

North Yorkshire County Council

Children & Young People's Service Children's Social Care

Support for Care Leavers Undertaking a Course in Higher Education (HE)

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This policy will be reviewed annually.

Links to other NYCC documents:

Post-18 Family Placement (Staying Put) Policy

Further Education Policy

Leaving Care Finance Policy

Leaving Care Eligibility & Entitlement Policy

Care Leavers Mentoring Scheme Briefing Document

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Policy Statement

Young people from local authority care are poorly represented amongst the population that undertake study at higher education level. There have been a number of initiatives (Aim Higher) from central government to support local authorities in improving the numbers of young people leaving care who are able to undertake study at higher education level. As corporate parents, North Yorkshire County Council has high aspirations for all young people leaving our care and has a track record of seeking to positively encourage and support young people towards higher education.

The landscape within higher education is changing particularly in terms of tuition fees, and the cost of student living. Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009, made under Children & Young Person's Act 2008, introduced new duties upon the responsible local authority. The regulations require that a one off bursary of £2,000 be paid to any care leaver going into Higher Education (HE), before their 25th birthday, which can be paid in a lump sum or instalments, and extends the duties to support care leavers in education or training up to 25 years old. More recently the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 added that a care leaver (having been closed to the service at age 21) may request to have their support from the Leaving Care service re-established, if they are looking to return to education or training before the age of 25. The implications of these changes have necessitated this revision of North Yorkshire County Council's Higher Education policy.

There is a finite amount of money available to support care leavers from North Yorkshire in higher education, as the statutory changes impact and there are greater numbers of care leavers requiring support in pursuing higher education it is critical that we use these resources as effectively as possible and bring added value whenever possible.

This policy sets out the financial and individual support available to care leavers going onto higher education. This policy also draws a distinction between full time and part time higher education study, as well as a distinction between young people Staying Put and young people leaving their care arrangements to live in independent accommodation.

This policy aims to offer clarity and guidance, but there will always be exceptional circumstances which will need to be considered on an individual basis.

For the purpose of this policy, the following definition of higher education will be used in determining care leavers eligibility for funding from North Yorkshire County Council:

"Higher education means a course of higher education that is of at least two academic years' duration and is designated by or under regulations made under section 22(1) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998(4) on the

date on which the former relevant child starts the course.” The Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009

In summary this policy is concerned with 3 key points:

1. Early identification of young people who wish and are capable of going into Higher Education in order to provide timely support in making the right choices.
2. Sources of financial support including that made available by North Yorkshire County Council for higher education.
3. The non-financial support from North Yorkshire County Council and its partners that can be provided to a young person before during and after university.

Legislation & Standards

Children Act 1989 [the 1989 Act]
Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010
Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) Regulations 2009
Children & Young Persons Act 2008
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 [C(LC)A 2000]

Responsibility

Supporting young people towards and through HE is a corporate responsibility, managed collaboratively by the Virtual School (VS) and Leaving Care services. Implementation of this policy is shared equally between the Team Manager for Leaving Care and the Virtual School Headteacher.

Action

1. Early Identification of Young People’s Interest in Higher Education

- 1.1 Conversations around careers and future courses should begin when a young person has to make their level 2 (e.g GCSE) subject choices at school (usually year 9). Consideration needs to be given to how these subject choices may affect the courses they can take at further and higher education. Careers advice will help a young person identify whether they want and need to go into higher education in order to achieve their career ambitions. It is important that this is continually reviewed through the Personal Education Plan, both pre and post 16, as the young person’s experience, wishes and feelings about careers are moulded.
- 1.2 How the local authority intends to support a young person in pursuing their education, training or employment goals is a core component of both the Personal Education Plan and Pathway Plan.

- 1.3 The VS has taken on responsibility for over-seeing and coordinating the higher education provision available to children in care and care leavers. The lead post holder for this within the VS is referred to throughout this policy as the HE Youth Mentor. The HE Youth Mentor provides specialist training and advice to personal advisers and social workers around HE, to enable them to best advise the young people they work with. The post holder is also responsible for monitoring and tracking care leavers who are interested in going to university and who are currently at university, and ensuring they are accessing all the appropriate financial and pastoral support available to them. The HE Youth Mentor Lead also works in partnership with universities to develop opportunities for children in care and care leavers to learn more about higher education, through events and programmes.
- 1.4 There must always be a named individual to whom the young person can turn to discuss higher education. Generally this will be their social worker or personal adviser but it could be anyone in whom the young person has trust and confidence e.g. Teacher, Foster Carer.
- 1.5 Exploring possible universities and their location will help the young person get a better sense of whether that university is right for them. Most universities offer support within their access policies to groups of young people who traditionally don't enter higher education.
- 1.6 The personal adviser is responsible for helping the young person with their application to university and ensuring that all aspects of the application process have been completed; from applying for the course through UCAS, to applying for finance and accommodation (if necessary). The HE Youth Mentor will assist the personal adviser where needed and help with personal statements if required.
- 1.7 It is important that the young person hoping to go to university accepts appropriate advice, assistance and guidance, from their Leaving Care Personal Advisor as part of the contract to receiving financial support. The nature and extent of this advice, assistance and guidance will vary according to the individual e.g. budgeting, tenancy law and managing relationships.
- 1.8 A hand-out in line with this policy has been produced by NYCC in consultation with care leavers. It details the financial support available to young people attending higher education and should be shared and discussed with young people and their carers (as appropriate).

2. Eligibility for support from North Yorkshire County Council with accessing Higher Education

- 2.1 Former Relevant Young People-** Have full entitlement to all the financial support as prescribed within this policy document.

2.2 Young Person Qualifying (YPQ)- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 draws a distinction between the extent to which a local authority should provide assistance to different categories of care leavers. The Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009 only refers to a former relevant child. Section 24 of the 1989 Act gives the local authority a duty to advise and befriend a YPQ and the power to assist financially. The C(LC)A 2000 amended the 1989 Act to add a duty to stay in touch in order to provide accommodation during the vacation should the care leaver in higher education so require it. The extent to which North Yorkshire County Council will exercise its power under section 24 1989 Act will be limited to a one-off bursary of £2,000 over the full course and assistance during the vacation period to secure accommodation will also be available up to a maximum of £1,800 per year.

2.3 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People - There are a number of possible outcomes to an UASC claim. Pathway Planning should include contingencies for durable and best interest plans for UASC and young people who may have to return to their country of origin. Those UASC provided with refugee status, or more rarely Humanitarian Protection, are usually granted 5 years to remain in the UK. When a UAS care leaver secures a place at university/HE and is unable to secure funding from the student loans company the matter should be referred to the VS Head Teacher and the Leaving Care Team Manager.

2.4 In all instances, a young person's entitlement for financial assistance above and beyond the minimum £2000 bursary is discretionary and may be subject to means testing¹. See also part 5.3

3. Support to Pursue Higher Education Post 21

3.1 The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 covers eligibility for leaving care services for young people post 21 as follows:

- Local Authority duties operate primarily until the young person reaches the age of 21. However, the duties continue beyond a young person's 21st birthday where they remain engaged in education or training and continue until the end of the agreed programme. (See also points 3.3 & 3.4).
- Care Leavers *Returning* Post 21- Young People previously eligible for leaving care services (Former Relevant and Young Person's Qualifying) *resuming* programmes of education or training after the age of 21, but before age 25, are entitled to renewed support from their Leaving Care Team. This includes starting a higher education course, and postgraduate

¹ When calculating the financial assistance that will be provided to a care leaver, the local authority cannot take into account any criminal injuries compensation or Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independence Payment that care leaver may receive.

study. Upon reinstatement, young people will be eligible for assistance in accordance with points 2.1 or 2.2 of this policy.

3.2 In accordance with legislation, North Yorkshire County Council Leaving Care Team will remain involved with the young person for as long as they are engaged on the course, but support beyond age 21 will be in relation to education and any needs associated with this (e.g. university accommodation).

3.3 A care leaver who wishes to start a course of higher education before age 25, but has been closed to NYCC Leaving Care Services, can contact their previous leaving care team to request assistance. All care leavers will be informed of their rights to this prior to closure and how to re-establish contact.

3.4 If a care leaver commences a course which will take them past their 25th birthday, then they will be supported financially (as set out in part 5.15) until the end of the semester in which they turn 25. Although financial *entitlement* ceases at 25 (see also 3.4), the young person will continue to receive advice and support from their personal adviser until the end of their course, if the young person so chooses and it is set out in the pathway plan.

3.5 Although financial *entitlement* ends at age 25, the young person may wish to have the total sum of their bursary spread out in equal payments for the duration of their course, so would still be receiving payments beyond their 25th birthday.

4. Finance from The Student Loans Company for **Full Time HE**

4.1 A Former Relevant Young Person, studying a course of higher education full time is eligible to receive a maintenance loan (this is repayable) and a maintenance grant (this is non-repayable).

4.2 Young people who qualify for Housing Benefit or Income Support should claim the Special Support Grant, instead of the Maintenance Grant.

4.3 A care leaver studying inside the London area may require additional financial assistance and this will be considered on an individual basis.

4.4 Since September 2012 UK Universities have been able to charge students from England up to £9,000 per year for tuition fees².

4.5 All care leavers applying for higher education will be expected to claim their maximum entitlement to the tuition fee loan, maintenance/special

² If a young person is from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, different rules apply. See www.direct.gov.uk/

support loan and maintenance grant from the Student Loans Company, with assistance from their Personal Adviser.

5. Financial Assistance From North Yorkshire County Council

The following will be provided by North Yorkshire County Council for **former relevant** young people pursuing a **full time** higher education course:

- 5.1 Once the young person identifies which universities they are interested in, the PA (or any other appropriate adult identified by the young person) will assist with making enquiries about the financial support each of these universities provides to care leavers and where possible source funds available from charities.
- 5.2 Some higher education courses are part or fully funded (e.g. NHS, certain initial teacher training courses, military sponsorship) and university and charity bursaries can be quite substantial. Some universities offer care leavers payments in kind (for example free accommodation). Any additional funding or payments in kind secured by the young person from bursaries and loans (excluding payments made by Student Loans Company) will be taken into account and may affect the amount of bursary provided by North Yorkshire County Council.
- 5.3 If the care leaver has more capital than is the threshold for claiming DWP benefits (circa £16k), with the exception of Criminal Injuries Compensation, then the maximum amount the care leaver would receive is £2,000³. This can be paid as a lump sum or in instalments, depending on the young person's preference.
- 5.4 In addition to the finance available from the Student Loans Company. North Yorkshire County Council will provide an annual HE bursary of £3,100 for up to a **maximum of 4 years**⁴ (up to £12,400 in total). This figure has been devised to include the statutory £2000 bursary and the assessed need. An additional £2000 will be paid to care leavers upon graduation ('Graduation payment'), to further assist with the cost of post graduate studies or to pay off some of their student loan. In total the young person may receive upto £14,400. NYCC's HE bursary will be reviewed annually in line with all the County Council's financial allowances. For those turning 25 part way through their course see part 5.13.
- 5.5 The young person will be expected to pay for their rent, (during holidays and term time) and their living costs throughout the year with their income from Student Finance and their North Yorkshire County Council bursary.

³ The Children Act 1989 (HE Bursary) Regulations 2009, & CYP Act 2008: The local authority is required to provide a one off bursary of £2,000 to all Former Relevant young people in HE.

⁴ The Student Loans Company will only make monies available to students for up to 4 years. North Yorkshire County Council has aligned its HE policy to be consistent with the Student Loans Company.

- 5.6 The young person's financial entitlement will be set out in their pathway plan⁵ (see also part 8).
- 5.7 An additional £650 is available to a young person to help towards the cost of books and high cost, one off items, of ICT equipment as needed (e.g. laptop). This is a one off amount. All expenditures must be agreed with the personal advisor *prior* to purchases being made. Requests for ICT equipment should be made to by the PA, on the young person's behalf, by contacting the Virtual School.
- 5.8 Most young people will not be eligible to receive welfare benefits during the period between them leaving college and starting university. They should be encouraged and supported by the PA to find employment during this time. However, if a young person still finds themselves in financial hardship in the period between courses, NYCC will provide financial assistance according to need. This assistance will be deducted from the financial support that is provided at the commencement of their studies. Arrangements will be agreed with the young person.
- 5.9 When a young person is considering their university accommodation options, serious thought must be given to the distance they will have to travel to their campus and related transport costs.
- 5.10 The young person will be expected to meet a proportion of their travel expenses to and from university during term time. Where the daily cost exceeds £3 per day, NYCC will assist by providing 50% of the **total cost** of daily travel based on the cheapest most practical form of transport available which will take into account the availability of extended transport passes. The extent of any financial assistance with travel will be **limited** to £5 per day pro rata.
- 5.11 NYCC will meet the cost of getting to and from university at the start and end of each term if returning home or other accommodation during the vacation period.
- 5.12 If so required, NYCC will provide a bond to the approximate value of one month's rent at local market value, and may act as guarantor if necessary⁶. A maximum of one month's rent in advance will also be available but will be deducted from the young person's bursary.
- 5.13 In line with Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, the financial support from the Leaving Care service ends at 25 (see part 3). If a young person reaches their 25th birthday prior to completing their course then they will receive a pro-rata amount of the £3,100 in the year that they turn

⁵ A Young Person Qualifying does not have a Pathway Plan

⁶ Any financial commitment to secure accommodation that requires North Yorkshire County Council to either sign a tenancy or act as guarantor must be undertaken in consultation with the Projects Officer, Corporate Governance (NYCC Legal Services)

25⁷ (for academic years prior to this they are still be eligible for the full £3,100 per annum). Then at the *end of the term* in which the young person turns 25, they will also receive £2,000 as a final instalment. This will provide them with the statutory £2k bursary payment within required timescales. They will also receive the £2k graduation payment upon completion of their course.

6. Part Time Study:

- 6.1 Former Relevant young people pursuing part time higher education courses *are* eligible to claim tuition fee loans to meet the cost of their tuition fees. A student maintenance grant and loan from the Student Loans Company *are not* available to part time students.
- 6.2 Former Relevant Young People studying part time will be given a one off payment of £2,000 from North Yorkshire County Council. This can be made in instalments over the duration of the course. As part time students they will have access to other sources of income from welfare benefits, depending on their circumstances.

7. Postgraduate Courses

- 7.1 Students wishing to pursue postgraduate study are not eligible to apply for maintenance grants or loans from the Student Loans Company. In some circumstances they are eligible to apply for tuition fee loans.
- 7.2 A graduation payment of £2,000 is paid out at the end of the young person's degree (see part 5.4). Although this will not cover the full cost of a postgraduate course, this is the extent to which NYCC can assist financially.
- 7.3 Care leavers undertaking postgraduate study prior to age 25 will continue to receive support and advice from their Leaving Care PA until the end of their course.

8. Payments

- 8.1 The PA will give the young person information about their financial entitlement, dependent upon their eligibility, as laid out in this policy. This includes those turning 25 during their course, who must be informed that financial entitlement ceases at age 25.
- 8.2 The annual NYCC HE bursary of £3,100 can be paid in a lump sum each year or in instalments. The young person will be consulted as to how they

⁷ The pro-rata figure is calculated by working out the number of weeks from the first week of the new academic year in September until the end of the week in which the young person's 25th birthday falls and multiplying it by the weekly bursary rate of £59.62

wish to receive payments. It can be used flexibly to help support care leavers with their degree or postgraduate studies.

8.3 The £2,000 graduation payment can also be used flexibly so long as it is in relation to a young person's course and the Leaving Care Team Manager or VS Headteacher has been consulted. Requests for this money to be made available early to assist with gap years or terms spent abroad will only be considered if it is educationally purposeful and can be supported in writing by a letter from the university. It must be planned in advance with the personal adviser.

8.4 Their entitlement will be written up in a letter and given to the young person and a copy stored on their electronic file. It will also be included in their pathway plan.

8.5 Payments will be made via BACS into the young person's bank account.

9. Application for Finances

9.1 The PA will apply for HE finances from NYCC, at the earliest opportunity once the young person's place at university has been confirmed and start date is known. Authorisation for payments will be made by the Leaving Care Team Manager. Payments of the HE bursary should start from the day the young person goes to university, and the start date should be indicated on the finance form.

9.2 The PA will also assist the young person with making timely applications for finance from Student Loans Company and explore bursaries available from charities and the university, with assistance from the HE Youth Mentor.

9.3 PA to check that payments from Student Loans Company and North Yorkshire County Council are being received and to assist if any problems arise.

10. Responsibility For Monitoring Budget and HE Cohort

10.1 Responsibility for the Leaving Care HE budget is held by the Leaving Care Team Manager. The HE cohort is monitored by the HE Youth Mentor and VS Head Teacher.

10.2 If a young person identifies that they are interested in pursuing higher education, the PA will help them explore their options and will notify the Leaving Care Team Manager and the HE Youth Mentor, by completing an 'Interest in Higher Education' form (Appendix A).

11. Exceptional Circumstances

- 11.1 There may be certain circumstances where a young person needs to request extra financial assistance. The PA must raise this with the Leaving Care Team Manager who will consider any circumstances regarded as exceptional.

12. Additional help for those with Specific Needs

- 12.1 Care Leavers with disabilities or dependents pursuing a course of higher education may be eligible for additional financial help from welfare benefits and universities. The PA will assist with applications for these funds. This will not affect the amount of bursary the young person will receive from NYCC.

13. Change in Circumstances

- 13.1 The NYCC bursary is available for upto 4 years to allow for any change in course, or repeated years.

14. Stopping and Recovering Payments made by North Yorkshire County Council

- 14.1 In accordance with The Children's Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009, North Yorkshire County Council may:

- *withhold payment of the bursary if the young person is not pursuing higher education as set out in their pathway plan. Section 4(5)*
- *recoup any bursary payments made in error around a young person's eligibility. Section 4(6)*

Therefore if a young person leaves their course early, a new needs assessment will be conducted and all HE bursary payments will end.

- 14.2 The PA will be responsible for keeping in touch with the university and monitoring a young person's progress. A condition of receiving the NYCC HE bursary is that the young person remains engaged with their course and making satisfactory progress. The young person should be informed of this. They should complete a 'consent to share information form' giving the University and PA consent to share information about the young person as necessary.

15. Additional Financial Advice and Information Relating to Higher Education

- 15.1 The PA will seek advice on behalf of the young person in relation to finances and repayment of student loans. The PA will help the young person devise a budget and plan their finances. This will be recorded in the Pathway Plan.

16. Staying Put

- 16.1 If a young person lives full time with their Staying Put provider throughout the year and commutes to University, the provider will receive the equivalent of the fostering allowance less £50 per week. This is made up of a contribution from the young person and the remainder paid by North Yorkshire County Council. Contact the Staying Put Portfolio Lead for details on calculating the contribution the young person must make to their former carer or see NYCC's Staying Put Policy.
- 16.2 If a young person Staying Put lives away at university, the former carer will receive a retainer allowance of £50 per week during term time (paid by NYCC), on the understanding that the young person's room is exclusively reserved for them to return to during the vacation periods or at any point during term time should the need arise. It is also expected that the former foster carer will provide support to the young person by phoning and visiting where practical. The retainer should also be used to assist the young person to move to university accommodation and help them settle in.
- 16.3 During the breaks from university the former carer will be entitled to the full Staying Put rate if the young person returns to stay in the home in their own bedroom, under the same financial arrangements as described in paragraph 15.1. Care leavers returning to visit for ad hoc days will be expected to make a contribution to their keep if required. NYCC will only make an allowance when the duration of the stay reaches 7 consecutive days.
- 16.4 Staying Put arrangements end when the young person reaches 21 years old. Post 21 it will become a private arrangement between the young person and ex-foster carer if the young person remains living there. If the young person's 21st birthday falls within 3 months of their exams, the end of their Staying Put arrangement will be deferred until the exam period is over.

17. Accommodation Arrangements (Not Staying Put)

- 17.1 If a young person does not intend on remaining in a Staying Put arrangement, the personal adviser will assist the young person with finding suitable accommodation during the year. Early planning is essential and should be incorporated into the pathway plan, to help the young person make informed choices about where they can and want to live (see also part 6.12 about travel costs).
- 17.2 The PA (or other suitable person identified by the young person) will support with visiting university accommodation and finding out about options available and financial packages for accommodation by liaising with Access and Inclusion Officers at various universities.

17.3 To avoid financial difficulty with accommodation during the vacation period, the level of weekly bursary paid during term time can be adjusted so that more funds are available through the holiday period. This arrangement will need to be discussed and agreed with the young person.

18. Pastoral Support and Assistance

18.1 The PA (or someone else chosen by the young person) should accompany the young person with a visit to their university campus prior to starting and assist with moving to university at the start of term, if required. The PA will help the care leaver prepare for starting university and will maintain contact regularly over the phone, via text and email, and make visits in line with current regulations, providing pastoral support for the duration of the course.

18.2 It is important that where the university provides support to vulnerable groups that that person is identified as a source of support and that this is included in the pathway plan.

19. Career Development and Future Opportunities

19.1 The young person will be encouraged to seek careers advice from the university. The personal adviser will assist with finding work experience/work placements/internships to develop skills and experience to help them compete for graduate opportunities when they leave university.

19.2 The Career Mentoring Scheme is a new Council initiative which offers care leaver's at university related support and insight. A diverse pool of council employees willing to act as a mentor has been established and individuals are matched according to whose role broadly fits with the ambitions of an individual care leaver. The mentor may be willing to offer some or all of a range of support from career and course advice to work shadowing and taster days.

19.3 NYCC will offer work experience across all business sectors to all of its care leavers in higher education. Further details are available from The Young Person's Recruitment & Development Team.

19.4 The personal advisor will support care leavers with applications to NYCC's Graduate Talent Pool.

20. Celebrating Achievement

20.1 North Yorkshire County Council will recognise achievement by paying for the cost of the graduation ceremony up to a maximum of £150.

20.2 Care leavers who complete their final year and are due to graduate will be invited by the Virtual School to North Yorkshire County Council's Graduation Ceremony, where they will receive a certificate to recognise their achievement and personal congratulations from the Director of Children's Social Care, followed by a celebratory dinner.

21. Advocacy

21.1 The young person is entitled to seek representation from an independent advocate (such as NYAS) if they have any issues in relation to the service that they are receiving from Children's Social Care or if any matter arises where they would like independent advice and/or representation.

Appendix A

Record of Young Person's Interest in Higher Education

To be completed by personal adviser and returned to HE Youth Mentor AND the Leaving Care Team Manager

The aim of capturing this information is to give the right support to the young person so they can achieve their goals and develop their interest in further and higher education.

Young Person's Details

Full Name	
Date of Birth	
Age: Turning 25 during course?	YES NO
Address	
Telephone Number	
College & Course Name	
Care Leaver Status (e.g. YPQ)	

Personal Adviser's Details

Full Name	
Contact number	
Email Address	
Locality	

What HE course is the young person hoping to study?_____

What level is this course? (e.g. HE Diploma, Foundation degree, Undergraduate, Postgraduate)_____

Will it be full time or part time?_____

Proposed start date_____

Has the young person already applied to any Universities? YES NO
If yes, which ones?

Does the young person wish to receive information about or be receiving support
from NYCC's Mentoring Scheme? YES NO

Does the young person want help with completing their application to University,
including help with their personal statement?

YES NO

Are they planning to "Stay Put"/already in a Staying Put arrangement?

YES NO

Will they be moving away to University? YES NO

If yes, please give details of what the plans are in terms of accommodation:

Any other details you think might be important: