

Care Leaver

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Identifying a care leaver

Care leavers are identified as a result of either:

1. the local authority Leaving Care Team contacting the care leaver single point of contact (SPOC) to inform them a young person is approaching their 18th birthday and will be making a claim
2. a care leaver identifying themselves to us, either freely or as a result of our asking questions of the claimant to discover their circumstance

To confirm the care leaver's status, the care leaver must provide secondary evidence and confirmation from the local authority or Local Health Trust in Northern Ireland.

If secondary evidence is provided we contact the local authority or Local Health Trust in Northern Ireland, Leaving Care Team to provide additional independent identity verification. Evidence must be satisfactory and verified to DWP standards. Evidence supplied by phone is not acceptable.

Once the care leaver is identified their status must be recorded.

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 switching off requirements (Easements) that must be applied.

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

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.

Claimants who are care leavers must be made aware of the support available to them whilst claiming Universal Credit. The support includes:

- [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 Alternative Payment Arrangements and Personal Budgeting Support 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 Programme

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 should 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 information must be submitted within 28 days of the claimant starting to enter information on the service, providing it is on or after the claimant's 18th birthday.

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

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 their 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 instances 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 will be 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

Care leavers aged 18-22 are exempt from non-payment of housing costs and will not receive the shared accommodation rate

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

Staying put

Staying Put arrangements help care leavers, transition from stable and secure homes to independence when they are ready and able. It also helps them enter adult life with the same opportunities and life prospects as their peers.

Local authorities can provide staying put arrangements to care leavers. Local authorities have a specific duty and legal requirement to advise, assist and support the young person and their former foster carers, when they wish to stay living together after the young person reaches their 18th birthday.

Care leavers in a staying put agreement are treated like any other Private Rental Sector case if a commercial agreement exists and the occupation, liability and payment criteria are met. More details can be found in the Private Rented Sector page of the guidance.

Former foster children, who continue to live in the foster home after turning 18 under the staying put policy, can generally claim housing costs. This arrangement should not be seen as a contrived tenancy, because it follows on from fostering which is a commercial arrangement. See Housing Costs - definitions.

There are equivalent schemes, in devolved areas. In Scotland this is "Continuing Care" and in Wales "When I'm Ready".

Depending on their circumstances young people who remain in a staying put arrangement may claim Universal Credit for their personal needs and where appropriate their housing costs from their eighteenth birthday to age 21.

Care leavers aged 16/17

It is possible for a claimant to be entitled to Universal Credit at the age of 16 if they are without parental support.

If the young person is 16 without parental support and a care leaver they will usually not be entitled to Universal Credit until they become 18.

A young person previously looked after by a local authority can get a certain amount of on-going support after they leave care at age 16. This is in the same way as another young person would be supported by their parents.

The definition of a care leaver for claimants aged 16/17 is different in England, Scotland and Wales.

There are some exceptions to whether a claimant can be classified as a care leaver. These also differ depending on whether the claimant is in England, Scotland or Wales.

It is for a Decision Maker to determine if a claimant is entitled to Universal Credit and ultimately if their circumstances deem them a care leaver at the age of 16/17.

See the Under 18s guidance for further details.