

# Leaving Care Learning Programme



Esmée  
Fairbairn  
FOUNDATION

Rapid Summary of the Department for Education's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England

## **The Department for Education's Response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care**

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) formally announced its response to the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England.

In response to the [Review's final report](#), published in May 2022, [the DfE announced](#) its long term strategy for reforming children's social care "[Stable Homes, Built on Love](#)".

The programme of reform is backed by £200 million over the next two years, and will result in changes across the entire children's social care sector including early help, child protection, workforce training and the care system.

This short note provides a brief summary of the changes that have been proposed which will directly affect the care leavers supported by English grantees across Esmée Fairbairn's Leaving Care Programme.

## The Headlines

The major headlines in relation to the Government’s planned reform of the whole system are:

- Testing a new “joined up” approach to family help.
- A new Child Protection Lead Practitioner role to identify and respond to significant harm.
- New support for kinship carers.
- Reform to improve the experiences of children in care and care leavers, with a particular emphasis on supporting children in care and care leavers to live closer to home.
- A variety of reforms to expand and improve the children’s social care workforce.
- A new Children’s Social Care National Framework and Dashboard to improve accountability, drive reform and improve outcomes.
- The Government is now consulting on its proposed strategy. The consultation will be open until May 11<sup>th</sup> 2023

## Changes for Care Leavers – at a glance

The Independent Review set out five “missions” for the government to improve the experiences of children in care and care leavers. Alongside each of these missions were a range of enabling reforms and changes to help make the missions a success. The missions were:

1. No young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships, by 2027.
2. Double the proportion of care leavers attending university, particularly high tariff universities, by 2026.
3. Create at least 3,500 new well paid jobs and apprenticeships for care leavers each year, by 2026.
4. Reduce care experience homelessness now, before ending it entirely.
5. Increase the life expectancy of care experienced people, by narrowing health inequalities with the wider population.

Broadly, the government have accepted these missions and many of the recommendations associated with them. The tables below summarise the Review’s Recommendations and the Government’s response.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Review</b></p> <p><b>Mission One: No young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships, by 2027.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Government</b></p> <p><b>Mission One: By 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place.</b></p>
<p>As part of the National Children’s Social Care Framework, all local authorities should have skilled family finding support equivalent to, or exceeding, the work of Lifelong Links in place by 2024 at the very latest.</p>	<p>We will provide over £30 million in the next two years to significantly increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes including Lifelong Links.</p>
<p>A new lifelong guardianship order should be created, allowing a care experienced person and an adult who loves them to form a lifelong legal bond.</p>	<p>We will assess levels of interest in introducing a way for care-experienced people to legally formalise a lifelong bond with someone they care about, such as a former foster carer or family friend.</p>

Ofsted should amend the SCCIF and ILACS inspection frameworks so that the quality and number of relationships held by young people play a significant role in determining the overall judgement.	Ofsted's implementation of its standalone care leaver judgement criteria will be used to assess leaving care services. It will strongly reinforce the importance of loving relationships, alongside the rest of our missions.
Local authorities should redesign their existing Independent Visitor scheme for children in care and care leavers to allow for long term relationships to be built.	We will increase the accessibility and take-up of the Independent Visitors offer by working with the sector to reinforce current good practice and developing standards for Independent Visitor services.
	We will monitor our progress in helping children in care and care leavers to maintain loving relationships using the following measures: feel lonely often/always; do not have a really good friend; do not have someone they trust; or do not have someone who will be there for them. We will be undertaking further work to look at how best to routinely track these areas going forward.

<b>The Review</b>	<b>The Government</b>
<b>Mission Two: Double the proportion of care leavers attending university by 2026.</b>	<b>Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers.</b>
Virtual School Heads should be held accountable for the education attainment of children in care and care leavers up to age 25 through Ofsted's ILACS framework. Pupil Premium funding should be focused on evidence led tutoring and mentoring programmes.	To support children in care to continue in education and training beyond 16, we will consult as necessary on our plans to build on the success of the Virtual School Heads model and expand the Virtual School Head role to include children in care and care leavers up to 25.  We will extend the post-16 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) style of funding with a further £24 million of funding between 2023 and 2025 to address the cliff edge in educational support that children in care and care leavers face in 16- to 19-year-old education.
Virtual School Heads should work to identify more children in care who might benefit from a place at a state or independent day or boarding school, and the Department for Education should create a new wave of state boarding capacity led by the best existing schools.	We will expand the Broadening Educational Pathways (BEP) programme to support children in care into independent schools.
Introduce a new mandatory kitemark scheme for higher education to drive improvements in admissions, access and support for those with care experience.	We are committed to introducing a gold standard accreditation scheme for further and higher education institutions. We want the scheme to set a high standard that all institutions will aspire to, including how to drive take-up and retain students.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Review</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission Three: Create 3,500 well-paid jobs and apprenticeships for care leavers each year, by 2026.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Government</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers.</b></p>
<p>The Care Leaver Covenant should be refreshed to align with the five missions set out in this report and co-produced with care experienced people. Employers should be able to apply for a new government led accreditation scheme which recognises their commitment to supporting care leavers into well paid jobs.</p>	<p>We will create 3,500 new, well-paid jobs for care leavers by 2027. To do this, we will refresh the Care Leaver Covenant and boost its capacity and profile, increasing its budget by 30% in each of the next two years.</p>
<p>An annual care leaver bursary should be made available to all apprentices up to the age of 25, and employers should be allowed to use unspent apprenticeship levy funds to tailor support for those with care experience.</p>	<p>From August 2023, we will increase the apprenticeships care leavers’ bursary from £1,000 to £3,000. We will ensure that more employers and training providers know about the bursary and the additional £1,000 funding they can each claim to support care leaver apprentices.</p>
	<p>We have agreed to host an employment summit in Spring 2023 to promote examples in the public, private and voluntary sectors on how best to support care leavers into employment; and to share learning from the care leaver social impact bonds that DfE funded.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Review</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission Four: Reduce care experience homelessness now, before ending it entirely.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Government</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission 5: By 2027, we will see an increase in the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and reduce care leaver homelessness.</b></p>
<p>There should be a range of housing options open to young people transitioning out of care or who need to return, such as Staying Put, Staying Close and supported lodgings. Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” expectation.</p>	<p>We will bring forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows, for Staying Close to be a national entitlement. We will explore Staying Put and Staying Close in order to support young people up to age 23. We will see an increase in young people accessing Staying Put and Staying Close nationally.</p>
<p>Introduce a stronger safety net against care leaver homelessness by removing the local area connection test, ending intentionally homelessness practice, providing a rent guarantor scheme and increasing the leaving care grant to £2,438 for care experienced people.</p>	<p>To support care leavers financially, we will increase the amount available for the leaving care allowance from £2,000 to £3,000 from April 2023.</p>

	We will bring forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to remove the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing at the next available opportunity.
	We will increase provision and take-up of “supported lodgings” models, where care leavers live in a family environment with support to develop independent living skills.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Review</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission Five: Increase life expectancy of care experienced people, by narrowing health inequalities.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Government</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission 6: We will work closely with health partners to reduce the disparities in the long-term mental and physical outcomes of care-experienced people.</b></p>
<p>The identification and response to poor mental health issues should be a core part of training programmes for any professionals working with children and young people that have involvement with children’s services.</p>	<p>We will ensure the Early Career Framework (ECF) builds social workers’ understanding of mental health and wellbeing and develops their skills so they can better respond to children and adults with mental health needs.</p> <p>In addition to driving progress through the ECF for social workers, we will review current levels of knowledge and skills in relation to mental health among other social care practitioners, such as Personal Advisors, children’s homes staff, staff working in virtual schools and Family Help practitioners.</p>
<p>All local authorities must improve care leaver mental and physical health support, and the National Children’s Social Care Framework should promote the most effective multidisciplinary models of doing this.</p>	<p>We will make clear our expectations of best practice in supporting the mental and physical health of children in care and care leavers. We will update the existing joint DfE/DHSC guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of Children Looked After and extend it to cover care leavers up to age 25.</p>
<p>Integrated Care Boards should publish their plans for improving the mental and physical health of those in care and leaving care and routinely publish progress. As part of these plans and a new corporate parenting duty, the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS should exempt care leavers from prescription charges up to age 25.</p>	<p>We are working with NHS England and DHSC to ensure all Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs), Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) and local authorities better support the planning and commissioning of services to meet the assessed physical and mental health needs of children in care and care leavers in their area.</p> <p>Guidance will be updated to encourage local authorities to purchase NHS Prescription Prepayment Certificates (PPCs) for care</p>

	leavers who have ongoing medical conditions and struggle to pay for prescriptions.
The Office for National Statistics should collect and report data on the mortality rate of care leavers and care leaver health outcomes. Government should also launch a new cohort study which tracks the health outcomes of care experienced people and helps to gather other missing data on housing, education and employment outcomes.	The Longitudinal Education Outcomes data set, which was used to support the Care Review, allows us to explore educational pathways, employment and earnings rates and evidence of those on benefits. This data set will be maintained and used to inform specific aspects of project work as needed. We are in the process of linking data with both DHSC and DLUHC, giving us detailed health and housing data for care leavers in the next two years. We will look further at the need for any focused longitudinal study in light of this new evidence base.
	We are proposing to extend the mandatory reporting of deaths or serious incidents involving children to include the deaths of care leavers. We will be consulting on this as part of the wider consultation on Working Together in spring 2023.

## Tackling Stigma

The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care also made a range of recommendations to tackle the stigma that care experienced young people often face. It recommended:

- New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations.
- Government should make care experience a protected characteristic, following consultation with care experienced people and the Devolved Administrations.
- National government should issue statutory guidance to local authorities setting out the priority that should be afforded to care experienced adults in accessing local services such as social housing.

The Government accepted that more needs to be done to tackle stigma and improve outcomes. Whilst they are not prepared to make Care Experience a protected characteristic they have announced that reform of the corporate parenting duty will be one of their six missions:

“Mission 3: By 2027, we will strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector.”

## What happens now?

The Department for Education have commenced the rollout of their new strategy with three public consultations.

The first consultation ask for views on the new strategy as a whole and can be found here:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/children2019s-social-care-national-framework/childrens-social-care-implementation-strategy-cons/>

The second consultation calls for views on all the reforms announced that will affect the children's social care workforce – particularly social workers. It can be found here: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/social-work-reform-unit/child-and-family-social-worker-workforce/>

The third consultation calls for views on the proposed National Children's social Care Framework. It can be found here: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/children2019s-social-care-national-framework/childrens-social-care-national-framework/>

**All of these consultations close on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2023.**

The strategy suggests there will be a further round of consultation on a range of additional issues in the Autumn.

There are many things in the Strategy which would require Primary Legislation (i.e. new laws). The strategy suggests that, following consultation, this legislation would be brought forward when Parliamentary time allows it.