

[News story: Major new scheme launched to support young people leaving care](#)

Businesses including Amazon, Rolls-Royce and Barclays LifeSkills have pledged to support care leavers through a landmark government scheme launched to raise their career aspirations and improve their life skills.

More than 50 businesses, charities and every government department in England have signed up to the [Care Leaver Covenant](#), which commits to provide work based opportunities to young people leaving the care system.

Children's and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi has today (Friday 26 October) set out an ambition for the scheme to create 10,000 work opportunities over the next ten years helping these young people gain vital skills and experiences as they enter the jobs market.

Due to be launched today in Birmingham, the Care Leaver Covenant is part of an unprecedented package of support for young people leaving care and smooth their transition into adulthood.

Too many care leavers do not achieve the same outcomes as their peers, with 40 per cent of care leavers aged 19 to 21 not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared to 13 per cent for this age group overall.

The Covenant will help care leavers navigate the work opportunities available and support them in fulfilling their ambitions. From today, they will have access to work placements and internships with big businesses, government departments, museums, theatres, or Premier League football clubs, as well as training workshops or life-skills coaching.

Ahead of the launch event in Birmingham, Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi, said:

Becoming an adult is a daunting and challenging time for all of us, but I know from speaking to many young people leaving care, this transition can feel like facing a cliff edge.

This is a landmark moment on how businesses can support care leavers, who through no fault of their own have been dealt a difficult hand in life.

Young people leaving care have often overcome huge challenges but struggle to achieve the same positive outcomes in life as their peers, which is simply not fair. When we talk about burning injustices, this is what we mean – so we need to be more ambitious for these young people.

Working with businesses, charities and every government department, our new Covenant will improve the offer we make to these young

people, through work placements, skills training or access to university so that they can fulfil their potential and flourish as adults.

The Covenant, run by Spectra First, is part of the government's ambition to improve care leavers' outcomes so they go on to lead happy and successful lives. The pledges on offer include work placements with organisations such as Liverpool FC Foundation, the Science Museum Group and Rolls-Royce to help them get their first step into a career.

In addition to the private and voluntary sector offers of support, the package of support for care leavers includes:

- 12-month internships from every government department in Whitehall, including 100 12-month internships from January 2019;
- Support from universities, such as bursaries and accommodation, with Cambridge, Leeds, and Manchester universities committing to supporting care leavers – data shows that only 6 per cent of care leavers aged 19 to 21 go on to higher education; and
- Resources and tools from Barclays Life Skills to help care leavers to manage their money better, as they often lack the safety net of financial support from their families.

At the launch of the Covenant at Birmingham ICC today, the Children and Families Minister will urge more businesses to sign up and consider how to build on the offers of support, as well as challenging employers to offer dedicated mentors for care leavers taking up placements and internships.

The Covenant has been signed by 65 organisations, and dozens more have committed to sign, as well as attracting the support of advocates for young people in care including award-winning children's author Dame Jacqueline Wilson – whose series of books about Tracy Beaker tell the story of a young girl living between the care system and a foster parent.

Dame Jacqueline Wilson said:

I think it's fantastic that at last there's going to be a Care Leaver Covenant. About time too! If my fictional Tracy Beaker were real she'd be yelling 'Yay!'

Seriously though, I'm so pleased that care leavers will have the help, information and access they deserve so they can get on with their lives and fulfil all their hopes and ambitions.

The Covenant builds on a breadth of government work already underway to improve the lives of care leavers, including schemes such as Staying Put, allowing care leavers to continue living with their foster families after the age of 18, and piloting Staying Close so young people leaving residential care can keep links with people they trust.

The government is already providing £5 million for three Social Impact Bonds to help care leavers into education, employment or training post-18 and £3.2 million for 47 councils to employ specialist personal advisers to help care leavers most at risk of rough sleeping in 2019/20.

The role of these personal advisers has been extended to support care leavers up to the age of 25, and councils now have a duty to publish their offer of support for care leavers online. Many councils have chosen to exempt care leavers from council tax to support them financially.

Kirstie Mackey, Director of LifeSkills at Barclays, said:

LifeSkills helps young people to make the difficult transition from education into the world of work, whilst also preparing them for independent living and how to better manage their finances.

We've helped 6.7 million young people so far and are delighted to be working with Spectra First to use the knowledge we have gained and the educational resources we have developed to really help transform the lives and financial capability of young care leavers across the UK. I encourage other businesses to sign up to the Care Leavers Covenant so that we can work together to help some of the most vulnerable young people in society.

Paul Broadhead, Rolls-Royce Head of Community Investment and Education Outreach, said:

At Rolls-Royce we are committed to inspiring and equipping a future generation of innovators and pioneers. Every child deserves the opportunity to explore the world of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and it is why we offer a wide variety of programmes and activities supporting this. This includes robotics challenges, nearly 700 work experience placements and our young apprentice programme.

We recognise the importance of attracting talent, which is equally distributed across our communities while the opportunity is not. This is why Rolls-Royce is committed to help change this and we are delighted to be supporting the Care Leaver Covenant.

Barnardo's Chief Executive, Javed Khan said:

Sadly young people leaving care often struggle to gain good qualifications and get their foot on the career ladder. That's why Barnardo's is committed to offering high quality work placements as well as specialist advice and support. We believe that all young people deserve the opportunity to follow their dreams. That's why our ambition is for care leavers to have the same life chances as

other young people, including access to employment, education and training.

Matthew Gordon, Chief Executive of Spectra First, delivery partner for the Covenant, said:

We are thrilled to be a part of this ground breaking initiative and are confident that we can use our creativity to find meaningful and practical opportunities for our care leaving community.