

Vital new support for young people leaving care

Access to better housing, healthcare and employment opportunities are at the core of a new multi-million pound settlement to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people leaving care.

Marking National Care Leavers Week, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (Wednesday 23 October) announced the new cross-government support available to young people leaving the care system, alongside £19 million of investment into programmes that directly benefit care leavers.

The new funding includes £10 million to create stable homes for care leavers as they become adults; £6 million to support young people leaving care to live independently and £3 million to help care leavers go into further education.

Alongside this, the Education Secretary has committed to delivering 1,000 internships for care leavers over the next two years to help secure long term, quality jobs for care leavers. This will include expanding the existing Civil Service Internship Scheme which has offered permanent jobs to 220 care leavers across Whitehall and working with other public sector bodies including the NHS, Ministry of Defence civilian roles, police and the fire service to support care leavers into new employment opportunities.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Young people leaving care face enormous barriers in their lives as they move towards independence, from not having a trusted person in their life to rely on, to not having a safe home to return to at the end of the day.

Housing, healthcare and education are three of the biggest obstacles they have to overcome. We all have a responsibility to do better for them – so I'm bringing together colleagues from across government to join me in transforming the support we offer care leavers in all of these key areas to make the biggest difference in their lives.

This starts immediately, because we must raise the bar for these young people, to give them greater stability and a strong sense of purpose in adulthood.

The new offer for care leavers builds on existing work by the Department for Education to tackle the root causes for children being taken into care, through projects designed to strengthen families and support stable home lives for vulnerable children so that they can stay with their birth families when it is safe to do so and in that child's best interest. It adds to extra

funding announced last week to help adoptive families build strong relationships and overcome past trauma, and practical support announced earlier this month for foster families in the form of short breaks, mentoring and social activities.

Chaired by Mr Williamson and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Dowden, the new Care Leaver Covenant Board will comprise of Secretaries of State from across relevant government departments and will meet three times a year to address the key barriers facing young care leavers as they adjust to independent life as adults: finding a suitable, safe place to live, supporting them to remain in education, employment or training, and helping them access appropriate healthcare. It will also look at how to support councils to employ adolescent mental health workers in every leaving care team in the country.

In addition to the new internships and ministerial group, the full package of new announcements includes:

- £10 million to expand Staying Put, a programme designed to create stable homes for care leavers as they become adults. The programme will help more care leavers to continue living with their foster families until they reach 21. This will the stability will boost their numbers in employment or staying in education and make a smooth transition into living independently.
- £6 million in 2021/22 to roll out Staying Close across the country, helping young people leaving residential care to continue to get on-going support from their previous carers they know and trust, which will help them to successfully live independently.
- £3 million to extend the Pupil Premium Plus to all 16-18 year old care leavers, supporting their transition into further education. This is to help them be ambitious in their choice of qualifications and to make sure that there is a greater chance that they will complete their chosen course.

This transformation in support for care leavers will help improve their outcomes, addressing the number of those aged 19 to 21 who are deemed 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). Almost 40% of care leavers are NEET compared to 13% for this age group overall. The new internships, each being a one-year paid offer, are designed to lead to full-time job offers, and follows an expansion of the civil service internship scheme for care leavers from 2021, which is currently offering 220 internships across 25 departments in the next year.

Expanding the scheme is part of the government's drive to provide care leavers with opportunities to learn new skills in a range of employment areas, whether the police, or other public bodies.

The ministerial group will agree key goals across relevant policy areas which will be scrutinised by members, which will include the Secretaries of State from the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and Social Care and Home Office.

Minister for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Dowden, said:

My role in the Cabinet Office is to pull together all the different parts of government, so that they work together on the issues that really matter. Through better coordination we can massively improve the support that's available to young people leaving the care system and make sure they can become independent adults with a bright future ahead of them.

Ian Dickson, Chair of the Conference for Care Experienced People which met with Mr Williamson on Monday to mark National Care Leavers Week, said:

The Education Secretary listened very attentively and reflected that our commitment to 'care experienced' people should be a lifelong one – similar to the commitment we make towards members of the Armed Forces. We thought he really got it: care experience is a continuous lifetime experience bringing different needs at different stages that may not accord with the statutory definition of care and leaving care. Care does not end at 18, 21 or 25.