

About this guide

This guide has been written in partnership between the Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF).

The information in here is about care leavers. It tells you what support you may be entitled to when you are aged 21 and over.

About us

The Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) is made up of young people aged 16 and above from local authorities who are members of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. The forum members range from young people who are employed by their local authority, undertaking a traineeship or actively involved with participation work and service delivery within their local authority. The YPBMF works alongside the manager's forum to complete a work plan that has been created together. The main aim is to help improve services and provide more learning and participation opportunities for young people.

The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) has a large and active membership of 57 local authorities and trusts from all over England and Northern Ireland. Our ultimate aim is to achieve the best outcomes for young people making the transition from care to adulthood. Members support each other to develop more compliant, efficient and cost effective services through policy and practice sharing and development.



The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) is the national advice, support and development service focussing on young people's transition from care.

For more information see: www.leavingcare.org

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Support for care leavers aged 21 to 25 with education and training

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Introduction

This guide is for young people who have left care. It tells you what support you may be entitled to with education and training when you are aged 21 and over.

It is written by the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) based on joint work between the Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF).

We wanted to tell people about a change in the law, which means there may be extra support with education and training for care leavers up to their 25th birthday.

In this guide you will find information on what the law says you are entitled to.

There are also tips from young people and leaving care service managers about how to get the support you need. This guide has been written for young people – but the information in here will be useful to all those who work with care leavers.

The information in here applies to care leavers in England and Wales only.

Summary

There is a lot of information in this guide so here's a summary of the main points.

The amount of support you get as a care leaver depends on your age and your circumstances (more info on page 5). Support from your local authority should be provided until you are 21. Support may continue beyond your 21st birthday if you are already in education or training. If you are **not** in education or training then leaving care support will usually finish around this time.

From April 2011 there has been a change in the law which means that care leavers up to their 25th birthday who tell their local authority they have returned, or want to return, to education or training will be entitled to an assessment of their needs. This could mean you get support from your local authority for education or training. The local authority should carry out an assessment of your needs within 3 months of you asking for support. You may then get further support while you are on your course, for example:

- Personal Adviser
- Pathway Plan
- Assistance (to the extent that your education or training needs require it)
- Financial assistance (this will depend on the course and money you may already have)

This is a new entitlement and not everyone knows about it so we hope this guide will tell you more about what support may be available when you are aged 21 and over.

Who is a care leaver?

Your right to support as a care leaver will depend on when and how long you were in care. The words you need to look out for are '**Eligible**', '**Relevant**' and '**Former Relevant**'. See: http://leavingcare.org/about_care_and_leaving_care/overview/who_is_a_care_leaver for more information.

If you are over 18, were in care for 13 weeks after the age of 14, and for at least 1 day after you are 16, you are a 'Former Relevant' young person and this means you are entitled to support under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The responsibilities that local authorities have towards care leavers is set out in the Statutory Guidance and Regulations called *Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers*, which you can see here: http://leavingcare.org/?page_ID=171#Planning_transitions_to_adulthood_guidance.



What support should you get as a 'Former Relevant' young person?

The local authority that looked after you must:

- Keep in touch with you
- Keep your Pathway Plan under regular review (at least every 6 months or sooner if you or your Personal Adviser think a review is needed)
- Continue to provide you with a Personal Adviser to offer advice and support
- Provide financial assistance to help with employment, training or education expenses (depending on your assessed needs)
- Pay a higher education bursary if you are at University

You may be doing different things: you may have a job; be at college; at university; unemployed and looking for work; looking after your child; volunteering or doing an apprenticeship. Whatever you are doing – support from your leaving care service continues until at least your 21st birthday.

However – the support you receive can change when you become 21 and this depends on your circumstances.

If at age 21 you are already in education or training then leaving care support continues until the programme of education or training which has been agreed in your Pathway Plan ends.

If at age 21 you are *not* in education or training then support from leaving care will usually stop around your 21st birthday. You should have a final meeting with your Personal Adviser who

will talk to you about other services you may be able to get help from. At this meeting it is a good idea to record your thoughts on what you may want to do in the future in relation to education or training. When support stops this is sometimes referred to as 'your case being closed'.

At your final Pathway Planning meeting you should also be told that you can re-contact the service in the future at any time up to your 25th birthday if you wish to seek support with education or training (see page 8).



Support for care leavers up to age 25: change in the law

From 1st April 2011, a change in the law means that care leavers up to the age of 25 who tell their local authority that they have returned, or want to return, to education or training, may be entitled to continuing support. This new duty is called different things such as 'Personal Adviser to 25 Duty' or 'Former Relevant children pursuing further education or training'.

This is good news for you if you are a care leaver aged over 21 who is **not** receiving support from your local authority (have had your 'case closed') but you want to return to education or training.

This change in the law is not about coming back into care but is about possible help and support with education and training.

Because this change in the law is quite new not everyone knows about it yet. Here's the legal reference 'Section 23CA of the 1989 Children Act' in case you or your local authority wants to know.

Who is entitled to support?

The change in the law means that if the following applies to you then you may be entitled to support from your local authority.

Are you:

- Aged under 25
- No longer receiving support from your leaving care service ('your case is closed')
- Wanting to start education or training or have already gone back to education or training

How to contact your local authority

In order to find out if you can get help you need to contact your local authority (the one that last looked after you) – it doesn't matter if you now live in a different area. You need to tell your local authority you would like to start education or training or that you have already started this.



Tips from young people and managers

Contacting your local authority

- Local authorities are responsible for making sure that all of their staff know about the change in law. However, if you find that your local authority is unsure about what you are referring to, you can show them this guide.
- Your leaving care service should be able to make sure you speak to the right person. You could try to get in touch with your previous Personal Adviser or try contacting the local authority Duty Service.
- Information on who to contact in your local authority may be included in this guide (see page 19).
- Your local authority website may also have information on who to get in touch with.
- If you can't find the right person to speak to in your local authority – keep trying – as this entitlement is new some local authorities are still working out how they will support young people.



What is meant by 'education or training'?

The law says that the definition of 'education or training' must be interpreted broadly and could include a range of opportunities e.g.:

- Basic skills courses – so you have the skills to help you get a job (e.g. numeracy and literacy skills)
- Vocational training and apprenticeships
- Courses in Further Education
- University courses
- Post graduate qualifications



Assessment of your support needs

The law says that you are entitled to an assessment of your support needs – this is not the same as automatically being entitled to support. The assessment will look at what assistance (if any) the local authority can provide you with.

The assessment should take place within 3 months of when you first ask your local authority for support. It should help you see what you want to achieve and how you could do this.

- The assessment should be based on your individual needs and identify what support you need.
- Your local authority will look with you at whether you are choosing the right course for you and what you have done so far in preparation.
- The assessment may look at the information recorded in your previous Pathway Plans up to age 21 or when you left the service.
- You may discuss during your assessment the skills you have and skills you need as well as your previous education, employment and training experiences.
- The assessment will look at how the education or training will help you to find employment in the future.
- Your financial situation will be assessed and the assessment will look at any other funding you can access to help with the costs of your education or training.

You don't have to have decided what education or training you would like to do – the law says you can get in touch with your local authority for support if you are 'wanting to pursue education or training' – thinking about it but not yet decided – in this case the assessment could help you work out what you want to do.

The leaving care service is there to help you, so do contact them to discuss your education and training ideas.

Tips from young people and managers

Making sure you are prepared

- You need to give as much notice as possible before the start of a course to make sure your local authority has time to carry out the assessment with you.
- Prepare in advance the reasons why you want to go back to education or training – it may help to write this down.
- If you don't know what course would be best for you, ask your local authority for information and help to make the right decision.
- Think about what you hope to achieve from the education or training e.g. how it will help you with future job and career plans.
- Start to think about the kinds of things you may need support with e.g. travel; accommodation; equipment for the course etc.
- Think about what money you may have to contribute to paying for the course and associated expenses and try to look at what other financial assistance may be available, don't worry if you can't contribute to costs.
- If you have decided which course of education or training you would like to do it would be very helpful to do some research about the course (e.g. if any qualifications are needed for it; length of course; how many hours a week; if there is any childcare facilities if this is something you will need; what other funding there may be etc.).



What support will you get?

Personal Adviser

If the assessment decides that you are entitled to on-going support from your local authority you will get support from a Personal Adviser.

The law doesn't give any set times for when you need to meet with your Personal Adviser if you are receiving support – this is something you will decide with your Personal Adviser in your Pathway Plan based on your needs and wishes.

Pathway Plan

The support that has been agreed should be written down in a Pathway Plan and you should receive a copy of this. The new Pathway Plan will have a specific focus on the support that you will need to be able to meet the agreed education or training goals.

The Pathway Plan will be reviewed with you as appropriate and how often will depend upon how long the education or training is.

Financial support

There are no rules on how much financial support you will receive or what you will get help with – it all depends on your individual situation and the type of course.

Your Personal Adviser should help you to explore other funding options available e.g. college bursaries and student finance.

In some local authorities you may be asked to agree to the leaving care service having contact with a named person at your college, university or training provider to check your attendance and progress on the course. If you are not attending or are not achieving, your Pathway Plan will need to be reviewed and support may stop.

If your local authority agrees to give you support it will continue for as long as you continue with the agreed education or training programme even if this goes beyond your 25th birthday.

Tips from young people and managers

Working together

- In YPBMF experience some young people don't really pay much attention to Pathway Plans. However, your Pathway Plan is your proof of what support has been agreed and it is important that you are involved in completing it.
- You should discuss with your Personal Adviser how often you will need to meet. Some of the contact with your Personal Adviser will be face to face and some will be via texts, e-mails or phone calls. These arrangements should be recorded in your Pathway Plan.
- You will have to engage with the local authority – attend appointments and keep in touch. If anything changes (e.g. if you stop going to college, move house etc.) you should contact your Personal Adviser as soon as possible.
- You should also try to get support from your course tutor at the college or education provider.
- It may be a good idea for you to keep a weekly diary of how things are going so you can let your Personal Adviser know when you meet.
- There is no guarantee that you will receive the same Personal Adviser that you had before – they may no longer be working at your local authority or they may not be available to support you.
- You won't necessarily get the same support as you had when you were under 21.



Every local authority should have a policy on this new duty

The law says that every local authority should develop a policy setting out the support it will offer to their care leavers. This means there will be differences between what local authorities offer. Each local authority policy should have information on:

- How young people can get in contact with their authority
- Details of how the local authority will work with the young person to develop a new education and training focussed Pathway Plan
- Information about any financial support.

Have you seen your local authority's policy? If not, you should ask for a copy.



Tips from young people and managers

Making sure everyone knows about this change in support

As this is a new change in the law not everyone knows about it yet. We asked NLCBF local authority members how many young people had returned to request support – so far the numbers are very small – in many local authorities no young people have yet come back for support and in other local authorities only 1 or 2 young people have come back to ask about possible support.

Here are some ideas on how your local authority can increase awareness about this new entitlement – ask if your local authority is doing these things and if not, why not.

- Tell young people as part of the Care Planning and Pathway Planning process.
- Make sure foster carers, residential staff, Independent Reviewing Officers, Personal Advisers and everyone who works with young people in and leaving care know about it.
- Make sure information for young people is included in handbooks about different services such as leaving care, fostering and residential.
- Remind young people about it as part of their last Pathway Plan or 'exit discussion'.
- Record young people's thoughts about future education or training in their last Pathway Plan.

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- Give young people a letter or leaflet with information on how to get in touch.
- Put information on the local authority website.
- Make sure advocacy organisations in your area know about this change in the law.
- Give information to the Children in Care Council and ask them for their ideas on how to tell more young people in care and care leavers about this change in the law.
- Check what the Virtual School Head in your local authority is doing to promote and monitor this entitlement.
- Send information to other services who work with care leavers (e.g. accommodation services; careers services; job centre etc.).
- Send information to local colleges and University support services staff.
- Finally ... give this guide to all young people in care and care leavers!



Local authority details

Name of local authority

How to contact us

Where to find out more information

What happens if no support is provided?

In some cases the local authority may need to decline support to you. This may be due to a number of issues such as the course not being appropriate, previous concerns regarding lack of engagement or because you refuse permission for the local authority to contact the education or training provider.

Where the local authority declines a request for support, the reasons for this decision must be clearly recorded. You should be told about the reasons for the decision and provided with details of the complaints procedure and any appeals process. If you want help with the complaints process you may want to find an advocate to support you. Voice have a free helpline that can put you in touch with an advocate in your area (see page 23).



Where to go for more advice

Apprenticeships

www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Basic Skills Learning

Online learning, support and advice.

www.bbc.co.uk/learning/subjects/basic_skills.shtml

Buttle UK

Run a range of grant schemes for young people who need support with education.

www.buttleuk.org

Care Leavers' Foundation

Small grants scheme for care leavers aged up to 29.

www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/grants.php

Discretionary Learner Support

Can be a source of help for 19 year olds or over who are having trouble with meeting the costs of participating in further education at college.

<http://bit.ly/fhngna>

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Provides free legal information, advice and representation to children, young people, their families, carers and professionals.

T: 01206 877 910

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Higher Education Bursary

If you are a care leaver starting university before your 25th birthday then you are entitled to a one-off bursary of a minimum of £2,000 from your local authority.

www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/education/a00208597/support-beyond-compulsory-education

Info 4 Care Kids website

This website provides information on how to survive and thrive in care by offering practical tips from life choices, independent living, staying in touch with family and friends, keeping healthy – through to bullying support, job searching, and coping mechanisms.

www.info4carekids.org.uk/index.aspx

Learndirect

Learn new skills and enhance existing ones (like English or maths).

T: 0800 101901

www.learndirect.co.uk

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS)

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), part of Catch22, is the national advice, support and development service focusing on young people's transition from care.

T: 020 7336 4846

www.leavingcare.org

National Careers Service

Free careers and skills advice – help is available online, over the phone or by email – or you can meet an adviser near where you live.

T: 0800 100 900

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

Offer information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to children and young people through a network of advocates throughout England and Wales.

T: 0300 330 3131 (Freephone)

www.nyas.net

Voice

Voice is a national charity committed to empowering children and young people in public care and campaigning for change to improve their lives.

Voice offers advocacy support care leavers and children in care, including a national helpline.

T: 0808 8005792 (Freephone)

www.voiceyp.org



The Who Cares? Trust

The Who Cares? Trust is a voice for children in care. They have produced a range of resources for professional and young people, including the HE handbook.

www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

Disclaimer

Please note that the information in this guide is correct and accurate at the time of printing. However, some of this information might change over time. Check websites and speak with professionals to get up-to-date, accurate information.