

Care Leavers

Contents

Identifying a care Leaver
Why we support care leavers
Support for care leavers
Advanced claim preparation for a care leaver
Full time non-advanced education for care leavers
Accommodation costs
Staying put
Care leavers aged 16 and 17

Identifying a care leaver

Care leavers are identified when:

- the local authority (Local Health Trust in Northern Ireland) Leaving Care Team notifies the Care Leaver SPOC that the young person will be making a claim for Universal Credit
- the young person provides this information when making an online claim
- the young person provides this information when discussing their circumstances with an agent

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

When care leaver status has been confirmed, this must be recorded in the Claimant Profile.

Why we support care leavers

Care leavers are young people who will usually have complex needs. This means that they require access to additional support. Children enter residential or foster care for many reasons and their past experiences can very often have a negative impact on adult life. Therefore, 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 that they receive the correct support and for the switching-off of requirements (easements) to be applied.

The Government is committed to improving the outcomes for care leavers, particularly with regard to engaging in education and employment. Claimants who are identified as care leavers must be made aware of all the relevant support that is available to them whilst receiving Universal Credit. This includes:

- Advances when making a new claim
- Money guidance and Alternative Payment Arrangements at any point during their claim
- undertaking full-time non-advanced education
- Recoverable Hardship Payments
- help with accommodation costs if they are under 25 years old
- 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, although the claim details must not be submitted until their 18th birthday. This helps to ensure that support is in place as early as possible.

The care leaver can also make a pre-claim appointment to confirm details such as identity and bank account details. A social worker or support worker can attend with them.

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

Full-time non-advanced education for care leavers

Care leavers are able to undertake full-time non-advanced education whilst receiving Universal Credit:

- up to the age of 21, or
- until the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 21 (or at the end of the course if earlier).

This is known as Second Chance Learning.

For further information about 'Young people up to age 21 in full-time non-advanced education only', see Students: Eligibility, conditionality and student income guidance.

Meaning of non-advanced education

Non-advanced education is any qualification up to General Certificate of Education Advanced level (A level) or equivalent. This includes:

- National Qualification Framework level 3 or the Scottish Qualification framework level 6
- A Level or Scottish equivalent
- AS Level or Scottish equivalent
- Advanced Diploma
- National Diploma certificate or award
- Level 3 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) award, certificate or diploma

Whilst in non-advanced education, the care leaver will be in the No Work-Related Requirements regime.

During the summer vacation, they are placed in 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 24 are exempt from the Shared Accommodation Rate. See the size criteria for renters guidance for more information.

Staying Put

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

Local authorities can provide Staying Put arrangements to care leavers. They have a legal requirement and a specific duty to advise, assist and support the young person (and their former foster carers) when they wish to remain in the foster home after the young person reaches their 18th birthday.

Under the Staying Put policy, former foster children can continue to live in the foster home as boarders and lodgers and may be eligible to claim housing costs. See Eligibility for housing support.

This arrangement must not be seen as a contrived tenancy, because it follows on from fostering which is a commercial arrangement. There are equivalent schemes, in devolved areas. In Scotland, this is 'Continuing Care' and in Wales 'When I'm Ready'.

Staying Put agreements are treated like any other Private Rental Sector case if a commercial agreement exists and the occupation, liability and payment criteria are met. Depending on their circumstances, young people who remain in a staying put arrangement may claim Universal Credit for their personal needs and housing costs (where appropriate) from their 18th birthday to the age of 21.

Care leavers aged 16 and 17

It is possible for a young person to claim Universal Credit at the age of 16 if they are without parental support.

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

A young person who was previously in local authority care can get a certain amount of ongoing support after they leave care at the age of 16. This occurs in the same way as it would be for any other young person being supported by his or her parents.

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

There are further exceptions as to whether a young person will be classified as a care leaver. These exceptions can also differ depending on whether the young person is living in England, Scotland or Wales.

See the Under 18s guidance for further details.