinforcing the fact that entry requirements are not the only barrier.

As a sector of care workers and, more importantly, corporate parents, we should be embracing this policy and accepting the challenge of shifting the perceptions that care-experienced young people have, where attending university is some-

Gary Darroch looks at the ongoing efforts to understand the needs of such young people and also shift perceptions about their capabilities

how beyond their ability or outside of their life parameters, which are often dictated by family and community experiences.

Most young people who enter our care have endured some form of traumatic event and require additional, and often extensive, social, emotional and behavioural support. This often includes the support of mental health professionals and educational psychologists in order to support the multi-agency care plan required to effectively care for each young individual and help them make sense of their world and cope with future hurdles.

While society as a whole is considerably more educated and understanding of those young people who require to be looked after, there are still often generalisations forwarded about 'bad kids' and their life chances being minimal. Perhaps even more frightening is that statistics for those who are care-experienced can almost support these stereotypes, regardless of how much those in the childcare sector balk at such stances.

The latest Who Cares? Scotland

statistics demonstrate that almost 33 per cent of the adult prison population and 6 per cent of homeless are care-experienced. However, these figures rely on self-identification, thus practitioners estimate the actual figures to be closer to 50 per cent and 40 per cent respectively (homeless figures based on those who actually apply for homeless support and self-identify as care-experienced).

The drive and commitment by Scotland's universities to widen access was affirmed in the Blueprint for Fairness published by the Scottish Government in March 2016. This highlighted contextualised admissions and year-round support combined with accommodation and mentoring programmes.

Nevertheless, Holyrood magazine and TES reported that last year only 4.5 per cent of care-experienced school leavers enrolled on a higher education course, compared to 41 per cent of non-care experienced school leavers, suggesting something has not yet clicked.

To allow this plan to be a success and ultimately enhance the lives



↑ For many care-experienced young people, the notion of going to university can

of thousands of future care-experienced young people and mature students, it must be approached from both sides.

Firstly, the framework and system for attraction, admittance and support throughout their time at university must be in place to help overcome barriers and sustain drive and confidence in completing their studies. Secondly, and most importantly, there needs to be a societal

shift where a genuine belief that access to university should be fair is developed so that any young person or adult has the potential to thrive and realise their own potential having the appropriate supports around them, regardless of their circumstances.

These supports should be all encompassing and provided through care, health and education systems, allowing those affected by adverse childhood experiences to develop

trigger feelings of personal inadequacy and anxiety, and they often need a network of support to meet their needs

their own self-worth, resilience and confidence.

By reaching a common ground where care-experienced people are supported to a desire and capability or even just aspiration to apply to university, and are met with a welcoming, accessible and supportive higher education establishment at the earliest possible juncture, we can establish an appropriate plan to allow them to achieve their goals whilst tak-

ing into account both care and education needs. As a sector, and more widely as a society, we should be encouraging all children and young people, regardless of background and circumstance, to aim high in all aspects of their lives by offering the appropriate support to help them get there.

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Oh, the
humanity
– are we in
danger of
losing it by
melding man
and machine?

Dr Calum MacKellar
looks at the ethics of linking
computers to the brain

A new biotechnological revolution is just about to begin in which electrodes implanted into the brain, or attached onto the skull of a person will enable them to directly control a computer. This is being examined in the context of new therapies to improve functional capabilities of individuals with disability, though these interfaces are also being considered for gaming and even in the military.

But as a result of these new brain-computer interfaces, it would also be possible to plug the human mind directly into cyberspace, giving rise to a new discipline examining the ethical consequences of such interactions called cyberneuroethics.

This seeks to appraise all the possible risks as well as advantages

of such interfaces. For example, one of the topics being considered is whether the clear boundaries of the human species can remain with such technology. Indeed, society is increasingly becoming uncertain about where the exact limits of humanity should be considered.

This means that such interfaces may challenge previous notions of human nature and how many human functions can be substituted or even enhanced by technical devices before aspects of humanity are lost. Since no definition of a human being exists, it will always be difficult to decide when, for instance, a partly human cyborg is not a human being which will have important consequences in many areas, such as in law.

Other ethical challenges also arise

in the way the new technology may be used. For example, current knowledge of the brain, and how it works, is not sufficient to enable a person's thoughts to be 'read', in any significant way. But this does not mean that new developments are not being considered where 'mind reading' could become a reality. In the future, it may even be possible for human brains to communicate directly through wifi – a form of telepathy.

But, if this happens, privacy will become important in the context of the kinds of relationships or interactions a person may have with other people. This is because every individual manages relationships with other persons through selective disclosure of information, with any breaches in this management

having the potential to undermine confidence in the system being used.

Privacy also involves protecting persons from being controlled by others since having knowledge and information about certain persons (lack of privacy) can be associated with having a certain amount of power over them. There may even be a risk of mind-hacking or 'brain-jacking' in which an individual may gain complete control over the mind of another person without his or her consent.

A further example of the risks arising from a direct interaction between a mind and cyberspace is in network intelligence, whereby the development of such interfaces could eventually enable the combination, in some way, of the intelli-

gence but also the identity of a multiple number of persons. In other words, all the different identities of persons in cyberspace could eventually combine to form just one new super-identity (a kind of hive-mind). However, this then raises questions relating to the very existence of the previous individualities. Would they have disappeared out of existence and, if so, would this be a form of cyberdeath?

While there is a lot to welcome in the development of brain-computer and mind-cyberspace interfaces, it is also true that human bodies and brains are beginning to be seen as things to master, take control over, redesign and enhance according to humanity's own desires. In this regard, it should be recognised that

any influence of technology on the human brain goes to the very core of who a person is in society.

Careful and prudent discussions in cyberneuroethics are, therefore, necessary for humanity to protect itself from losing its humanity. This means that society must remain vigilant in the face of future prospects while trying to understand why it wants a different future from the present and, if it does, what kind of future it really wants.

In short, society now has a choice of standing by and seeing what happens or considering in which direction it would be beneficial to go. Are these interfaces good, bad, inevitable or to be avoided at all cost? How would cyberneuroethics impact upon legislation, education, freedom, and on

