

Leaving Care Status – Qualifying Child

I am 18. I was in care as a child for two years and then I went back into care for a few weeks when I was 16. I claim income support and housing benefit and when I go to University I will then get a full student loan. Social Care may pay for my tuition fees, travel, books, equipment and field trip expenses. When I leave my hall of residence at the end of term, Social Care must pay for my accommodation during the holidays.

If you are between 16 and 21, Social Care must give you advice and support in dealing with a range of things when you leave care. They must now make sure that they keep in touch with you to do this.

You have the same rights to benefits as any other young person who is your age. Any extra money you get from Social Care will not be taken into account in working out your benefit.

Social Care do not have to, but they may, find you somewhere to live 'in exceptional circumstances'. If you are 16 or 17 and they agree that you are seriously at risk they must accommodate you. This gives you rights as if you were in care. The law also says that homeless 16 and 17 year olds and care-leavers over 18 are in priority need. This means that the Housing Department must provide you with housing. You may need an advocate to help you with this complicated stuff.

Social Care may be able to give you financial help too, particularly in connection with your education, training and work. This may be a weekly amount or for one-off items. Most Social Care Departments have given leaving care grants to young people who leave care to help them set up home. There is no fixed amount for this grant. Each Social Care Department decides what they think is the right amount. It is unlikely that they will just give you the money but you should be given some say in what is bought for you. It's OK to have some things second-hand, but you'll also need some things bought new, like a mattress.