Care leavers

First published: **13 April 2016 (version 1)**

Last updated: **12 October 2016 (version 3)**

Contents

Introduction

Care leavers are vulnerable young people who are in the unusual position of having the State as their parent. The vast majority of children enter care (either residential or foster care) for reasons associated with neglect and abuse and not through any action of their own, but their past experiences and their time in care can have an impact on their outcomes as adults.

Care leavers are more likely to be at risk of:

- poor educational outcomes
- unemployment
- homelessness
- drug and alcohol abuse
- offending
- mental health issues

The Government is committed to improving outcomes for care leavers and has introduced a number of measures to encourage them to engage in education and employment. Universal Credit supports care leavers by ensuring they have a

claim for Universal Credit and access to the Work Programme immediately on day one of leaving care. This will ensure support is in place when leaving care.

A care leaver is a person who has been in local authority care (for example, residential or foster care) for a period of at least 13 weeks or more, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks or more, since they were age 14, and ending after age 16.

Support for care leavers

The support a care leaver can get whilst on Universal Credit includes:

- voluntary day one access to the Work Programme (claimants must be aged 18 to 21 and in the Intensive work search regime)
- advance claims to benefit, enabling a smoother transition at 18
- support for vulnerable claimants under Universal Credit, including day one access to Alternative Payment Arrangements and Personal Budgeting Support
- undertaking full-time non-advanced education whilst on Universal Credit
- exception to the seven Waiting days being applied for care leavers making their first claim for Universal Credit (therefore entitled to benefit from the first day of their claim)
- access to hardship payments from day one of their sanction

Back to contents

Eligibility for Universal Credit for care leavers aged under 18

There are restrictions on entitlement to Universal Credit for care leavers aged under 18, for whom the local authority has continuing responsibility under the Children Leaving Care Act. A young person previously looked after by a local authority should be able to get a certain amount of on-going support after they leave care at age 16, in the same way as any other young person would be supported by their parents. This on-going support is provided by the local authority. However there are some circumstances where a care leaver aged under 18 will be eligible for Universal Credit.

A care leaver aged under 18 cannot qualify for Universal Credit unless they:

- are a part of a benefit unit with responsibility for a child (either as a lone parent or as part of a couple)

- have Limited Capability for Work or Limited Capability for Work Related Activity
- have a fit note

Care leavers aged under 18 cannot qualify for Universal Credit on the grounds that they:

- are without parental support
- is pregnant and it is 11 weeks or less before her expected week of confinement
- was pregnant and it is 15 weeks or less since the date the baby was born
- are a carer

Where the care leaver is still eligible for Universal Credit, because they are a lone parent or are disabled, they will not be eligible for support with housing costs through Universal Credit. The local authority is expected to cover their housing requirements.

Back to contents

Advanced claim for a care leaver

Care leavers can make an advanced claim to Universal Credit up to one month before their 18th birthday. These claims will not be submitted until the claimant's 18th birthday but can be viewed and checked by agents. Local authority Care Leaver teams can assist young people to make their claim online and to book appointments.

A number of steps must be completed within the one month before the claim is submitted, to allow an immediate advance of payment request. This includes making a pre-claim appointment to:

- confirm the claimant's identification
- confirm bank account details
- confirm the claimant is 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)
- book an Initial evidence and Commitment interview (on or as soon as possible after their 18th birthday)

Advanced claims for care leavers are processed by accessing the Instructions for advanced claims for Care Leaver (ALP).

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

The care leaver Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in each Jobcentre will support the care leaver throughout their claim. The SPOC will book additional appointments for the care leavers 18th birthday to complete the claim process.

Hardship payments

Hardship payments are available as a safeguard to people who are subject to a benefit sanction. Claimants who are under 21 and who have left local authority care in the last three years are able to apply for hardship payments of 60% of their normal benefit payment from day one of the sanction.

Education and training for care leavers

Care leavers aged 18 and above are able to undertake full-time non-advanced education while on Universal Credit. During this time they will move to the No Work Related Requirements regime.

Non-advanced education is any qualification up to A Level, or equivalent. A young person with no parental support will be able to qualify up to age 21, or the end of the academic year in which they reach age 21 (or the end of the course if earlier).

During the summer vacation, claimants will be allocated to the Labour Market regime based on their individual circumstances (as if they were not in education or training).