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Support for care leavers

Summary

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Summary

This paper provides an overview of the UK Government's policies to support care leavers in key areas.

It primarily focuses on England but includes some information on devolved policies. The British Academy paper, [Young People leaving care: A four nations perspective](#) (November 2019), provides a short comparative overview of policy across the UK.

Who are care leavers?

Care leavers are young people aged over 16 leaving authority care. Support for younger children moving into and out of care, or leaving care through adoption or other routes, is not considered in detail in this briefing.

As noted in the Department for Education's [Keep on Caring](#), care leavers generally experience worse outcomes than their peers across a number of indicators. The National Audit Office's [Care leavers' transition to adulthood](#) (2015) identified poorer life outcomes as a "longstanding problem" and one whose "public cost [...] is likely to be high", giving rise to additional costs in mental health, employment, education, policing and justice services.

UK Government policy

The Coalition Government published its [Care leaver strategy](#) in 2013 which identified education, employment, financial support, health, housing, the justice system, and ongoing support as areas where care leavers needed greater provision. In 2016, the UK Government published [Keep on caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence](#), which set out additional commitments to "put care leavers first".

Specific programmes include the [funding for Social Impact Bond-backed projects](#) for care leavers, targeted at Bristol, Sheffield and Lewisham, the [Care Leavers' Apprenticeship Bursary](#) to provide financial support, and support to prevent [rough sleeping](#).

In October 2018, the UK Government launched the [Care Leaver Covenant](#) for England. This allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support, through work experience, apprenticeships and free or discounted goods and services.

A ministerial Care Leaver Covenant Board was [established](#) in October 2019 to address key barriers facing care leavers and to encourage joint working across the UK Government.

Summary of support for care leavers in England

When a young person [leaves care](#), a local authority must appoint a Personal Adviser (PA) to help them plan for their futures. PA support is available for all care leavers to age 25. Local authorities must also publish a “local offer” for care leavers, which sets out their legal entitlements, as well as any discretionary support the authority provides.

Authorities since 2014 have been required to provide financial support to enable young people in foster care to remain living with their former foster family to age 21 in a [“Staying Put”](#) arrangement.

Authorities should also provide a £2,000 bursary to care leavers who attend university and are required to provide financial support to help care leavers engage in education, employment and training; and a leaving care grant (£2,000) to help the young person furnish their first home.

1 Strategies and funding

1.1 Who are care leavers?

Unless otherwise stated, a care leaver is defined in this briefing as a young person aged 16-25 who is/was “looked after” by a local authority on or after their 16th birthday. Support for younger children moving out of care (for example to return home to their parents or through adoption) is not considered in detail in this briefing.

Local authorities provide information about previously looked after children. This covers children looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including some time after their 16th birthday.¹ In 2019/20, there were 43,000 care leavers in England now aged 17 to 21, 62% of which were male.

- 480 care leavers were 17 years old in 2019/20, 6% of which were in semi-independent transitional accommodation.
- 11,220 were aged 18, with 30% in semi-independent transitional accommodation, and 11% were living independently.
- 31,260 were aged 19 to 21, with 15% in semi-independent transitional accommodation, and 35% living independently.²

The definition of a “looked after child”

A child is classed as a “looked after child” in the following circumstances:

- They are in the care of a local authority pursuant to a care order made by the court (including interim care orders). A local authority has (often shared) parental responsibility for the child and a “right and duty to provide accommodation.”
- They have been provided with accommodation by a local authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (with the voluntary agreement of the child’s parents – no court order is required). The child is not in care and the local authority does not have parental responsibility for them. The authority “may, and sometimes must, provide accommodation but, save in certain circumstances, has no right to do so.”³

¹ DfE, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), 10 December 2020

² DfE, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), 10 December 2020, table F1

³ Hershman and McFarlane, *Children Law and Practice*, para F146.

1.2

Children Commissioner’s “Ten Asks”

There is an identified issue of care leavers generally experiencing worse outcomes than their peers who have not been in care. In October 2020, The Children’s Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, published [“Ten Asks for care leavers”](#). A brief list, including justifications cited by the Commissioner is given below:

1. Pay care leavers the higher rate of Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit, from their 18th birthday, because “care leavers under 25 are less likely than other children to have support networks” to help with day-to-day costs.
2. Stop benefit sanctions for care leavers, as “care leavers are five times more likely to be sanctioned than other claimants, and less likely to appeal their sanction.”⁴
3. Exempt all care leavers from council tax. The Commissioner said many authorities had already done this.
4. Exempt care leavers from the shared accommodation rate of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit until 25. Budget 2020 announced this would be implemented from October 2023. The implementation date was subsequently moved forward to June 2021 (see section 3.5).
5. All care leavers to have a decent home: “Access to housing is one of the things that care leavers most frequently call [the Commissioner’s] Help at Hand service about.”
6. Enable all care leavers to continue to live with carers, by extending funding for the “Staying close” scheme to avoid loneliness, isolation or exploitation.
7. University entry requirements should be lowered for care leavers, with appropriate accommodation and financial support for all those pursuing higher education. The Commissioner said some universities were already making “contextual offers” and this would address barriers to participation.
8. All public bodies offering apprenticeships should be required to interview any care leavers who apply for apprenticeships and meet the basic criteria, because “39% of 19 to 21 year old care leavers are [Not in employment, education or training] compared to 13% of all 18 to 24 year olds”
9. Improved mental health support as “care leavers are likely to have experienced trauma and adversity in their lives”.

⁴ [Written evidence from the Children’s Society \(ANC0053\) to the Work and Pensions Committee](#), May 2018, para 26

10. Improved local offers for care leavers, including through authorities offering free local travel, driving lessons, business discounts and acting as a guarantor for accommodation.⁵

The Children's Services Development Group's [Designation unknown: Improving transitions for care leavers and young people with special education needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#) (February 2020) made similar recommendations regarding improved local support for care leavers.

In addition, whilst welcoming the Government's commitment to support care leavers, the Group argued that until there was a "duty or mandate [for] specific actions [...] the changes these vulnerable young people need will not be realised". Care leavers, the report argued, "are expected to become independent, self-sufficient adults much earlier than their non-care experienced peers" but lacked the support systems to do this.⁶

1.3

Government Strategies 2013 to 2018

The 2013 Strategy

In October 2013, the then-Coalition Government published the [Care leaver strategy](#). The Strategy emphasised the need for greater support for care leavers transitioning into independent adulthood as they leave home at a younger age and have more abrupt transitions to adulthood than their peers.⁷

It noted care leavers encounter a range of services including housing, health, employment, and education, yet they are "often not recognised as a priority group for services". The Strategy suggested improved support from these services was "crucial to improving the lives of this vulnerable group of people".⁸

The Strategy identified education, employment, financial support, health, housing, the justice system, and ongoing support as [areas where care leavers needed greater support](#). The [One year on progress update](#) (2014) said the Government had implemented some of the actions in the 2013 strategy.⁹ A care leavers champion was appointed in the Ministry of Justice.¹⁰

The NAO's [Care Leavers' transition to adulthood](#) (2015) welcomed the strategy but said it had not been established effectively.¹¹ It said "Staying Put" (offering

⁵ Children's Commissioner, [10 asks for care leavers](#), 29 October 2020

⁶ Child Support Development Group, [Destination unknown: Improving transitions for care leavers and young people with special educational needs and disabilities](#), February 2020, pp13, 18

⁷ UK Government, [Care Leaver Strategy. A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care](#), October 2013, p4

⁸ [Ibid](#), p4

⁹ UK Government, [Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update](#), October 2014, pp3, 8

¹⁰ [Ibid](#), p14

¹¹ NAO, [Care leavers' transition to adulthood](#), 2015, p8

care leavers the opportunity to stay with their former foster carers until they are 21 if they and their foster carers agree) had been generally welcomed by local authorities, though noted financial barriers to its implementation.¹²

DfE funding for New Belongings projects

From 2013 to 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) provided funding to the Care Leavers' Foundation charity, to run the New Belongings (NB) programme. This was in response to continuing evidence of poor outcomes for many young people leaving care and the variability in service provision. A 2016 [evaluation](#) of the programme found it had some impacts:

The overall reach of the programme was limited to only a proportion of the potential number of care leavers in each LA [Local Authority] and generally NB LAs had not yet stretched far enough to engage all necessary partners and the local community. That said, the evaluation found that overall, and within the limited timeframe and resources, there was evidence of impact at both the service level and at the individual level and that participation in the NB programme had brought tangible benefits to most participating LAs.¹³

The 2016 Strategy

The UK Government published [Keep on caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence](#) in July 2016. Its commitments included:

Piloting 'Staying Close' – a variant of Staying Put for those leaving residential care;¹⁴ and testing out alternative models of delivery for leaving care services through the use of Trusts, Mutuals and other arrangements. It gives a clear commitment to test payment-by-results approaches, and commits the government to create the first care leaver-specific Social Impact Bond.¹⁵

Implementation Adviser reports

The National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, has published two reports on progress made since October 2017.

The [2018 report](#) concluded the requirement to develop a local offer to care leavers had encouraged councils to "to work more closely with key partner agencies and stakeholders". Future ambitions identified for authorities included tackling homelessness and supporting employment, education and training.¹⁶

¹² [Ibid](#), p29

¹³ J. Dixon and C. Baker for DfE, [NB: An evaluation](#), October 2016, pp8, 16

¹⁴ This was in response to Sir Martin Narey's [Independent Review of children's residential care](#), July 2016

¹⁵ UK Government, [Keep on caring: Supporting young people from care to independence](#), July 2016, p6

¹⁶ DfE, [National implementation adviser for care leavers' first year report, October 2017 to October 2018](#), December 2018, pp5, 21

The [2020 report](#) welcomed the continuation of the Staying Close pilot and Care Leaver Social Impact Bonds as means to tackle isolation and homelessness, and support education and employment.¹⁷ The Adviser said greater support was required from NHS, Police, educational institutions and employers through the Care Leaver Covenant (see below)¹⁸ and described additional pressures on local authorities.

Since lockdown, local authorities have reported a “much higher proportion of care leavers aged 22-25 are taking up the offer of Personal Adviser support to age 25”. Further, in almost all local authorities visited, Mark Riddell said he was “unable to see a specific offer to care leavers from local health services that went beyond universal/public health services [...] leaving them with unmet mental health needs”.¹⁹

The Care Leaver Covenant

In October 2018, then-Education Minister Nadhim Zahawi launched the [Care Leaver Covenant](#) for England, to aid care leavers’ transition to independence. It was first announced in 2016.²⁰

The Covenant allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support through work experience, apprenticeships and free or discounted goods and services. Details of commitments can be found at: [Care Leaver Covenant](#) (October 2018).

The [announcement](#) included an ambition to create 1,000 internships for care leavers in the first three years and up to 10,000 internships over the following ten years.²¹

At November 2020, 155 organisations had signed the Covenant, including public bodies, charities and businesses.²²

1.4

Devolved Strategies and reviews

Wales

The Programme for Government, [Taking Wales Forward](#) (2016) committed the Welsh Government to “examine ways of ensuring children in care enjoy the same life chances as other children and if necessary reform the way they are looked after”.²³ The strategy, [Prosperity for All](#) (2017) further committed to

¹⁷ DfE, [National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers’ second report: The decade of the care leaver](#), November 2020, pp7-8

¹⁸ [Ibid](#), p9

¹⁹ [Ibid](#), p28

²⁰ UK Government, [Care Leaver Strategy. A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care](#), October 2013, p28

²¹ DfE, [Children and Families Minister launches Care Leaver Covenant](#), 26 October 2018

²² PQ 91946 [on [Care Leavers](#)], 13 November 2020

²³ Welsh Government, [Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021](#), 2016, p10

support “young care leavers [who] need intensive support at this key transitional stage of their lives [into adulthood], with attaining appropriate skills, improving employability, and access to safe, secure homes.”²⁴

The [Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving outcomes of children](#) assesses provision and publishes research on improving outcomes to children in care.²⁵

The Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee in a 2018 [report](#) concluded “the outcomes that public services deliver for care experienced children must be improved” and funding should be better targeted.²⁶ The Welsh Government accepted the majority of the Committee’s recommendations.²⁷

In 2018, the Welsh Children’s Commissioner published [Hidden Ambitions- A follow up report on local authorities’ progress and good practice in support care leavers](#), which assessed support for education/training, housing and the effectiveness of “corporate parenting”.

The Care Inspectorate Wales report, [National overview report in relation to care experienced children and young people](#) (2019) assesses local authority support and outcomes for care experienced children.

Scotland

The A Way Home Scotland Coalition, funded by the Scottish Government, produced [eight recommendations](#) regarding care leavers and their housing pathways in November 2019. These included streamlining and better communicating the financial support available to care leavers.²⁸ The Scottish Government said it would seek to “ensure that we meet the ambitions set out in this report.”²⁹

The Independent Care Review’s [Reports on care experienced children and adults](#) (2020) set out a ten-year plan to support children in care and 80 recommendations, including the development of new guidance and a legislative framework.³⁰ The review was commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2017.³¹

²⁴ Welsh Government, [Prosperity for all: The national strategy](#), 2017, p25

²⁵ Ministerial Advisory Group, [Improving outcomes for children already living in care](#), October 2019

²⁶ Public Accounts Committee, [Care experienced young children and young people](#), November 2018, pp5-9

²⁷ Welsh Government, [Response to Public Accounts Committee recommendations into the costs and value for money of public services for care experienced children and young people](#), January 2019

²⁸ Scottish Government, A Way Home Scotland and Centre for Excellence for Children’s Care and Protection, [Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: Improving care leavers housing pathways](#), November 2019, p30

²⁹ Scottish Government, [Greater protection for care leavers welcomed](#), 12 November 2019

³⁰ Independent Care Review, [The rules](#) and [The Plan](#).

³¹ Scottish Government, [Launch of the Independent Care Review](#), May 2017

In [response](#) to its reports, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said the Scottish Government would seek to present a delivery plan for the recommendations.³² The Promise team is responsible for translating the findings of the Care Review into Plan 21-24. Plan 21-24 is the first of 3 plans and was published in March 2021:

It sets a series of outcomes that must be fulfilled by 2024. One of the five foundations of The Promise is ‘Scaffolding’ and it identifies that ‘children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed’.³³

The Plan 21-24 was published in March 2021. In June 2021, [The Promise Change Programme](#) was published. It details the requirement for investment in the lives of children and families to be considered strategically and holistically in the context of their experiences.³⁴

Northern Ireland

In 2009, the Northern Ireland Executive launched [Care Matters](#). This said it was incumbent on all Departments and agencies to co-operate and take action to improve the life experiences of those leaving care.³⁵

A new strategy, [Improving children’s lives](#), was subject to consultation in 2018.³⁶ [A Life Deserved: “Caring” for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#) was published in February 2021. The strategy “aims to improve the well-being of children and young people, who are already in care, at risk of entering care and those children and young people who have recently left care.”³⁷

1.5

Impact of Covid-19

During the coronavirus pandemic, Government restrictions meant some of the contact and support available for care leavers had to change or temporarily stop. Various surveys and reports have found that care leavers have had trouble accessing accommodation and have been impacted by loneliness and the increasing cost of bills.

³² Scottish Government, [Report of Independent Care Review: First Minister’s Speech](#), 5 February 2020

³³ Scottish Government, [Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund: national operational guidance](#) [accessed 20 October 2021]

³⁴ Scottish Government, [Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund: national operational guidance](#) [accessed 20 October 2021]

³⁵ NI Department of Health, [Care matters in Northern Ireland](#); Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, [Care matters in Northern Ireland- a bridge to a better future](#), March 2007

³⁶ Department of Health and Department of Education, [Strategy for looked after children: Improving children’s lives](#), 30 April 2018

³⁷ Northern Ireland Executive, [New Strategy for care-experienced children and young people published](#) (accessed 20 October 2021)

Surveys by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)³⁸, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers³⁹ and Ofsted⁴⁰ all found care leavers reported some problems in finding appropriate accommodation during the pandemic. Ofsted reported:

...a small number of care leavers lost college places, apprenticeships and jobs. Often, they were helped by personal advisers back into full-time employment and training.⁴¹

Increasing pressures on the mental health of care leavers were identified during the pandemic. The National Implementation Advisor raised concerns regarding [a greater complexity of mental health needs](#)⁴² and research by the University of Bedfordshire found every local authority surveyed said mental health support for care leavers was “a pressing issue”. In some local authorities, there had been a rise in complex mental health needs.⁴³

The University of Bedfordshire research also found the nature and extent of poverty in care leavers’ lives had been exacerbated during the pandemic such as “loss of work, increased heating bills, higher food bills due to shortages of some goods and greater reliance on local corner shops”.⁴⁴ The Advisor reported concerns about access to food and accommodation during the pandemic.⁴⁵

Ofsted found care leavers’ Personal Advisers had shown “strong commitment” to them during the pandemic, and “most” experienced regular contact, allowing “many care leavers [to] continue [...] to make progress and live successfully independently”.⁴⁶

³⁸ Surveyed experiences of children’s social care in 15 local authorities; NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce and The Policy Institute, King’s College London, [Managing through COVID-19: the experiences of children’s social care in 15 English local authorities](#), July 2020

³⁹ Based on conversations with 20 local authorities; DfE, [National Implementation Adviser For Care Leavers’ second report: The decade of the care leaver](#), November 2020

⁴⁰ Based on assurance visits to 284 social care providers in 11 local authorities; Ofsted, [Briefing on children’s social care providers, October 2020](#), November 2020

⁴¹ Ofsted, [Briefing on children’s social care providers, October 2020](#), November 2020, p11

⁴² DfE, [National Implementation Adviser For Care Leavers’ second report: The decade of the care leaver](#), November 2020, pp25-6

⁴³ University of Bedfordshire, [Care leavers, Covid-19 and the Transition from Care \(CCTC study\): Research Briefing One](#), May 2021, p2-3

⁴⁴ University of Bedfordshire, [Care leavers, Covid-19 and the Transition from Care \(CCTC study\): Research Briefing One](#), May 2021, p2-3

⁴⁵ DfE, [National Implementation Adviser For Care Leavers’ second report: The decade of the care leaver](#), November 2020, pp25-6

⁴⁶ Ofsted, [Briefing on children’s social care providers, October 2020](#), November 2020, p2

2 Social services

Social care for care leavers is a devolved matter. Section 2.10 provides brief information on policies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

2.1 National policy developments: overview

Before 2000, there was no statutory framework in place for care leavers; instead, each local authority determined the level of support provided. The DfE argued in 2016 this meant “many care leavers received only minimal assistance”.⁴⁷

Over the last 20 years, legislation has mandated greater support for care leavers, including:

- The [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) which introduced requirements for local authorities to: “assess the needs of the young person once they left care; appoint a Personal Adviser for them; and develop a pathway plan. This support was available to care leavers up to age 18, or to age 21 if the young person was in education”.⁴⁸
- The [Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#) required local authorities to provide assistance to care leavers in education (including a £2,000 bursary for those in higher education); and extended support from a Personal Adviser to age 21 for all care leavers; and to 25 if they remained in education.⁴⁹
- The [Children & Families Act 2014](#) introduced the “Staying Put” policy, requiring local authorities “to support young people to remain with their former foster carers to age 21 where both the young person and carer want the arrangement to continue”.⁵⁰
- The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) required local authorities to publish their local offer of support to young people leaving their care. The Act also:
 - introduced the corporate parenting principles for local authorities in respect of both looked after children and care leavers; and

⁴⁷ DfE, [Keep On Caring – Supporting Young People from Care to Independence](#), 2016, p9, para 1.1

⁴⁸ [Ibid](#), para 1.1

⁴⁹ DfE, [Keep On Caring – Supporting Young People from Care to Independence](#), 2016, para 1.2

⁵⁰ [Ibid](#), p9, para 1.3

- removed the requirement for certain care leavers to be in education and training to obtain support from a Personal Adviser and get other help from the local authority between 21 and 25 years of age.⁵¹

More detail on each of these policies is set out below.

Box 1: Categories of care leavers

There are various categories of care leavers based on when the young person was in care, how long for and their age. The duties owed to a particular care leaver depends on the category into which they fit.

Eligible child:

- aged 16 or 17;
- been looked after by Children’s Services for a period of 13 weeks since they were 14 (this does not have to be continuous). They will still be ‘eligible’ if the period of 13 weeks began after they turned 16; and
- they are still looked after.

Relevant child:

- aged 16 or 17; and are no longer looked after; and were previously an ‘eligible child’;

or

- are aged 16 or 17; and are not the subject of a care order and at the age of 16 they were detained or in hospital and immediately beforehand they had been looked after in the care system.⁵²

Former relevant child:

- aged 18-21 (or 18-25 if still in full-time education) and were previously an eligible or relevant child.⁵³

Qualifying Care leaver

- Aged 16-21 (or 16-25 if still in full-time education);
- looked after on or after their 16th birthday but no longer looked after;
- spent less than 13 weeks in care since their 14th birthday (ie do not fulfil criteria for eligible or relevant child).⁵⁴

⁵¹ [Explanatory notes to the Children and Social Work Act 2017](#), sections 1 and 3

⁵² Family Rights Group, [Support for young people leaving the care system](#), 15 December 2014, pp4–6.

⁵³ [Children Act 1989](#), as amended, section 23C.

⁵⁴ Children Law Advice, [Services for children leaving care](#), last accessed 15 October 2021.

Further detail is available on the website of Children Law Advice at: [Services for children leaving care](#).

2.2 Local Offers

Section 2 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) requires local authorities to publish information about:

- services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989;
- other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.⁵⁵
- The Act states that “services which may assist care leavers” for these purposes include “health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; [and] participation in society”.⁵⁶

The DfE subsequently said that the purpose of the local offer is to “set out in one place the full range of services that the whole of the LA [local authority] provides, which will be of benefit to care leavers [...] not just the support provided by the Children’s Services Department”. It also provided guidance on when the offer should include services provided by third party organisations.⁵⁷

Authorities were required to publish their local offers by 1 January 2019 at the latest, following consultation with young people. In terms of reviewing and, if necessary, updating the local offer, the DfE said that it would “expect the local offer to be reviewed every 2-3 years”, although this was not “prescriptive”.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The definition of care leavers for section 2 was set out in subsection 7 of the Act: Care leavers in respect of the local offer are defined as: ‘eligible children’; ‘relevant children’; ‘persons under 25 who are ‘former relevant children’; and those who qualify for advice and assistance under section 24 of the Children Act 1989 [i.e. those aged between 16 and 21 and subject, or previously subject, to a special guardianship order having previously been looked after by a local authority, or under 21 and at any time after reaching the age of sixteen but while still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered].

For definitions of the first three terms above, please see the Child Law Advice’s webpage, [Services for children leaving care](#).

⁵⁶ More detailed information on the provisions of the Act in respect of looked after children can be found in the Library briefing paper, [Children and Social Work \[HL\] Bill 121: analysis for Commons Report Stage](#).

⁵⁷ DfE, [Guidance on the corporate parenting principles, the local offer and extending Personal Adviser \(PA\) support to all care leavers to age 25 – Government consultation response](#), February 2018, p9; see also DfE, [Local offer guidance – Guidance for local authorities](#), February 2018.

⁵⁸ DfE, [Guidance on the corporate parenting principles, the local offer and extending Personal Adviser \(PA\) support to all care leavers to age 25 – Government consultation response](#), February 2018, p10.

In September 2021, a website was launched – [the Care Leaver Local Offer Website](#) – which allows users to compare support offered to care leavers by local authorities in England.⁵⁹

2.3 Personal Advisers (PAs) and pathway plans

Entitlement to a PA up to age 20

Since October 2001, local authorities have had a duty to provide certain care leavers with a Personal Adviser (PA).⁶⁰

When a former relevant child reaches age 18, the local authority is no longer required to provide them with a social worker to plan and co-ordinate their care. The authority must, however, appoint a PA, who will provide support:

The PA acts as a focal point for the young person, ensuring that they are provided with the practical and emotional support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood, either directly or through helping the young person to build a positive social network around them. All care leavers should know who their PA is and how to contact them. Throughout their transition to adulthood and independent life, care leavers should be able to rely on consistent support from their PA, who is the designated professional responsible for providing and/or co-ordinating the support that the young person needs. This includes taking responsibility for monitoring, reviewing and implementing the young person's pathway plan.⁶¹

For care leavers aged 18 to 21, there is a “proactive duty” on the authority to keep in touch:

For care leavers aged 18 to 20 there is a proactive duty on the local authority to keep in touch with care leavers (section 23C (2) of the Children Act 1989 Act), which does not apply to care leavers aged 21 or over (neither those who are already entitled to support because they are in education or training, nor those who will be covered by the new duty).⁶²

Entitlement to a PA for carer leavers aged 22-25

As cited in section 2.1, the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) allows, since April 2018, any care leaver aged up to 25– whether or not they are in

⁵⁹ Children & Young People Now, [COMPARISON SITE FOR CARE LEAVER OFFERS LAUNCHES](#), 29 September 2021.

⁶⁰ Section 3 of the [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#), as amended

⁶¹ DfE, [Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 – Statutory guidance for local authorities](#), February 2018, p7, para 13.

⁶² [Ibid](#), p6, para 8

education or training– to retain a PA if they wish. This also applies to individuals who turned 21 before the new duty was introduced in April 2018.⁶³

The duty requires authorities to make care leavers aware that they can continue to request PA support when they turn 21: “and on at least an annual basis thereafter. This applies regardless of whether a care leaver may have earlier declined the offer of PA support”.⁶⁴

The DfE does not necessarily expect local authorities to provide the same level of support to those aged 21 to 25, but states that the requirement to provide a PA to any care leaver under 25 “does however enable local authorities to respond positively to requests for support from care leavers aged 21-25 who may be continuing to struggle with the transition to independence and adult life”.⁶⁵

In May 2021, the DfE announced £12 million for local authorities to “continue to provide personal advisors to support care leavers up to the age of 25”.⁶⁶

Pathway plan

A pathway plan should include details about the kind of support that the young person might expect their PA to provide and address: eg information on housing options, benefit entitlements, support in finding employment, health, family contact and education.⁶⁷

Under the Children Act 1989, as amended by Section 3 of the [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) and Section 3 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#), plans should be prepared for all eligible children and continued for all relevant and former relevant children and remain a “live” document:

Each young person’s pathway plan will be based on and include their care plan and will set out the actions that must be taken by the responsible authority, the young person, their parents, their carers and the full range of agencies, so that each young person is provided with the services they need to enable them to achieve their aspirations and make a successful transition to adulthood. This plan must remain a “live document”, setting out the different services and how they will be provided to respond to the full range of the young person’s needs.

All relevant and former relevant children must have a pathway plan based on an up to date and thorough assessment of their needs.⁶⁸

⁶³ [Ibid](#), p8, para 15. Under the Children & Social Work Act 2017

⁶⁴ [Ibid](#), p13, para 27.

⁶⁵ [Ibid](#), p6, paras 8 and 10.

⁶⁶ DfE, [£51 million for councils to support care leavers](#), 24 May 2021.

⁶⁷ DfE, [The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers](#), January 2015, paras 3.28, 3.7

⁶⁸ [Ibid](#), paras 3.5–3.6

2.4

Staying Put

“Staying put” was introduced under the [Children and Families Act 2014](#), which came into force in May 2014.⁶⁹

It allows young people in foster care (subject to certain conditions)⁷⁰ to choose to remain with their former foster carers until they reach the age of 21, where this is what both parties want, unless the local authority considers the arrangement to be inconsistent with the welfare of the young person. In turn, carers continue to receive financial support.

Further information is found in the statutory guidance [Staying put: arrangements for care leavers aged 18 years and above](#), which was first issued in 2013. In 2020, the Government said it intended to update the guidance “as soon as possible”.⁷¹

In October 2019, the Government announced £10 million for “Staying Put”, to help create stable homes for care leavers as they become adults,⁷² In total, £33 million was allocated to local authorities to implement “Staying Put” in 2020/21.⁷³ In May 2021, the Government announced £33 million for “continued investment in ‘Staying Put’”.⁷⁴

Concerns about the financial impact of the Staying Put programme were raised in NAO and Public Account Committee reports in 2015.

The Education Select Committee (2017) [reported](#) that many young people were not taking up the option, and that further funding and promotion was needed. It also noted the potential knock-on impact on fostering: “by keeping care leavers with their carers past the age of 18, Staying Put also reduces the number of available places, further impacting capacity in the sector”.⁷⁵

In [response](#), the DfE called on authorities to engage “at an earlier stage” and said it would seek to share best practice.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) inserted new section 23CZA into the Children Act 1989.

⁷⁰ An “eligible child” for Staying Put is defined in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, as aged 16 or 17, still looked after, and has been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after s/he reached 14 and ended after s/he reached 16: DfE, [The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers](#), January 2015, p63, paras 7.21.

⁷¹ PQ 124269 [[Foster care: Care leavers](#)], 2 December 2020; DfE, DWP and HM Revenue and Customs, [Staying put: Arrangements for care leavers aged 18 years and above](#), May 2013

⁷² DfE, [Vital new support for young people leaving care](#), 23 October 2019; PQ 91946 [[Care Leavers](#)], 13 November 2020

⁷³ PQ 100445 [on [Care Leavers: Finance](#)], 16 October 2020

⁷⁴ Gavin Williamson MP and DfE, [£51 million for councils to support care leavers](#), 24 May 2021

⁷⁵ Education Select Committee, [Fostering](#), HC340, December 2017 paras 42-6

⁷⁶ DfE, [Fostering better outcomes: The Government response to the Education Select Committee report in fostering and Foster Care in England](#), Cm 9662, July 2018, p22

The [Fostering Network](#) in 2018 said that four years after the scheme had been introduced, “many young people still have to move out before they are ready”. Their survey of 903 foster carers found “in 44% of cases where Staying Put arrangements did not go ahead, it was because they were prevented by local policies and payments. More than half of these were prevented because the foster carer could not afford the drop in income”.⁷⁷

Action for Children’s [Giving care leavers the chance to stay: Staying Put six years on](#) (2020) called on the Government to continue to programme beyond 2020/21 and ring-fence funding in the long-term.⁷⁸ The DfE announced “over £33 million in the financial year 2021/22 to support implementation, an increase of approximately £10 million on the financial year 2019/20”.⁷⁹

Statistics on “staying put”

The DfE publishes [statistics](#) on care leavers aged between 19 and 21 years. Local authorities provide information about children who were previously looked after, who turned 17 to 21 in the year. These were children looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including some time after their 16th birthday.

- In 2019/20, the proportion of 19 and 20-year-olds who ceased to be looked after on their 18th birthday, and who were still living with their former foster carers (‘Staying Put’) was 28%, up from 26% in 2018/19 and from 23% in 2015/16.⁸⁰
- Of the 3,400 children who turned 18, 1,970 (58%) remained with their foster carers three months after their 18th birthday, slightly higher than the 2015/16 figure of 55%.⁸¹

2.5

Staying Close

In July 2016, the UK Government announced a “Staying Close” programme for those leaving residential care, as an alternative to the Staying Put arrangements for children in foster care.⁸²

The scheme enables young people previously in residential care “to live independently, in a location close to their children’s home with ongoing support from that home”.⁸³

⁷⁷ Fostering Network, [Staying put: An unfulfilled promise](#), November 2018, pp1,4

⁷⁸ Action for Children, [Giving care leavers the chance to stay: Staying Put six years on](#), October 2020, pp8-10

⁷⁹ PQ HL15271 [[Care Leavers: Social Services](#)], 29 April 2021

⁸⁰ DfE, [Looked after children statistics, Table F4](#), December 2020

⁸¹ DfE, [Looked after children statistics, Table F4](#), December 2020

⁸² [HCWS 57 4 July 2016](#)

⁸³ DfE, [Putting children first: Delivering our vision for excellent children’s social care](#), July 2016, para 59

The UK Government funded pilot projects in eight sites since 2018, with funding of around £6 million for 2018/19 and 2019/20.⁸⁴

In October 2019, the DfE announced £6 million in 2021/22 “to roll out Staying Close across the country.”⁸⁵ In March 2021, the DfE confirmed [£1.9 million in funding for local authorities](#) involved in the Staying Close pilot.⁸⁶

In April 2021, the Government said it was “committed to the national roll-out of Staying Close in the future.”⁸⁷ And in May 2021 it announced £3.6 million of funding to extending the “Staying Close” pilot.⁸⁸

An evaluation, [The Break Staying Close, Staying Connected Project](#) (August 2020) assessed how well the Break charity’s staying close project supported care leavers.

The researchers found “independent living skills had improved after 6 months” and “young people showed increased happiness with life over time, had better stability in their accommodation [...] and there was increased participation in activities, whether education, employment or getting involved with activities”.

Concerns raised included changes in project workers, being unhappy with housemates and not being able to live in the area they preferred.⁸⁹

2.6

Corporate parenting

The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) introduced seven corporate parenting principles for local authorities. Authorities “must have regard [to the principles] whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers (collectively referred to as looked-after children and young people)”.⁹⁰

“Corporate parenting principles”, the DfE states, apply directly to local authorities, including “beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning”, and Directors of Children’s Services and Lead Members for Children “should [...] ensure that relevant partners [e.g. Police, NHS] understand how they can assist local authorities apply the principles”.⁹¹

⁸⁴ PQ 172579 [on [Care Leavers](#)], 10 September 2018

⁸⁵ DfE, [Vital new support for young people leaving care](#), 23 October 2019; PQ 91946 [[Care Leavers](#)], 13 November 2020

⁸⁶ DfE, [Staying Close: section 31 grant determination letter](#), 31 March 2021

⁸⁷ PQ HL15271, [on [Care leavers: Social services](#)], 29 April 2021

⁸⁸ Gavin Williamson MP and DfE, [£51 million for councils to support care leavers](#), 24 May 2021

⁸⁹ University of York for the DfE, [The break staying close, staying connected project](#), August 2020, p10

⁹⁰ DfE, [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers: Statutory guidance](#), February 2018, para 1.5

⁹¹ [Ibid](#), para 1.9

To this end, the DfE said it was “introducing a ‘care leaver covenant’ that will enable organisations to make commitments to care leavers within the spirit of the corporate parenting principles in a way that is most appropriate to them”.⁹² As noted in section 1.3, the Covenant was launched by the DfE in 2018.

The Seven Principles

Section 1 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) sets out the seven principles:

- (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- (d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Accompanying [statutory guidance](#) says the principles are “not about applying a formulaic approach to how services are delivered” and are intended to “describe the behaviours and attitudes expected of councils when they are acting as any good parent would do”.

The principles are intended to ensure “looked after children and care leavers ... are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support a non-looked after child or young person may receive from their family”. The guidance does not define what “significant disadvantage” means.⁹³

⁹² [Ibid](#), para 3.12.

⁹³ [Ibid](#), para 2.3.

2.7 Ofsted inspections

The DfE noted in 2014 that the new inspection framework for children’s social care introduced a specific judgement on the quality of leaving care support.⁹⁴

Ofsted’s current guidance, [Inspecting local authority’s children’s services](#) (November 2020), states that inspections should focus on the “experiences and progress of care leavers”, including edge of care proceedings, the physical and mental health of care leavers, and the degree to which authorities have maintained contact.⁹⁵

2.8 National standards for unregulated accommodation

On 24 May 2021, the DfE announced a consultation on proposed national standards that all unregulated settings accommodating 16- and 17-year-old children in care and leaving care would have to meet. The consultation closed on 19 July and the Government is yet to respond.

Further information is available in the Library briefing: CBP7560, [Looked after children: out of area, unregulated and unregistered accommodation \(England\)](#).

2.9 Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme

The £200 million programme, funded by the DfE, has conducted several projects and pilots into supporting vulnerable children, included care leavers. Funded projects and evaluations can be found on the DfE’s [Insights and evaluations page](#). Projects included co-designing support models for care leavers, strengthening local coordination to secure work and education, the “staying close” option and identifying accommodation when leaving care.

2.10 Devolved policies

Scotland

The [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#), as amended, requires local authorities to prepare young people for leaving care or ceasing to be looked after, and

⁹⁴ DfE, [Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence](#), 2016, paras 1.1–1.3.

⁹⁵ Ofsted, [Inspecting local authority children’s services](#), updated 4 November 2020

provide advice and assistance to young people who have ceased to be looked after on or after their 16th birthday. Local authorities are required to provide aftercare support until the care leaver turns 19, and to assess any eligible needs for aftercare support until they turn 26 (or beyond in some cases).⁹⁶

Scotland's Staying Put policy – called “Continuing Care” – was introduced through the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#). From April 2015, a young person born after 1 April 1999 who is looked after in foster, kinship or residential care is eligible to remain in their current care placement until they turn 21.⁹⁷ A welfare assessment must take place if the placement is not continued:

If the placement cannot be maintained, or if it is in the young person's best interests to start an alternative placement, a welfare assessment must be provided showing why staying in their current placement would significantly adversely affect their wellbeing.⁹⁸

When Continuing Care ends the young person is eligible for aftercare support until they turn 26. The 2014 Act also provided for any young person who ceases to be looked after on or after their sixteenth birthday, and is less than 26 years of age, to be eligible (between the ages of 16 and 19) or potentially eligible (between the ages of 19 and 26) for aftercare. This applies to all care leavers regardless of the placement type while looked after.⁹⁹

The 2014 Act also gave effect to corporate parenting, placing duties on public authorities to act in support of children and young people.¹⁰⁰

Wales

[The Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#), as amended, requires local authorities to provide support “intended to be equivalent to that which a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from his or her parent”.¹⁰¹

An eligible young person is one who had been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 years.

The “When I am Ready” scheme is the Welsh equivalent of “Staying Put”. Local authorities are required to operate their own ‘When I am Ready’ schemes in line with national guidelines. The Welsh Government’s [When I am ready- good practice guide](#) (March 2016) sets out support for care leavers:

When I am Ready’ enables young people in foster care to continue living with their foster carers once they turn 18. It allows them to

⁹⁶ Scottish Government, [Looked after children: ‘Children leaving care’](#), undated.

⁹⁷ [Ibid](#)

⁹⁸ [Ibid](#)

⁹⁹ [Ibid](#)

¹⁰⁰ [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#), as amended, Part 9

¹⁰¹ Welsh Government, [Law Wales: Leaving care and services for care leavers](#), undated

remain in a stable and nurturing family environment up to the age of 21, or up to age 25 if they are completing an agreed programme of education or training. It also provides them with the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence so they can make a successful transition to more independent living.¹⁰²

The 2014 Act requires local authorities to safeguard and promote the well-being of care-leavers. The Welsh Cabinet's [Extending corporate parenting across public services: Looked after children](#) (November 2019) sets out the potential strengthening of corporate parenting in Wales.¹⁰³

Northern Ireland

[The Children \(Leaving Care\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2002](#), as amended, which came into force in 2005, placed duties on Health and Social Care Trusts to support young people leaving care. This included:

Prevent[ing] premature discharges from care, improv[ing] preparation, planning and consistency of support for young care leavers, and to strengthen arrangements for financial assistance. Central to the Act are duties to assess and meet individual's needs, provide Personal Advisers and develop pathway planning for young people up to the age of 21 (or beyond if they are continuing in education).¹⁰⁴

“Going the Extra Mile” is the equivalent to “Staying Put”. It was launched in 2006, and aims to:

Promote continuity and stability of living arrangements in postcare life for young people living with foster carers by ensuring that financial support is available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of these young people until they reach the age of 21. Allied to this, the scheme also aims to promote better outcomes for young people leaving care in relation to training, employment and education.¹⁰⁵

The [2012 Standards for Leaving Care Services in Northern Ireland](#) established minimum standards for leaving and aftercare services.¹⁰⁶ In 2017, as part of a public consultation on the draft Adoption and Children Bill, the Department of Health sought views on whether to extend some support to care leavers up to age 25.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Welsh Government, [When I am Ready – Good Practice Guide](#), March 2016, pp2, 4.

¹⁰³ Welsh Government, [Meeting: Extending corporate parenting across public services: looked after children, CAB \(19-20\)18, 18 November 2019](#), published 6 January 2020

¹⁰⁴ Department of Health, [Northern Ireland Care Leavers 2018/19](#), January 2020, p6

¹⁰⁵ [Ibid](#), p6

¹⁰⁶ Department for Health, [Leaving care services in Northern Ireland](#), September 2012

¹⁰⁷ Department of Health, [Adoption and Children \(Northern Ireland\) Bill: A consultation document](#), 16 January 2017, pp58-9

[The Adoption and Children Bill](#) was introduced to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the 20 September 2021.¹⁰⁸ Part of the Bill aims to:

...extend the age limit for support provided to specified care leavers who are still engaged in education and training from 24 to 25 [and] [...] provide for further assistance to specified care leavers aged between 21 and 25 to pursue a new course of education or training.¹⁰⁹

2.11

Response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Funding for support services

The DfE in April 2020 [announced](#) £12 million for 14 projects, aiming “to prevent social isolation at this time, as well as finding homes for young people leaving care”. The UK Government also restated additional funding for the “Staying put” programme (£33 million) and Personal Adviser support for care leavers to 25 (£9 million).¹¹⁰

In May 2021, the Government announced [£51 million in funding for councils](#), which includes £33 million continued investment in ‘Staying Put’, £3.6 million to extend the ‘Staying Close’ pilot and £12 million for councils to continue to provide Personal Advisors to support care leavers up to the age of 25.¹¹¹

DfE request to pause leaving care

The then-Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, asked local authorities in April 2020 to use additional funding to ensure [no one had to leave care](#):

The £1.6 billion of additional funding announced yesterday [18 April 2020] will help local authorities give care leavers, and other vulnerable groups, the support that they need at this difficult time.¹¹²

2.12

EU Settlement Scheme for looked after children and care leavers

The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) enabled European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss citizens resident in the UK by the end of the transition period on

¹⁰⁸ [Adoption and Children Bill \(Bill 37/17-22\)](#), 20 September 2021

¹⁰⁹ Adoption and Children Bill (Bill 37/17-22) [Explanatory and Financial memorandum](#), 20 September 2021, p4

¹¹⁰ DfE, [Multi-million support for vulnerable children during Covid-19](#), 24 April 2020

¹¹¹ Gavin Williamson MP and DfE, [£51 million for councils to support care leavers](#), 24 May 2021

¹¹² DfE, [Education Secretary’s statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 19 April 2020](#), 19 April 2020

31 December 2020, and their family members, to obtain the UK immigration status they need to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021.

The Home Office published [guidance](#) for local authorities on their responsibilities for identifying and applying for settled status for looked after children and care leavers, in line with the child's wishes.¹¹³ In England, the Children Act 1989 provides the legal framework for local authorities to promote a child's welfare and best interests.

Support provided by the Department includes £22 million to 30 September 2021 to the Settlement Resolution Centre and the network of 72 organisations across the UK to help vulnerable groups apply.¹¹⁴

Based on surveys of local authorities, the Home Office estimated that as of 23 April 2021 in the UK, there were an estimated 3,660 [looked after children and care leavers who may be eligible to apply for the EUSS](#). Around 3,140 of those eligible were in England, 165 in Scotland, 135 in Wales and 220 in Northern Ireland.¹¹⁵

Of the 3,660 identified as eligible by the survey, 67% (2,440) of applications to the EUSS had been received. 72% (1,765) had been decided, of which 77% (1,365) had resulted in settled status and 235 (13%) in pre-settled status. 9% (165) received an 'Other' outcome (the application was withdrawn, void, invalid or refused).

Applications after 30 June 2021

The EUSS includes provision for late applications to be made by those who can show they had reasonable grounds for missing the 30 June 2021 deadline. [Caseworker guidance](#) has been published, covering a non-exhaustive range of circumstances which would constitute reasonable grounds. This includes where a parent, guardian or local authority failed to apply on behalf of a child.¹¹⁶

In response to a PQ, the Government said:

We will continue to work closely with local authorities following the 30 June 2021 deadline. Consistent with the published non-exhaustive guidance on reasonable grounds for making a late application, we will take a pragmatic and flexible approach to dealing with late applications, including from care leavers who were aged over 18 before the deadline.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Home Office, [EUSS: Looked after children and care leavers: local authority and health and social care trust guidance](#), April 2020, pp7-15

¹¹⁴ PQ 33932 [on [Immigration: EU Nationals](#)], 20 July 2021

¹¹⁵ Home Office, [EU Settlement Scheme – Home Office looked-after children and care leavers survey 2021](#), 13 May 2021, Table 1

¹¹⁶ UK Visas and Immigration, [EU Settlement Scheme: information for late applicants](#), 16 July 2021

¹¹⁷ PQ HL1523 [on [Immigration: EU Nationals](#)], 29 June 2021

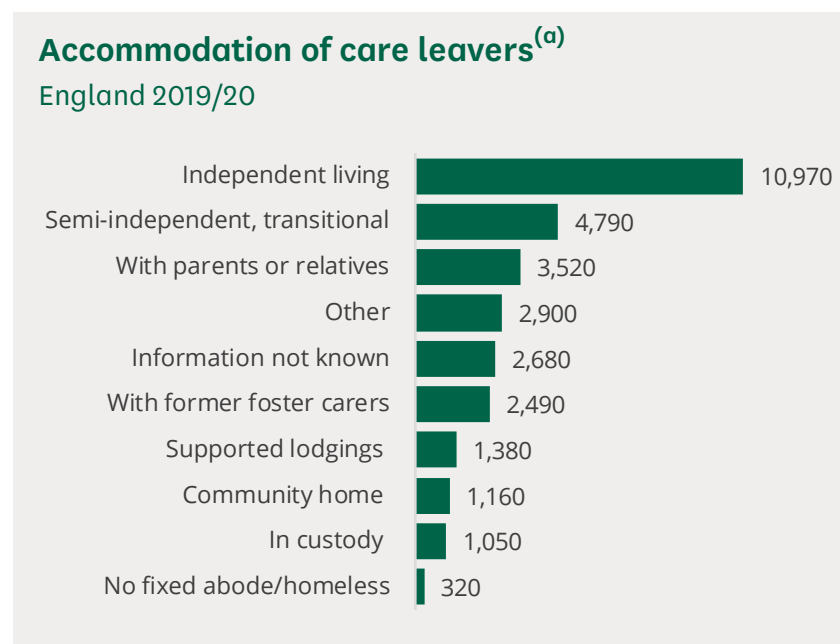
3 Housing

Housing is a devolved matter. Section 3.6 provides brief information on policies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3.1 Statistics on accommodation for care leavers

Most care leavers (35%) were in independent living in 2019/20 with around 15% in semi-independent/transitional accommodation. Around 11% were living with parents or relatives and 8% with former foster carers. The chart below provides the numbers.

In 26,360 cases (85%) the accommodation placement for these care leavers was considered suitable.



Note:

a) Care leavers now aged 19-21 years looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday.

Source: [DFE Looked after children statistics, Table F2](#)

3.2

A higher risk of homelessness?

A 2019 Office for National Statistics report said “leaving institutions including prison, hospitals or care is a less common reason cited for homelessness”.¹¹⁸ In England, between October to December 2018, it was estimated that 2% of applicants to local authorities seeking statutory homelessness assistance were reported to have an institutionalised background.¹¹⁹

Surveys of wider homelessness populations report higher figures. For example, in London, the proportion of rough sleepers seen by outreach workers who had experience of the care system was 8% in 2020/21 (643 people) and 10% in 2019/20 (582 people).¹²⁰

Around a quarter of the 480 homelessness people from 16 local authorities interviewed for research commissioned by Crisis from the University of Cardiff (published December 2014) indicated they had previously been in local authority care.¹²¹

In 2017, the homeless charity Centrepoin [argued](#) that care leavers were particularly at risk of homelessness due to deficiencies in transitional and practical support (eg financial support), a lack of suitable accommodation, accommodation moves coinciding with critical moments in education, and greater social isolation.¹²²

During National Care Leavers Week 2019, Centrepoin [called](#) on the Government to lengthen the amount of time for which they provide extra support for care leavers with their housing costs, arguing it was “clear that being able to afford to live independently was a critical barrier to care leavers moving into independent accommodation”.¹²³

3.3

Local housing authorities’ duties to homeless care leavers

A statutory rehousing duty

Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure accommodation for certain unintentionally homeless care leavers including:

¹¹⁸ Office for National Statistics, [UK homelessness: 2005 to 2017](#), 17 September 2019, Section 7

¹¹⁹ Office for National Statistics, [UK homelessness: 2005 to 2017](#), 17 September 2019, Section 7

¹²⁰ Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), [Annual report: Greater London April 2020-March 2021](#), 2021, p34

¹²¹ Cardiff University and Crisis, [Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain](#), December 2014, ppviii, 12

¹²² Centrepoin, [From care to where? Care leavers’ access to accommodation](#), 2017, pp8-23

¹²³ Centrepoin, [There’s a lack of support for care leavers: Here’s how we can help](#), 1 November 2019

(e) a person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a ‘relevant student’);

(f) a person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a ‘relevant student’).¹²⁴

The [Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities](#), to which they must have regard when fulfilling their duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, provides the following guidance on duties owed to homeless care leavers over the age of 21:

Having been looked after, accommodated or fostered and aged 21 or over

A person aged 21 or over who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered has a priority need (other than a person who is a ‘relevant student’). The terms ‘looked after, accommodated or fostered’ are set out in [section 24\(2\) of the Children Act 1989](#)) and this includes any person who has been:

(a) looked after by a local authority (i.e. has been subject to a care order or accommodated under a voluntary agreement);

(b) accommodated by or on behalf of a voluntary organisation;

(c) accommodated in a private children’s home;

(d) accommodated for a consecutive period of at least 3 months:

(i) by any Local Health Board, Special Health Authority or by a local authority in the exercise of education functions; or,

(ii) in any care home or independent hospital or in any accommodation provided pursuant to arrangements made by the Secretary of State, the National Health Service Commissioning Board or a clinical commissioning group under the National Health Service Act 2006 or by a National Health Service trust or an NHS foundation trust, or by a local authority in Wales in the exercise of education functions; or,

(e) privately fostered.

A ‘relevant student’ means a care leaver under 25 to whom [section 24B\(3\) of the Children Act 1989](#) applies, and who is in full-time further or higher education and whose term-time accommodation is not available during a vacation. Under section 24B(5), where a social

¹²⁴ MHCLG, [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), para 8.3 and section 189(1) of the [Housing Act 1996](#), as amended

services authority is satisfied that a person is someone to whom section 24B(3) applies and needs accommodation during a vacation they must provide accommodation or the means to enable it to be secured.

Housing authorities will need to make inquiries into an applicant's childhood history to establish whether they have been looked after, accommodated or fostered in any of these ways. If so, they will need to consider whether they are vulnerable as a result.¹²⁵

The Homelessness Code of Guidance contains advice on the assessment of vulnerability in relation to care leavers in [chapter 22](#).

Duty to prevent and relieve homelessness and the Duty to Refer

On 3 April 2018, local authorities in England acquired new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for **all** eligible applicants for a period.¹²⁶ In addition, local authorities' duties to provide advice and assistance to homeless people were strengthened. Authorities must design advice and information services to meet the needs of people within their district including, in particular, the needs of the following groups:

- people released from prison or youth detention accommodation;
- **care leavers;**
- former members of the regular armed forces;
- victims of domestic abuse;
- people leaving hospital;
- people suffering from a mental illness or impairment; and,
- any other group that the authority identifies as being at particular risk of homelessness in their district.¹²⁷

On 1 October 2018, certain public bodies in England, including adult and children's social services, acquired a **duty to refer** service users to a local housing authority if they are aware of an individual who is homeless or threatened with homelessness (with the individual's consent).¹²⁸

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and DfE published [Joint housing protocols for care leavers: good practice advice](#) (October 2020), which "sets out how council housing departments and

¹²⁵ MHCLG, [Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities](#), paras 8.28 to 8.31.

¹²⁶ This duty stops short of actually providing accommodation for homeless people who are not in a priority need category. Eligibility is determined with reference to an applicant's immigration status.

¹²⁷ Section 179 of the [Housing Act 1996](#), as amended

¹²⁸ MHCLG, [A guide to the duty to refer](#), 28 September 2018

children’s services can work effectively together to support care leavers into settled accommodation and prevent them from becoming homeless.”¹²⁹

The guidance suggests that information published by authorities on services offered to assist care leavers should include information on how they will be supported to access suitable accommodation. The guidance cites Barnardo’s and St Basil’s [Accommodation and support framework for care leavers](#) (2019) as an outline of “best practice”.¹³⁰

Local area connection

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amended the 1996 Act to clarify the definition of “local connection” for care leavers. The [Code of Guidance](#) explains the position:

A young person owed leaving care duties under [section 23C of the Children Act 1989](#) will have a local connection to the area of the children services authority that owes them the duties. If the children services authority is a county council and not a housing authority, the young person will have a local connection with every housing authority district falling within the area of the children services authority.

Where a care leaver is aged under 21 and normally lives in a different area to that of a local authority that owes them leaving care duties, and has done for at least 2 years including some time before they turned 16, the young person will also have a local connection in that area.¹³¹

The aim of this change was to make it easier for care leavers to get assistance in the area where they feel most at home.

APPG report 2017

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ending Homelessness published [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence](#) in 2017. It questioned the degree to which authorities were declaring care leavers to be ‘intentionally homeless’, ie to have made themselves homeless and, therefore, not be owed a full rehousing duty. The APPG also raised issues about the suitability of accommodation into which care leavers were being placed.¹³²

The APPG recommended:

¹²⁹ MHCLG, [Action to help prevent vulnerable young people from becoming homeless](#), 26 October 2020

¹³⁰ DfE and MHCLG, [Guidance: Joint housing protocols for care leavers: good practice advice](#), 26 October 2020, para 1.4; Barnardo’s and St Basils, [Care leavers accommodation and support framework](#), 2019

¹³¹ MHCLG, [Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities](#), paras 10.18-19

¹³² APPG, [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence](#), July 2017, pp5, 8

- National Government should abolish intentionality for care leavers aged 18-25.
- Local authorities should use their existing powers to exempt care leavers from council tax until the age of 25.
- National Government should exempt all care leavers from the Shared Accommodation Rate up to the age of 25. Budget 2020 announced that this would be implemented from October 2023 – this date was subsequently moved forward to June 2021 (see section 3.5).
- The Department of Communities and Local Government (now the MHCLG¹³³) should conduct a review of the 2013 allocation guidance. The particular concern here was how restrictions on local connection might impact on care leavers. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017's amendments to the 1996 Act addressed this issue for homeless care leavers.¹³⁴

3.4 A commitment to eradicate rough sleeping

The [Conservative manifesto December 2019](#) committed to ending “the blight of rough sleeping by the end of the next Parliament” through an extension of the Rough Sleeping Initiative, Housing First and using local services to meet the health and housing needs of people living on the streets.

The [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) (2018) committed the then-Government to funding support for areas with the highest number of at-risk care leavers:

We will fund £3.2 million in 47 areas to employ specialist personal advisers to provide intensive support, appropriate to their needs, to the most at-risk care leavers in their area.¹³⁵

Information on areas benefitting from this funding can be found in [Rough sleeping funding: grant determination letters](#). The 2019 Government is continuing to implement the rough sleeping strategy:

We provided £1,615,000 from 2018 to 2019, and £3,230,000 from 2019 to 2020, to 47 local authorities with the highest number of care leavers at risk of rough sleeping. We will provide £723,114.33 from 2020 to 2021 to 21 local authorities with the highest number of care leavers at risk of rough sleeping.¹³⁶

¹³³ MHCLG has been renamed the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Local Government (DLUCLG).

¹³⁴ APPG, [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence](#), July 2017, pp7-8

¹³⁵ MHCLG, [Rough Sleeping Strategy, August 2018, p36](#)

¹³⁶ DfE, [Rough sleeping funding: grant determination letters](#) [accessed on 13 December 2020]

Over 2021-22 “A total of £2,681,175.43 grant funding will be allocated to 52 local authorities” with the highest number of care leavers in certain categories.¹³⁷

More information on the Government’s policy to eradicate rough sleeping can be found in the Library paper [Rough sleeping \(England\)](#). Specific information on action to tackle rough sleeping during the Covid-19 outbreak can be found in [Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers \(England\)](#).

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Government announced £3.2 million in emergency funding for rough sleepers in March 2020.¹³⁸ In his November 2020 report on care leavers, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers welcomed innovations by authorities, such as working to secure housing.¹³⁹

In May 2021, the government announced a further £2.7 million of funding for the Rough Sleeping Strategy, “to provide intensive support to care leavers at high risk of homelessness”.¹⁴⁰

3.5 Paying for housing

Supported housing

This accommodation is suitable for care leavers who may need additional support before moving towards independent living. Supported housing is expensive as the rent reflects additional services and support provided.

In its 2017 report, [Claiming after care](#), the Children’s Society said it can be difficult for care leavers in supported housing to save up sufficient money as a deposit in order to move on.¹⁴¹

Concerns about proposed changes to the funding of supported accommodation and the impact this could have on providers were allayed on 9 August 2018 when the then-Government announced that Housing Benefit would continue to meet residents' rent payments in all supported housing.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ [Section 31 Grant Determination Letter on additional funding to deliver aspects of the Government’s rough sleeping strategy \[GR1000739\] \[No 31/5500\]](#), 1 April 2021

¹³⁸ MHCLG, [£3.2 million emergency support for rough sleepers during coronavirus outbreak](#), 17 March 2020

¹³⁹ DfE, [National Implementation Adviser For Care Leavers’ second report: The decade of the care leaver](#), November 2020, pp25-6

¹⁴⁰ Gavin Williamson MP and DfE, [£51 million for councils to support care leavers](#), 24 May 2021

¹⁴¹ The Children’s Society, [Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017, p9

¹⁴² MHCLG, [All supported housing funding to be retained in the welfare system](#), 9 August 2018

Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) exemptions

The SAR limits the amount of Housing Benefit/housing element of Universal Credit a single person can claim to the equivalent of the cost of a room in a shared house for claimants under 35 years of age.¹⁴³

There is an exemption for claimants under age 22 who were formerly in social services care. This allows care leavers some leeway to become settled and move into work without have to share accommodation with others.

The SAR originally applied to single claimants up to age 25 but was extended to under 35-year-olds in January 2012. This change did **not** apply to care leavers aged over 21.

In the 2020 Budget, the UK Government announced “from October 2023 the SAR exemption for care leavers will be extended to 25 years”.¹⁴⁴ Subsequently, the March 2021 Budget announced implementation would be brought forward to June 2021.¹⁴⁵

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate

Most tenants in private rented housing who are in receipt of assistance with their housing costs receive LHA.¹⁴⁶

The LHA is paid at a flat-rate based on the lowest 30th percentile of market rents for a particular size of property (up to a maximum of 4 bedrooms) within a Broad Rental Market Area.¹⁴⁷

The LHA can cover all or part of a claimant’s rent. As a means tested benefit, the amount of LHA a claimant receives depends on their personal circumstances. LHA rates were frozen for four years from April 2016. Housing organisations, particularly those working with the homeless, linked the freeze in LHA rates with an increase in homelessness.

In January 2020, the Government announced the freeze would end in April 2020 with an uprating of 1.7% in line with the Consumer Price Index.¹⁴⁸ However, as part of the Government’s coronavirus support package, in March 2020 the Chancellor announced LHA rates would be reset to the 30th percentile:

As well as keeping people in work, and supporting those who lose their jobs or work for themselves, our plan for jobs and incomes will help keep a roof over your head.

¹⁴³ Entitled to, [Shared Accommodation Rate](#)

¹⁴⁴ [HC 121, March 2020, para 1.190](#)

¹⁴⁵ [HC 1226, March 2021, para 2.28](#)

¹⁴⁶ Entitled to, [LHA](#)

¹⁴⁷ House of Commons Library, [LHA and homelessness](#), July 2019

¹⁴⁸ [HCWS29 Welfare update](#), 13 January 2020. Note that during the freeze there was some allowance for increases in LHA rates in the most expensive rental areas.

I'm announcing today nearly £1bn pounds of support for renters by increasing the generosity of housing benefit and Universal Credit, so that the local housing allowance will cover at least 30% of market rents in your area.¹⁴⁹

This announcement was described as reversing the four year freeze. [Revised LHA rates for 2020/21](#) were published by the Department for Work and Pensions.

During Spending Review 2020 it was announced that LHA rates would be maintained “in cash terms” after the increase in 2020-21. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) commented:

This means the £1 billion cost of the measure in 2020-21 declines to £0.3 billion by 2025-26 (and that LHA rates will fall back below the 30th percentile of local rents over time).¹⁵⁰

Shelter analysed the implications of freezing LHA rates in cash terms and concluded:

We are likely to face a situation over the years where LHA rates are eroded in the face of rising rental costs, as we did for the four-year benefit freeze (2016-2020). This is also the prediction that the OBR made at the spending review. Falling rents also suggest people are struggling more. While it is positive some people may receive more housing benefit, the idea that rents are falling is a bad sign of how people on low incomes are struggling.¹⁵¹

Housing element of Universal Credit (UC) for 18 to 21-year olds

From April 2017, the Government removed automatic entitlement to housing support in UC for those making new UC claims who were out of work and aged 18 to 21, with some exceptions. Care leavers were exempted from these changes on the basis that:

The option to remain living in the family home clearly does not apply to care leavers and we have therefore decided that care leavers will be exempt from these changes.¹⁵²

On 29 March 2018, the Government announced restrictions on accessing the housing element of UC for 18 to 21-year olds would be removed: Regulations to achieve this came into force on 31 December 2018.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ HM Treasury, [The Chancellor's updated statement on coronavirus](#), 20 March 2020

¹⁵⁰ BR, [Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#), November 2020, p179

¹⁵¹ Shelter, [First indication of Local Housing Allowance rates out last week](#), 18 December 2020

¹⁵² HM Government, [Keep on Caring](#), July 2016, p48

¹⁵³ [The Universal Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2018; The Council Tax \(Exempt Dwellings\) \(Amendment\) \(Wales\) Order 2019](#)

Help with Council Tax payments

The Children’s Commissioner for England in October 2019 called for care leavers up to age 25 to be exempted from council tax payments.¹⁵⁴ The Government published [a letter to local authorities in England](#) in January 2021, noting that individual councils in England can offer council tax reductions to care leavers on a discretionary basis.

Legislation to exempt care leavers aged 18-26 in Scotland and those aged 24 or under in Wales from council tax payments was passed in 2018 and 2019, respectively.¹⁵⁵

3.6 Devolved duties

Wales

Section 70 of [The Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) places a duty on local authorities to assist unintentionally homeless persons of between 18 and 20 years of age who were “looked after, accommodated or fostered at any time while under the age of 18”.

The Welsh Government published [Preventing Homelessness and Promoting Independence: A Positive Pathway to Adulthood](#) (2016), which endorsed Barnardo’s [Care leavers accommodation and support framework](#) (2016).

Background information and recommendations can be found in Wales Centre for Public Policy’s [Youth homelessness and care leavers: Mapping interventions in Wales](#) (2018).

Scotland

In Scotland, there is a statutory duty on local authorities to find permanent accommodation for all applicants who are unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness.¹⁵⁶ [Guidance](#) says local authorities, as corporate parents, should ensure:

Integrated pathways to safe sustainable and affordable accommodation is fundamental to improving outcomes in all areas for care leavers, not least in relation to the prevention of homelessness.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Children’s Commissioner, [10 asks for care leavers](#), 29 October 2020

¹⁵⁵ See the [Council Tax \(Discounts\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2018](#); and the [Council Tax \(Exempt Dwellings\) \(Amendment\) \(Wales\) Order 2019](#)

¹⁵⁶ Scottish Government, [Homelessness: Policy actions](#)

¹⁵⁷ Scottish Government, [Code of guidance on homelessness](#), November 2019, para 2.49

Northern Ireland

Young people who become homeless are eligible for assistance under the [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2002](#) and under the [Housing \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1988](#).

There are no specific references to a duty to assist homeless care leavers to secure accommodation unless they are “a young person who satisfies the Executive that he is at risk of sexual or financial exploitation”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Barnardo's, [Access all areas: Northern Ireland](#), 2017, p19

4 Education and training

This is a devolved issue— brief information on Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found in section 4.6.

4.1 Education and Employment Activity

Comparable statistics on the education and employment activity amongst care leavers aged 19-21 years are available for the past four years as shown in the table below.

Education and employment activity of care leavers ^(a)									
England									
	Number of care leavers				Percentage of care leavers				
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
In higher education	1,640	1,750	1,860	1,920	6.1%	6.1%	6.2%	6.1%	
In education other than higher education	5,090	5,710	6,170	6,310	18.8%	20.0%	20.6%	20.2%	
In training or employment	6,670	7,180	7,600	8,210	24.7%	25.2%	25.4%	26.3%	
Not in education, training or employment	10,870	11,090	11,550	12,050	40.2%	38.9%	38.6%	38.5%	
No information	2,740	2,770	2,730	2,780	10.1%	9.7%	9.1%	8.9%	
All care leavers now aged 19-21	27,010	28,500	29,910	31,260	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Note:

a) Care leavers now aged 19-21 years looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday

Source: [DFE Looked after children statistics \(Various years\), Table F1](#)

Over this period there has been a slight increase in the numbers in higher and other forms of education, although the proportions have remained relatively stable. Both the number and proportion of those in training or employment has increased. While the number of those not in education, training or employment increased over the past few years, the proportion of care leavers this represents has fallen over time.

To put these figures in context, around 35% of those who completed 16-18 studies in 2017/18 progressed to higher education in 2018/19.¹⁵⁹ As shown above, only 6% of care leavers were routinely reported to be in higher education.

¹⁵⁹ DfE, [Destinations of Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils](#)

In addition, in 2019/20 a reported 39% of care leavers aged 19-21 years were not in education, training employment (NEET). A relatively comparable figure from ONS data shows that the NEET rate among 18-24-year olds was 13% in the quarter ending March 2020.¹⁶⁰

4.2

Government funding and employment support

Social Impact Bonds, 2018

£5 million was announced over four years to provide support to help care leavers into education, employment or training. The projects would be targeted at three areas: Bristol, Sheffield and Lewisham.¹⁶¹

Care Leavers' apprenticeship bursary, 2018

Care leavers aged 16 to 24 starting apprenticeships in England after 1 August 2018 may be entitled to a £1,000 bursary during the first year of training. This is in addition to the £1,000 provided to both employers and training providers when they take on 16- to 18-year olds or 19 to 24 year olds who were in care or who have an Education, Health and Care plan.¹⁶²

The charities, the Children's Society and Barnardo's, had previously called for increased financial support for care leavers undertaking apprenticeships.¹⁶³

Collaboration with Barnardo's, 2018

The DWP [announced](#) a partnership with the charity Barnardo's to provide care leavers with the opportunity to participate in work experience placements in the charity's shops. The DWP said they were also "exploring options for a longer-term partnership, which would deliver a broader range of support for care leavers to help them thrive in the workplace."¹⁶⁴ The initial pilot was due to run for 6 months, with placements lasting 6-8 weeks.¹⁶⁵

Support for internships, 2019-2020

In 2019, the DfE committed to creating 1,000 new internships over the next two years, including through the Civil Service Internship Scheme and partnerships with other public sector employers.¹⁶⁶ In September 2020, the

¹⁶⁰ ONS, [Young people not in education, employment or training](#)

¹⁶¹ DfE, [Minister announces improved support for care leavers](#), 27 February 2018; PQ 91947 [on [Education: Care Leavers](#)], 13 November 2020

¹⁶² DfE, [New support for young care leavers starting an apprenticeship](#), 17 May 2018

¹⁶³ [Written evidence submitted to the Children's Society to the Education Select Committee, QUA0022](#), 6 March 2018 and [Written evidence submitted by Barnardo's to the same, QUA0086](#), January 2018

¹⁶⁴ DWP, [Government launches new collaboration with Barnardo's to support care leavers into work](#), 1 October 2018.

¹⁶⁵ PQ 206811 [on [Barnardo's: Work experience](#)], 9 January 2019

¹⁶⁶ DfE, [Vital new support for young people leaving care](#), 23 October 2019

DfE announced the Care Leaver internship scheme, with 500 12-month internship opportunities in 20 departments and agencies for care leavers.¹⁶⁷

To September 2020, 250 opportunities to care leavers have been made available across Whitehall since 2017.¹⁶⁸

Pupil Premium Plus, 2019

The Government announced in October 2019 £3 million to extend the Pupil Premium Plus to all 16-18 year old care leavers, in order to support their transition into further education and encourage them to be “ambitious in their choice of qualifications”.¹⁶⁹

4.3

Schools

Since 2014, virtual school heads (VSH) have been responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children during the period when they become eligible for free early education to when they have completed the compulsory years of education. As a minimum, they can provide advice on admissions, raise awareness of the needs of looked after children and ensure effective use of the pupil premium.¹⁷⁰

The DfE has said that VSHs have made a “significant impact” on supporting a reduction in permanent exclusions and absenteeism:

In 2018, Looked After Children had the same persistent absence rates as all children (10.9%), whilst permanent exclusion rates for them are now lower than all children (0.05% compared to 0.1%).¹⁷¹

Government response to the coronavirus pandemic

The DfE provided laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers via local authorities to care leavers who did not have access to them through another source, such as their education institution.¹⁷²

At 13 October 2020, 148,000 laptops and routers had been provided to children with a social worker and care leavers.¹⁷³ Laptops, routers and data packages continued to be rolled out during the spring 2021 lockdown and

¹⁶⁷ DfE, [Applications for care leavers apprenticeship scheme 2020](#), 7 September 2020

¹⁶⁸ [Ibid](#)

¹⁶⁹ DfE, [Vital new support for young people leaving care](#), 23 October 2019

¹⁷⁰ DfE, [Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children](#), February 2018, p25; DfE, [Pupil premium: VSH responsibilities](#), March 2015

¹⁷¹ PQ 118057 [on [Care Leavers](#)], 19 November 2020

¹⁷² DfE, [Laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers provide during coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#), updated 1 October 2020; MHCLG, [£3.2 million emergency support for rough sleepers during coronavirus outbreak](#), 17 March 2020

¹⁷³ PQ HL 8580 [on [Care Leavers: Digital technology](#)], 13 October 2020

school attendance restrictions, and in May 2021, the DfE announced a further 5,000 laptops would be provided to care leavers through the ‘Get Help with Technology’ scheme, to prevent loneliness and isolation.¹⁷⁴

In November 2020 the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers welcomed the prioritisation of care leavers for laptops and routers.¹⁷⁵

4.4

Post-16 education and training financial support

16-19 bursaries: Bursary for vulnerable groups

Some students in this age bracket and who are in a school sixth form or other qualifying further education or training may qualify for a [bursary for young people in defined vulnerable groups](#). The defined vulnerable groups include students who are care leavers.

The DfE defines “in care” and “care leavers” in the following terms:

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund defines ‘in care’ as children looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or under a care order (section 31 of the Children Act 1989) - Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 defines the term ‘looked after child’.

A ‘care leaver’ is defined as:

- a young person aged 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16; or
- a young person aged 18 or above who was looked after prior to becoming 18 for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16.¹⁷⁶

In 2021/22, the bursary is worth up to £1,200 per year; institutions may pay discretionary additions on top of this. DfE guidance says institutions may decide not to pay the bursary to an individual if “[they do not have any actual financial need](#).”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Gavin Williamson MP and DfE, [£51 million for councils to support care leavers](#), 24 May 2021

¹⁷⁵ DfE, [National Implementation Adviser For Care Leavers’ second report: The decade of the care leaver](#), November 2020, pp25-6

¹⁷⁶ DfE, [16 to 19 bursary fund guide 2021 to 2022 academic year](#), 30 March 2021

¹⁷⁷ [Ibid](#)

4.5 Higher education financial support

Higher education (HE) students are supported via a package of repayable student loans for maintenance and fees. Medical and dental students can apply for NHS bursaries during the later years of their courses, which include non-repayable funding.

More information on student finance can be found in the Library briefings [Student support for undergraduates across the UK](#) (September 2021) and [Funding for healthcare students in England](#) (March 2021).

Care leavers who are starting higher education for the first time and are under 25 years of age may be eligible for a one-off [Higher Education Bursary](#) of up to £2,000 from their local authority. This funding is paid in a lump sum or in instalments during a course. Care leavers should contact their local authority for further information.

Individual higher education institutions may also provide awards or bursaries for care leavers. See, for example, the University of Sheffield's [University Bursary for Care Leavers](#).

The [Propel website](#) (run by the charity Become) provides further information on financial support for care leavers in higher education.

Government response to Covid-19

Funding was also made available to support care leavers and students estranged from their families during the Covid-19 outbreak. Universities were able to access the Office for Student's Student Premium funding (c. £23 million per month) from April to July 2020 and £256 million for the academic year 2020/21 towards student hardship funds.¹⁷⁸

4.6 Widening participation in higher education

Office for Students briefing, January 2021

The [Office for Students](#) (OfS) regulates higher education providers in England. In its briefing, [Care experienced students and looked after children](#) (January 2021), the OfS said those with care experience are underrepresented in higher education and have significantly poorer educational outcomes than the general population on average.

Care leavers face many barriers to entering and succeeding in higher education. These include:

¹⁷⁸ PQ 102867 [on [Students: Coronavirus](#)], 13 October 2020

- lower school attainment, particularly at key stage 4
- a lack of positive role models and low expectations from carers and advisers
- low aspirations and concerns about being able to afford higher education
- a lack of information and advice before and when applying to higher education
- difficulty accessing the financial support they need and problems with accommodation.¹⁷⁹

The OfS also said care-leavers were likely to achieve lower results:

The data also shows that for qualifiers in 2018-19 the rate of achieving a first or upper-second class degree qualification was 12.1 percentage points lower for care experienced students when compared to students that were not in care.¹⁸⁰

OfS Guidance

Institutions that want to charge higher tuition fees are required to produce [annual access and participation plans](#) for approval by the OfS's Director of Fair Access and Participation. These plans set out the steps that institutions intend to take to improve access for under-represented groups, including care leavers.¹⁸¹

Such plans must also include an “assessment of a provider’s current performance across the whole student lifecycle” and consider both retention and attainment.¹⁸²

DfE Guidance

The DfE’s [Principles to guide HE providers on improving care leaver access and participation in HE](#) (March 2019) says universities should consider:

- Incorporating care leavers as a priority group in admissions policies, through the use of contextual admissions;
- Provide priority access and continuous 365 days a year accommodation, preferably subsidised;
- Structure financial support to support budgeting and the provision of basic items; and

¹⁷⁹ OfS, [Care leavers and looked-after children](#), January 2021

¹⁸⁰ [Ibid](#)

¹⁸¹ OfS, [Regulatory Notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance](#), September 2021

¹⁸² [Ibid](#), p21

- Identify at least one designated member of staff to support care leavers by providing pre-application help, pastoral support and build relationships with local authorities.¹⁸³

Care Leaver Covenant

As set out in section 1.3, the Covenant allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support through work experience, apprenticeships, and free/discounted goods and services.

60 Higher Education institutions had signed the Care Leaver Covenant at November 2020, a rise from 13 in March 2019.¹⁸⁴ The Minister of State for Higher and Further Education, Michelle Donelan, wrote to universities who were not yet signatories of the Covenant in September 2020 to request they subscribe.¹⁸⁵

Details of individual institution offers can be found on the Covenant website in the [Care Leavers Opportunities Area](#).

4.7

Devolved support

[Propel website](#) (run by the charity, Become) provides detailed information about financial support for care leavers in HE. A separate website is in place for Scotland: [Propel Scotland](#).

Wales

The 2016 Diamond Review specifically recognised care leavers as a group underrepresented in HE.¹⁸⁶ Under the [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#),¹⁸⁷ the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales requires institutions to use their fee and access plans, which are necessary to charge up to the maximum tuition fee limit of £9,000, to support care experienced applicants.¹⁸⁸

A Student Finance Wales page, [Independent and estranged students](#), explains care leavers will be treated as ‘independent students’, which means

¹⁸³ DfE, [Policy paper: Principles to guide HE providers on improving care leavers access and participation in HE](#), 14 March 2019

¹⁸⁴ HL Deb, [Children in care: Unregulated accommodation](#), 17 November 2020, c1322; DfE, [Universities asked to do more to support care leavers](#), 14 March 2019

¹⁸⁵ PQ 113122 [on [Universities: Care Leavers](#)], 9 November 2020

¹⁸⁶ Professor Sir Ian Diamond, [The review of HE funding and student finance arrangements in Wales](#), 2015, paras 13, 14, 9.6.1-9.6.4, p55

¹⁸⁷ Section 6

¹⁸⁸ Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, [2022/23 Fee and access plan application guidance](#), June 2021, p24

their parents' income will not be taken into account when working out how much student finance they can get.¹⁸⁹

Further Education students who are care leavers may be eligible for a [Welsh Government Learning Grant](#) of up to £1,500 a year and an [Education Maintenance Allowance](#) of up to £30 per week.¹⁹⁰

Scotland

The Scottish Funding Council commissioned the [Centre For Excellence For Children's Care And Protection](#) to survey care-experienced students in Scotland's colleges and universities in 2018-19. The findings, [Being a student with care experience is very daunting](#), were published in June 2019.

In July 2019, Scotland's 18 HE institutions committed to guaranteeing care experienced applications who meet minimum entry requirements an offer of an undergraduate place.¹⁹¹

Student Awards Agency Scotland's [Support for care experienced students](#) sets out potential financial support for full-time students. The Care Experienced Students Bursary (CESB) is available to eligible full-time students taking an undergraduate course. The amount available is currently £8,100. From the academic year 2020/21, there is no longer an age cap for the CESB. A care experienced accommodation grant of up to £105 a week during the summer holiday is also available.¹⁹²

At Further Education level, care leavers may be eligible for non-income assessed higher rate of bursary support of £8,100 per year (2019/2020).¹⁹³ They may also be eligible for education maintenance allowances.¹⁹⁴

More information and research can be found at the Scottish Funding Council's [Care-experienced students](#).

¹⁸⁹ A care leaver is someone "who has in the care of or been given accommodation by your local authority for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 up to the start of your course": Student Finance Wales (SFW), [Independent and estranged students](#)

¹⁹⁰ SFW, [Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education](#) and [Education Maintenance Allowance](#)

¹⁹¹ Universities Scotland, [Scotland's Universities to guarantee offers to care experienced applicants who meet minimum entry requirements](#), 25 July 2019. "Care experienced" was defined as: "anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short, including adopted children who were previously looked after. Care may have been provided in one of many different settings, such as in residential care, foster care, kinship care, or looked after at home with a supervision requirement". There are no age restrictions.

¹⁹² Student Awards Agency Scotland, [Support for care experienced students](#)

¹⁹³ Scottish Government, [Costs of learning: student funding guide 2019 to 2020: Full time students in Further Education](#), August 2019

¹⁹⁴ [Ibid: Quick Guide](#)

Northern Ireland

Widening Access and Participation Plans for Universities seek to set targets for improving participation from underrepresented groups, such as care leavers, and assess institution progress.¹⁹⁵

There is a system of grants and loans for student support and, as elsewhere, care leavers may be assessed as independent students. More information is available on the [Student Finance NI website](#). Additional support may also be available from individual HE institutions.

Until July 2021, care leavers up to age 24 may also have been eligible for the [Training for Success Programme](#), which guaranteed training up to 104 weeks to help individuals gain skills and qualifications for career progression.¹⁹⁶ From September 2021, it has been replaced by the [Skills for Life and Work](#) programme, which provides between 24 and 30 hours each week for two years.

Individuals may also be eligible for an [Education Maintenance Allowance](#).

¹⁹⁵ Northern Ireland Department for the Economy, [Higher Education widening participation](#)

¹⁹⁶ NI Direct, [Training for success](#)

5 Health services

This section relates to England only.

5.1 NHS Long Term Plan

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) (January 2019) states that care leavers do not reliably receive the support they need:

The most vulnerable children, who need extra help from the state to safeguard their wellbeing, do not reliably get the support or access to the services that their needs demand.

[...]

The NHS, together with partners at national and local level, will commit to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people, by targeting early help for adults living in households with vulnerable children, and by improving access to targeted support for these children, especially during transition to adult services, building on the current assessment pilots for children entering the care system.¹⁹⁷

5.2 Commissioning of Health Services

The DfE and the then-Department of Health (DH) published statutory guidance on planning, commissioning and delivering health services for looked after children as [Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children](#) (March 2015).

This includes a section on care leavers, that states that local authorities, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and NHS England should ensure that there are effective plans in place to enable looked after children aged 16 or 17 to make a smooth transition to adulthood. In particular:

- There should be an emphasis on partnership working between the young person and their personal adviser, and the doctors and nurses involved in their health assessments

¹⁹⁷ NHS England, [Long term plan](#), January 2019, p119

- Personal advisers should have access to information and training about how to promote physical and mental health
- Transitions should be planned as early as possible, and certainly at least six months in advance of a transition to adult services, so that social workers, personal advisers, commissioners and providers of children's and adult services can manage transitions smoothly and ensure that young people are clear about expectations.¹⁹⁸

The statutory guidance also states care leavers should be equipped and supported to manage their own health needs, and records:

Care leavers should be equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible. They should have a summary of all health records (including genetic background and details of illness and treatments), which suggests how they can access a full copy if required. Information needs to be given to care leavers sensitively and with support, with an opportunity to discuss it with health professionals. Young people leaving care should be able to continue to obtain health advice and services, and know how to do so.

Personal advisers should work closely with looked-after children's health teams involved in health assessments. Leaving care services should ensure that health and access to positive activities are included as part of the young person's pathway planning. They should also ensure that care leavers have the information they need to be able to manage their health when living independently.¹⁹⁹

Pathway planning, organised with the Personal Advisor, should also attend to any complex needs and ensure appropriate support:

Care leavers with complex needs, including those with disabilities, may transfer direct to adult services and the pathway plan will need to ensure that this transition is seamless and supported. For care leavers who do not meet the criteria for support by adult services, their personal adviser should ensure that all possible forms of support, including that offered by the voluntary sector, are identified and facilitated as appropriate.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ DfE and DH, [Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities, CCGs and NHS England](#), 2015, p26

¹⁹⁹ [Ibid](#), p27

²⁰⁰ [Ibid](#), p27

5.3

Transition out of care & mental health

Barnardo's report, 2017

Barnardo's report, [Neglected Minds](#) (2017), drew on an assessment of 274 care leavers the charity was supporting. The charity highlighted challenges of care leavers obtaining support with their mental health, including information not always being passed on to leaving care teams, delays due to waiting lists, and a lack of stable accommodation resulting in denial of access to services.²⁰¹

Recommendations included embedding mental health workers within care teams, developing youth-specific services and services targeted at those leaving care.²⁰²

UK Government Strategy, 2016

In its 2016 [Keep on caring](#) strategy, the UK Government said it recognised the transition out of care to living independently can be particularly challenging:

For care leavers who are receiving support to improve their emotional health and well-being, as it often coincides with a transition from CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] to adult mental health services.²⁰³

The strategy set out a commitment to achieve better working between the NHS, local authorities, voluntary and community services, schools and other local services and said Government would make available an “additional £1.4 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament [to May 2020] to support improvements” in Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).²⁰⁴

More information can be found in the Library briefings [Mental Health policy in England](#) and [Children and young people's mental health](#).

Education Select Committee, 2016

In April 2016, the Education Committee published a [report](#) on the mental health and well-being of looked after children. In addition to finding that looked after children face significant challenges in getting access to mental

²⁰¹ Barnardo's, [Neglected minds](#), 2017, pp11, 17-18

²⁰² [Ibid](#), p25

²⁰³ UK Government, [Keep on caring: Supporting young people from care to independence](#), 2016, pp43-5

²⁰⁴ [Ibid](#), para 3.71-2

health support, the Committee also reported concerns about the transition out of care.²⁰⁵

The report noted that leaving the care system can be a time of significant upheaval and disruption, and that this is likely to be more acute for care leavers with mental health concerns. The Committee said that current support is “based too heavily on inflexible age restrictions” and recommended that CAMHS should be made available for care-leavers up to the age of 25:

CAMHS should be made available for all looked-after young people up to the age of 25 in recognition of the distinct issues which this vulnerable group of young people face as they leave the care system. Access to services beyond the age of 18 should be offered where appropriate but not made mandatory where an individual would be better suited to moving onto adult mental health services.²⁰⁶

Government response, 2016

In September 2016 the Government published its [response](#) to the Committee’s report saying it did not accept the Committee’s recommendation on CAMHS being made available to care leavers up to age 25:

Mental health support should be available for those that need it regardless of age and the government does not therefore mandate an age range for statutory mental health services for children or adults. The configuration of local mental health services is a matter for commissioners, based on the needs of their local population.²⁰⁷

The response noted that some local approaches had been adopted to commission 0-25 services or transition support team workers.²⁰⁸

The Government said it was establishing a new Expert Working Group for Looked after Children.²⁰⁹

Expert Working Group, 2016

In 2016, the Government announced a new Expert Working Group (EWG) for Looked after Children.

This would consider how to improve the mental health and well-being of the following vulnerable groups: Looked after children; children adopted from

²⁰⁵ Education Committee, [Mental health and well-being of looked-after children](#), HC 481, April 2016, paras 21 & 39

²⁰⁶ [Ibid](#), para 40

²⁰⁷ DH and DfE, [Mental health and well-being of looked-after children: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2015-16](#), Cm 9284 September 2016, p14

²⁰⁸ [Ibid](#), p14

²⁰⁹ [Ibid](#), pp1, 23

care; care leavers; and children leaving care under a special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.²¹⁰

The EWG published a [final report](#) in November 2017. Risks identified included “insufficient accountability”, “no consistent leadership for supporting, monitoring and championing young people’s mental health” and lack of training and flexible pathways to support.²¹¹

The group’s recommendations included:

- An oversight role of a virtual mental health lead (VMHL)
- Better information in local offers regarding services
- Training for all those working directly with looked after children
- A needs-based model to identify and generate appropriate support
- Greater flexibility in formal services in who they will allow to support the young person
- Assessments that focus on understanding the individual’s mental health and emotional wellbeing in the context of their current situation and past experiences, rather than focusing on the presenting symptoms.²¹²

Integrated health assessments

During the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Government said it would pilot integrated physical and mental health assessments for looked after children. These were launched in 2018. Taking forward the EWG’s recommendations on assessing the individual needs of children in care, the pilots would test improved approaches to the mental health and well-being element of the health assessments looked after children receive on entry to care.²¹³

In 2019, the DfE said it would conduct an evaluation of the pilots, which “will consider how effective the mental health assessments are at providing an accurate and thorough diagnosis of the child’s needs”.²¹⁴

In January 2020, the Government provided an update on the EWG proposals it was taking forward through the mental health assessment pilots for looked after children:

The Department is taking forward a number of these recommendations through our £1 million mental health assessment pilot programme, which is testing improved approaches to the

²¹⁰ Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), [New co-chairs announced for working group on the mental health of looked-after children](#), 28 April 2016

²¹¹ Expert Working Group, [Final report: Improving mental health support for young people in care: Recommendations, key risks and quality statements](#), November 2017

²¹² [Ibid](#)

²¹³ PQ HL 7926 [on [Children in care: Health Services](#)], 15 May 2018

²¹⁴ PQ 216909 [on [Children in care: Health Services](#)], 5 February 2019

mental health and wellbeing element of the health assessment on entry to care.

The Department has appointed SQW Limited to carry out an evaluation of the pilot and fieldwork is currently underway. This will help inform our assessment of the changes needed to the mental health assessments of looked-after children.²¹⁵

5.4 Green Paper, 2017

The DfE and DH published [Transforming children and young people's mental health provision](#) in 2017.

This made a commitment to “set up a new national strategic partnership with key stakeholders focused on improving the mental health of 16-25 year olds by encouraging more coordinated action, experimentation and robust evaluation”. This was to involve schools, colleges and universities, and focus on early intervention, transitions and integrated service support.²¹⁶

The Education and Health and Social Care Committee [report](#) in 2018 was critical of the Green Paper, in particular its long-timescales and that its “narrow scope does not take several vulnerable groups into account”.²¹⁷

In [response](#), the Government said in 2018 that the Green Paper was “only part of the action we are taking on multiple fronts to support children and young people's mental health”, citing additional funding for mental health services and commitments in the Long-Term Plan.²¹⁸

The Government also published its [response](#) to the consultation on the Green Paper in 2018.²¹⁹ This included a commitment on the part of NHS England to:

- Establishing new **Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs)**, jointly delivered with the Department for Education. MHSTs are intended to provide early intervention on some mental health and emotional wellbeing issues, such as mild to moderate anxiety, as well as helping staff within a school or college setting to provide a ‘whole school approach’ to mental health and wellbeing. The teams will act as a link with

²¹⁵ PQ 3632 [on [Children in need: Mental health services](#)], 14 January 2020

²¹⁶ DH and DfE, [Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: A Green Paper](#), Cm 9523, December 2017, para 133

²¹⁷ Education and Health and Social Care Committees, [The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation](#), HC 642, 9 May 2018, para 7

²¹⁸ DH and DfE, [Government response to the first joint report of the Education and Health and Social Care Committees](#), Cm 9627, July 2018, pp7

²¹⁹ DH and DfE, [Government response to the consultation on Transforming Children and young people's mental health provision](#), Cm 9626, July 2018,

local children and young people’s mental health services and be supervised by NHS staff;

- **Trialling a four-week waiting time** for access to specialist NHS children and young people’s mental health services, building on the expansion of NHS services already underway.²²⁰

In November 2020, the DHSC set out progress on the two commitments:

In 2018 we announced the first 25 trailblazer sites delivering 59 mental health support teams in and near schools and colleges. Twelve of the trailblazer sites are also testing four-week waiting times specialist NHS services, and they will deliver a recommendation for the phased introduction of an access and waiting time standard for children and young people’s mental health.²²¹

MHSTs are intended to roll out to “at least 20-25% of the country by 2023”.²²²

²²⁰ NHS England, [New mental health support in schools and colleges and faster access to NHS care](#), u.d.

²²¹ PQ 115551 [on [Mental health services: Young people](#)], 16 November 2020

²²² PQ 111628 [on [Mental health services: pupils](#)], 4 November 2020

6 Social security benefits

6.1 Care leavers and DWP benefits

Young people **aged 18 and over** – including those who have left local authority care – may claim benefits on the same basis as adults.

Young people **aged 16-17** who are ‘care leavers’ – who have been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who left care on or after their 16th birthday – cannot usually claim benefits. This is because the local authority remains responsible for meeting their needs for maintenance, accommodation and support. Care leavers aged 16-17 are not excluded from claiming benefits if they are responsible for a child, or have a ‘limited capability for work’, but this will not include an amount to cover rent.

Legacy benefits

Until recently, the main benefits care leavers might claim were: Income Support; Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance; Income-related Employment and Support Allowance; and Housing Benefit.

With the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC), most young people leaving care will find that making a claim for UC is their first experience of the benefits system.

UC is replacing means-tested benefits and tax credits for working-age households, including single people and couples without children as well as families. It is payable both in and out of work.

The UC ‘Full Service’ – the final, digital version of UC available to all claimant groups – was rolled out across the whole of the UK by December 2018. Under the [latest timetable](#), UC will not fully replace legacy benefits for all existing claims until the end of 2024.

With very limited exceptions, it is now no longer possible to make new claims for ‘legacy’ benefits (the benefits – including those listed above – that UC is replacing).

Universal Credit and Care Leavers

[Universal Credit guidance](#), deposited in the House of Commons Library by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), includes a chapter on [Care leavers](#) (Version 16.0, current April 2021).

This gives information on how UC affects care leavers and on the additional support available for this group. It supplements a separate chapter on [Under 18s](#) (Version 13.0).

In November 2019, the DWP announced a £10 million ‘Universal Credit Transition fund’ for organisations supporting vulnerable people, including care leavers, making UC claims from April 2020.²²³ The procurement exercise was suspended due to the coronavirus outbreak. In October 2020, the Work and Pensions Committee noted that the disruption created by coronavirus had left future funding in some doubt. It recommend the DWP and the Treasury “continue the Universal Credit Transition Fund by renewing its funding for the next financial year.”²²⁴

The DWP currently funds Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland to deliver the ‘[Help to Claim](#)’ service. This provides tailored, practical support to people making a UC claim up to their first full, correct payment being received. On 9 September 2021, the Department issued an invitation to organisations in England, Scotland and Wales to apply for funding to deliver a successor to Help to Claim from April 2022. The ‘Future Support Offer’ will provide funding for organisations to support people who need it to both make a new claim for Universal Credit, and maintain their new UC claim up until their first full correct payment. The support will be provided through accessible telephony and digital channels, including webchat. The deadline for application submissions was 15 October 2021. The DWP expects to notify successful bidders on 8 December 2021.²²⁵

Identifying care leavers

The Universal Credit guidance chapter on care leavers says care leavers may be identified in the UC system as a result of either:

- A local authority Leaving Care Team contacting the Jobcentre’s care leaver ‘Single Point of Contact’ (SPOC) to inform them that the young person is approaching their 18th birthday and will be making a claim; or
- The care leaver identifying themselves when making the claim.

The individual must also confirm their care leaver status by providing secondary evidence and confirmation from the local authority (or Local Health Trust in Northern Ireland). Once the DWP has verified their status, this is recorded in the person’s ‘claimant history.’

In response to a November 2020 parliamentary question on progress made on introducing a care leaver ‘marker’ in the UC system, the then Minister for Welfare Delivery, Will Quince, said “with the permission of the claimant, a

²²³ DWP, [£10 million fund to help vulnerable people claim UC](#), 1 November 2019

²²⁴ Work and Pensions Committee, [Universal Credit: the wait for a first payment](#), HC 204 2019-21, 19 October 2020, para 183

²²⁵ DWP, [Future Support Offer: grant competition specification](#), 9 September 2021

Work Coach is able to record, in a free text format, through the use of ‘pinned notes’ in the Universal Credit system, information which supports staff in identifying and managing” individual claimants.²²⁶

Concerns have been voiced about the pinned notes system, including by the National Audit Office, which in July 2020 said the DWP needed to improve its understanding of vulnerable claimants and how best to support them to ensure that no one slipped through the net.²²⁷

In March 2021, Will Quince said the Department was developing a new system – ‘claimant profiles’ – “so that we are able to track individuals separately and as one of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups through the universal credit system”.²²⁸

The latest Universal Credit guidance chapter on [Care leavers](#) also emphasises the vulnerable position of care leavers and the issues they may face:

Why we support care leavers

Care leavers are young people who often have complex needs so have access to additional support. Children enter either residential or foster care for many reasons. Often, their past experiences can sometimes have a negative impact on adult life.

Care leavers are more likely to be at risk of:

- poor educational outcomes
- unemployment
- being homeless
- drug and alcohol dependency
- offending
- mental health issues

Support for care leavers

It is important that care leavers are identified as soon as possible to ensure they receive the correct support and for the switching-off of requirements (easements) to be applied.

In the majority of cases, the care leaver will have documentation confirming their care leaver status from their local authority.

²²⁶ PQ 116566 [on [Universal Credit: Care Leavers](#)], 17 November 2020

²²⁷ NAO, [Universal Credit: getting to first payment](#), HC 376 2019-21, 10 July 2020, para 3.15

²²⁸ [Joint evidence session of the Work and Pensions Committee and Lords Economic Affairs Committee](#), 9 March 2021, Q21

The Government is committed to improving the outcomes for care leavers and has introduced a number of measures to encourage them to engage in education and employment.

Outline of support available

The guidance sets out support for care leavers claiming UC, which may include:

- advance claim preparation, being able to prepare their claim up to 28 days before, entering details on their account (this cannot be submitted before their 18th birthday)
- being able to apply for money guidance and Alternative Payment Arrangements at any point in their claim
- undertaking full-time non-advanced education
- access to Recoverable Hardship Payments
- help with accommodation costs, if they are under 22 years old
- Advance payments are available to care leavers in short term financial need
- access to the Work and Health Programme²²⁹

The DWP guidance gives further information on advanced claim preparation for care leavers, education and on accommodation costs:

Advanced claim preparation for a care leaver

Care leavers can prepare their claim to Universal Credit up to 28 days before and including their 18th birthday. This helps ensure support is in place as soon as possible.

Although the claim details must not be submitted until the claimant's 18th birthday they can be viewed and checked in advance of submission - to help get the claim ready.

The service automatically deletes any information after 28 days. All relevant information must be submitted within 28 days of the claimant starting to enter information on the service providing it is on or after their 18th birthday.

Local authority Leaving Care Teams can assist young people to make their claim using the service.

²²⁹ [Ibid.](#)

The care leaver can make a pre-claim appointment to confirm:

- Identity
- bank account details
- they are a care leaver (for example, written confirmation from the local authority on headed paper or by email, official paper work relating to the claimant being in care)

The initial evidence interview and commitment interview can be booked at the pre-claim appointment providing that they take place on or as soon as possible after the claimant's 18th birthday.

The care leaver may bring a social worker or support worker with them to the pre-claim appointment.

There are rare circumstances where young people leave care after age 18. In these cases, the advanced claim preparation facility should still be offered.

Full-time non-advanced education for care leavers

Whilst claiming Universal Credit - care leavers are able to undertake full-time non-advanced education, up to the age of 21 or the end of the academic year in which they reach the age 21 (or at the end of the course if earlier).

Whilst in non-advanced education, the care leaver will be in the No Work-Related Requirements regime. During the summer vacation, the claimant is allocated to the Labour Market regime based on their individual circumstances (as if they were not in education or training at that time).

Accommodation costs

The local authority must provide support for 16 or 17 year-old care leavers with housing costs until they are 18 years old.

Care leavers aged 18 to 21 are exempt from the shared accommodation rate. See guidance on size criteria for renters for more information.²³⁰

6.2

Children's Society report, 2017

The Children's Society published [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#) (2017), which set out findings from research into care leavers

²³⁰ [Ibid.](#)

which involved, among other aspects, examining case studies from practitioners, a focus group with Jobcentre Plus staff who engaged regularly with care leavers, and analysis of data on outcomes from the Work Programme (now superseded in England and Wales by the [Work and Health Programme](#)) and on benefit sanctions.

The 2017 report said care leavers faced specific challenges when interacting with the welfare system and JobCentre plus:

Care leavers and our practitioners tell us that their experiences of the welfare system and JobCentre Plus are not always happy ones. Care leavers can often face delays in payment, sanctions, and must make difficult decisions between taking up education and employment opportunities. Unlike other claimants, they must also maintain good relationships with both their personal adviser and their work coach in order to make a claim, because of the many interdependencies between JobCentre Plus and their local authority as their corporate parent.²³¹

Employment outcomes

The report includes an analysis of data on participation in the **Work Programme**. It said outcomes for care leavers were “particularly poor”:

After a participant has spent a minimum amount of time gaining experience with their provider, a job outcome payment is made to that provider. The response from the [DWP] revealed that amongst all of the groups for which data is collected, care leavers’ outcomes were particularly poor. Overall, they were around half as likely to spend the minimum amount of time gaining work experience within a 12 month period than peers aged 18-24 claiming Job Seekers’ Allowance. Based on this data, it is clear that the work programme did not operate effectively for care leavers as a group.²³²

²³¹ The Children’s Society, [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017, p2

²³² [Ibid](#), p4

Children Society report: Job outcomes as a percentage of referrals

	2014	2015
All claimants	17.7%	20.9%
Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) 18- 24	24.1%	26.6%
JSA 25 and over	21.7%	24.3%
JSA and prison leavers	11.5%	12.6%
All self-identified care leavers	10.0%	13.5%
JSA ex-incapacity benefits	16.6%	21.7%
Employment & Support Allowance volunteers	5.7%	8.1%

Source: The Children's Society, [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017, p4

Sanctions data

The Society's analysis of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) sanctions data for the six months ending in September 2016 found:

Care leavers are three times more likely to be sanctioned than their peers [18-24 year olds] claiming benefits and five times more likely than the general population of adult claimants.

[...]

15% of self identified care leavers challenged the decision to sanction them, compared with 24% of all adult claimants. Compared to our previous work²³³ we found the rate of overturned sanctions to be higher during this period, standing at 86% compared to 62%. In total, 810 sanctions were applied during the latest period [April-September 2016].²³⁴

Youth Obligation Support Programme

The Society argued its findings should be used “to inform the design and implementation” of the Youth Obligation Support Programme (YOSP), first introduced in April 2017. Under the YOSP all new UC claimants aged 18-21 are allocated to either an “Intensive Work Search” or a “Light Touch” regime, from day one of their claim. Participants receive “intensive support to help find employment or apprenticeship quickly.”²³⁵

²³³ The Children's Society, [The cost of being care free, p19](#). This considered 4,000 sanctions applied to care leavers between October 2013 and September 2015

²³⁴ The Children's Society, [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017, pp4-5

²³⁵ DWP, [Universal Credit Full Service Guidance: Youth Obligation](#), Version 10.0, current March 2019; DWP, [Support for 18-21 year olds claiming UC](#), 10 February 2020

The Children's Society commented on the design of the YOSP (bold added to original);

The Youth Obligation combines aspects of both the current sanctions regime and the Work Programme. Its increased conditionality and accelerated move of claimants into some form of work runs the risk of replicating the worst parts of both the predecessor policies.

If the Youth Obligation is to prove a success, it must be changed to overcome these flaws. Given their vulnerability, **it is essential that sanctions are not applied to care leavers without contact first being made with their personal adviser.**

The intensive activity period also gives cause for concern. If care leavers are forced to enter this period too soon, or if they are unable to pause it once in progress if it becomes unmanageable they are likely to fail, and instead of moving them closer to work it may actually make work seem a lot further away or more difficult and risk demotivating care leavers.

Many of these **potential problems can be avoided by reducing the consequences of sanctions on care leavers.** We would recommend that the early warning system should always be used when a care leaver is at risk of being sanctioned. Work coaches should also be required to make contact with the care leaver's personal adviser before applying a sanction, and sanctions should not be applied above the levels set for 16 and 17 year olds.

Finally, thought should be given to the **design of the intense activity period for vulnerable young people like care leavers. The ability to 'pause' the period should be made available** to young people so they know that, if necessary, they can take a break without being penalised whilst they attend to other issues going on in their lives.²³⁶

The report set out five key recommendations, focusing on DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff:

Changing the nature and use of sanctions

The early warning system for sanctions should always be applied to care leavers. Work coaches should contact a care leaver's personal adviser before applying a sanction. When applied, sanctions should not be applied above the levels set for 16 and 17 year olds so that the financial burden is lessened and the sanction is lifted immediately when the care leaver re-engages and meets their claimant commitment.

²³⁶The Children's Society, [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017, p6

Improved Entitlements

Care leavers should be eligible for the full Universal Credit Standard Allowance from the age of 18. The Shared Accommodation Rate Exemption should be extended to 25 years of age. The Severe Disability Premium should be carried forward from legacy benefits into Universal Credit so that care leavers with disabilities are supported to move into independent living.

Reducing the risk of debt whilst waiting for the first payment

Instead of offering an Advance Payment to care leavers - a form of loan which alters future payments and makes budgeting more difficult - care leavers should receive an 'Advance Grant' based on their maximum entitlement at the point of making their claim, whilst waiting for the first payment of their first claim.

Do not make care leavers the go-between

Where a care leaver's claim has administrative or technical problems which require solving, care leavers should not be passed from pillar to post. Personal Advisers should be able to be listed as a designated person to assist in a care leaver's claim and joint protocols between the local JobCentre Plus and the local authority should be put in place so that professionals working with a young person can contact each other.

Changing attitudes

The Department for Work and Pensions should produce training materials to change attitudes towards care leavers among job centre staff and increase their knowledge about how to support them. JobCentre Plus should explore ways to allow care leavers to participate in how local services are structured and how they are better supported into work.²³⁷

The report identified other measures that could improve the relationship between care leavers, work coaches and Personal Advisers:

Recommendations for the Department for Work and Pensions

- DWP should introduce an apprenticeship bursary, similar to the higher education bursary, to support care leavers during the first year of their apprenticeship. This would provide better financial support, ensure better long-term employment prospects and provide increased parity between academic and technical education routes.

²³⁷ The Children's Society, [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017

- DWP should bring forward the marker for care leavers under Universal Credit. Currently, care leavers can be flagged on the legacy benefits system if they tell their work coach they are leaving care but this is not yet available on Universal Credit. The marker should be as robust as the current marker for those leaving prison.
- For their first claim, care leavers should always have the option to have their housing element/housing benefit of their claim paid direct to the landlord communicated to both themselves and their personal adviser.
- DWP should further explore the early warning system for care leavers at risk of a sanction to see if it reduces the levels of sanctioning.
- DWP should produce a resource to help personal advisers better understand Universal Credit and the ways in which it can be tailored to meet the needs of care leavers.

Recommendations for JobCentre Plus staff

- JobCentre Plus and local authorities should establish joint protocols to allow personal advisers and work coaches to contact each other when a care leaver misses an appointment or appears to be struggling financially.
- JobCentre Plus staff should be encouraged to contact care leavers in a variety of ways, including text, in order to simplify communication.
- JobCentre Plus should proactively approach their local authorities to see if a service level agreement like a joint protocol would improve ways of working.

Recommendations for local authorities

- Local authorities should provide comprehensive training for their personal advisers on Universal Credit.
- Local authorities should establish service level agreements, like a joint protocol, with their local JobCentre Plus in order to allow better information sharing and in order to make it easier for professionals to help solve technical and administrative issues in a care leaver's claim.

- Local authority staff should be encouraged to contact care leavers in a variety of ways, including text, in order to simplify communication.²³⁸

The report's conclusions build on the society's evidence submitted on the [Children and Social Work Bill, Committee Stage \(CWSB 04\)](#) (2016) and its report, [The cost of being care free](#) (2016).

6.3

Social Security Advisory Committee Report, 2018

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) published its report on its study of [Young People Living Independently](#) (May 2018), which explored the impacts of the benefit system on young people aged 16 to 24 who live independently of parents or other guardians.²³⁹ As part of project, the SSAC examined the issues relating to the UC claims process for care leavers transitioning out of care.

Advanced claim preparation scheme

In order to provide support for care leavers at 18, the Government's Advanced claim preparation scheme allows care leavers to prepare their claim to UC before their 18th birthday. The SSAC report explains the process:

To help them receive benefits at 18, at age 17 and 11 months, the care leavers' Universal Credit account is set up and a check is run on their identification and bank account. The account is then held for 28 days. The young person has two appointments at the Jobcentre. The first is to explain Universal Credit and talk about alternative payments and budgeting support. The second, mostly on the day of their 18th birthday, is to check that there has been no change of circumstances so that the claim can then be determined. The work coach's first focus is ensuring the young person gets paid and that they have an allocated case manager.²⁴⁰

Potential barriers in accessing the scheme

Although the pre-claim process should provide support as soon as a care leaver turns 18, the SSAC study identified various barriers to the timely payment of benefit. These included many care leavers not having a bank account when they turn 18, and a majority not owning a passport to provide the required identification to open a bank account:

²³⁸ The Children's Society, [Claiming after care: Care leavers and the benefits system](#), 2017

²³⁹ SSAC, [Occasional Paper 20: Young people living independently](#), 23 May 2018

²⁴⁰ [Ibid](#), p55

These [issues] can cause payment delays and care leavers personal advisers may be reluctant to access advance payments as “they felt that care leavers should not have to start their independent life in arrears”.²⁴¹

Other barriers to accessing the support and exceptions for care leavers included:

- Young people not wanting to disclose the fact that they are care leavers to a work coach and therefore not being identified as requiring additional support
- Issue with the Universal Credit computer system flagging care leavers.
- A “lost opportunity” to connect the support between the local authority’s care leaver Pathway Plan and Claimant Commitment which forms the basis of a care leaver’s claim for Universal Credit.²⁴²

SSAC also heard that care leavers found the transition to adult life “rapid and crowded”. Many reported unclear or unrealistic expectations upon leaving care, including not knowing how to apply for benefits or pay rent. Combined with the emotional issues involved in transitioning to independent living at 18, SSAC found it “makes the experience of turning 18 a very different one for care leavers” compared to young benefits claimants living with parents or guardians.²⁴³

Recommendation

SSAC report’s key recommendation for improving the benefit claims process for care leavers was that as part of the [Care Leavers Covenant](#), the UK Government explores with local authorities, how better to link up the Pathway Plan, Jobcentre support and the Claimant Commitment.²⁴⁴

Government Response

In July 2018, the DWP’s response did not refer to report’s recommendation on linking support for care leavers.

Instead, the Government response emphasised the “intensive support for 18-21 year olds making a new claim to Universal Credit” under the Youth Obligation Support Programme introduced in April 2017. The response adds:

This programme starts with an intensive activity period of workshops and interventions that encourages 18-21 year olds to think more broadly about their skills and job goals, helps them identify any

²⁴¹ [Ibid](#), p55

²⁴² [Ibid](#), p56.

²⁴³ [Ibid](#), p56

²⁴⁴ [Ibid](#), p56

training they need, and supports them to improve their job search, job application and interview skills.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ [DWP response to SSAC report on young people living independently: government response](#) July 2018

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