

CARE MATTERS

Young people's responses

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First of all, thank you for sending in your views in response to the *Care Matters* consultation. Your views and opinions are important to us, and it was good to see that you thought we were heading in the right direction. Over 12,000 young people in care have seen copies of the Green Paper and over 5,000 gave us your views, either through the written consultation, through organisations or at events.

In October 2006, the Government published a document called *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*. This Green Paper set out our ideas for how the care system can be made better for children in care in the future in seven areas:

- more help for families who are having problems
- a consistent adult throughout their lives
- a good, settled placement that is right for each child
- a place at a good school and support for each child to do their best
- more out of school support for children in care
- giving young people a say on when to move on from care, and the support they need to succeed when they do
- giving young people a say and holding people responsible for making care work

What did you think?

“Children and young people need encouragement to get through bad times in their life. They need more support.”

Overall, you were pleased with the ideas set out in the Green Paper, especially proposals to allow children to stay in care longer.

Some of you were worried that although the ideas sounded good, there would not be enough money or commitment from local authorities and the Government to make them work.

Many of you were also pleased to be asked to comment on the ideas in *Care Matters* and about your experiences in care. Lots of you said that this was the first time you had been asked what you thought about being in care.

What have we been doing?

Since October Government has been asking young people and adults what they think about the ideas in *Care Matters* and if they have other ideas which would make things better. All the quotes in this document are from young people that we have met or heard from over the last few months.

- Over 1,300 written responses from children and young people in care
- 4 national conferences run by *What Makes the Difference*
- Over 12,000 copies of the young people’s guide to the Green Paper sent to children in care
- Local authorities and other groups consulted children in care
- Children’s Rights Director consulted children in care
- Ministers and officials have talked to many groups of children
- Visits to children’s homes, foster carers, schools, young offender institutions and secure children’s homes

CHILDREN IN CARE PLEDGE

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One idea in *Care Matters* is that every local authority should make a number of promises to the children in its care. This 'pledge' would set out what children in care should get from their local authority.

Children and professionals thought this was a good idea. They thought that the promises should be published so that children know what they are entitled to. Young people also wanted to have a say in the contents of the pledge.

"Every child should receive the same quality of care and support no matter where in the UK they live."

Some children and young people were worried that the promises in the pledge would be broken. They wanted local authorities to be held accountable if this happens. Otherwise the pledge will not make any difference to children in care.

YOUR IDEAS

The promises that most people thought should be made in the pledge were:

1. A good home
2. Choice of placement
3. Effective social worker
4. To listen to children and act on what they say
5. Better help with education
6. More activities to do
7. Choice of when to move on from care

The pledge is a good idea, as long as it is not a token gesture and that local authorities stick to it.

CHILDREN ON THE EDGE OF CARE

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Family and Friends

Children and young people thought it was really important to see if there are other relatives who could look after a child before they go into care. They told us that they wanted to **stay with their brothers and sisters** whenever this is possible. When this is not possible, they should still be allowed to see them. They also told us that they should be allowed contact with their birth parents if possible, even if visits had to be supervised.

Children and young people told us that it was **right to work with families** and give more support so that more children could stay with their parents.

75% of young people thought that families should be given a chance to suggest other ways of looking after children before they go into care

*“Social services should ask every single person in my family if they could look after me but they only asked my Nan and it really p***ed me off.”*

I didn't want to be separated from my brother but I was.

Information

"A teacher blew my confidentiality in front of 20 kids."

One of the ideas in the Green Paper was to give teachers and doctors information about children in care so that children's needs are met.

Many children and young people were worried about this. They thought that **teachers and doctors might not understand the need for confidentiality** and might tell other people personal details about them. They were worried that this might lead to them being bullied. Young people wanted the right to say no to their private information being shared with someone else.

YOUR IDEAS

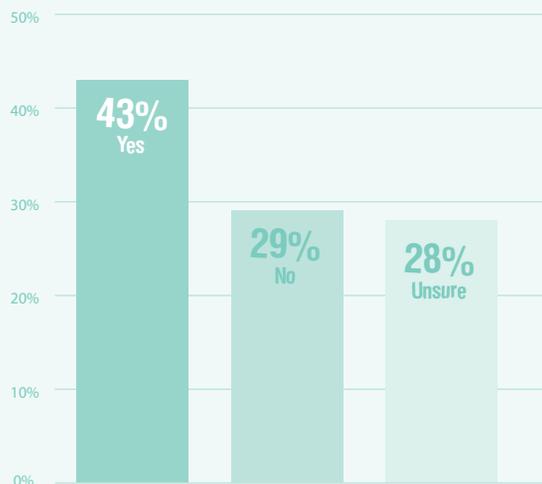
You thought that teachers, doctors and other professionals should have better knowledge of the care system, but not the individual case details of children in care, unless you gave your permission.

Future of Care

"The children you don't take into care could be in danger."

Children and young people had mixed views on whether we should work towards having fewer children in care. They agreed that there should be more support for families, but were concerned that the needs of some children could only be met in care. Children and young people were **worried that some people might not be safe if they were left at home**. The needs and safety of each child should be the main thing decisions are based on, not the number of children the Government wants to have in care.

Do you think the Government's idea of having a smaller number of children in care is right?



THE CORPORATE PARENT

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When a child is in care the local authority acts in place of their parents. They must do everything that a parent would for that child. In the Green Paper the Government set out ideas to help social workers spend more time with children and to improve care plans.

80% of children and young people in care told us that there are too many professionals involved in making decisions for children in care and care leavers

Social Workers

Lots of children and young people told us that they have too many social workers while they are in care, and that they are often hard to get hold of or build relationships with. Children thought that social workers often broke the promises they had made to the child.

Children said that they wanted to be able to get support for a social worker at when they needed it, and for the social worker to be able to spend more time with children in care than on paperwork.

"My social worker doesn't spend enough time with me."

One of the ideas in the Green Paper was that social workers should have money to spend on the child, instead of having to go to their managers. Children and young people thought this was a good idea, and that it might let them spend more time working with children in care.

YOUR IDEAS

Some of you thought that you should have a choice of who your social worker is, and be able to change social worker if you feel the relationship is not working

Some young people thought that it might be better for other people such as carers or independent visitors to hold this money, instead of social workers. They thought that children should be able to choose who they wanted their 'lead professional' to be.

94% of children and young people thought social workers should spend more time with the children they are working with.

There is too much corporate and not enough parenting.

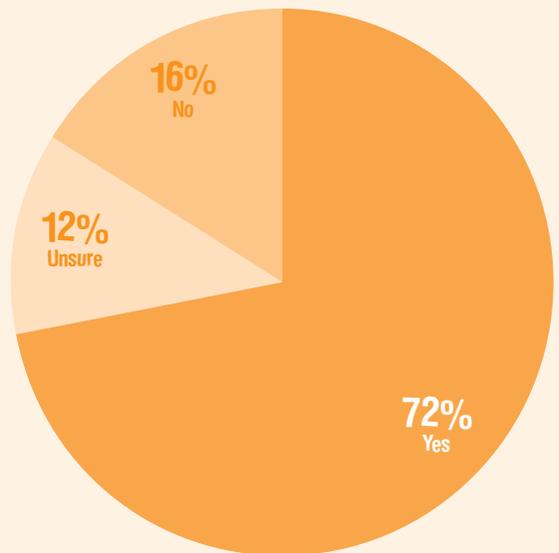
Independent Visitors

The Green Paper had an idea that more children in care should be able to have an independent visitor. These are volunteers who visit and are friends with children who don't see their families. The Government thinks that more children should be able to have an independent visitor.

"It's nice to have another friend to go out with. It's nice to have someone there when you need to talk."

Children and young people thought this was a good idea and that all children in care should be treated equally and have **access to an independent visitor**. Some children and young people thought that certain groups would need this person more, such as disabled children.

Do you think that more young people in care should have an Independent Visitor?



Another idea in *Care Matters* was that independent visitors should also be advocates, and renamed 'independent advocates'. Almost everyone we spoke to thought that this was a bad idea, as it confuses two different roles.

"[An] advocate is there for complaints and reviews and IVs are there to support you. The government wants to save money by changing two roles into one."

Care Plans

Another idea that the Green Paper had was that **care plans should set out children's long term aims**. Lots of children and young people thought this was a good idea and wanted more say in what was in the care plan. They also wanted the plan explained to younger children so that they understood what was in it and what it was for.

A group of 10 young people were consulted by the Children's Rights Director on care plans.

- 4 said they didn't know what was in their care plans
- 3 did know what was in their plan
- 3 didn't know what care plans were

THE RIGHT PLACEMENT

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Children and young people thought that being in the right placement for them could make the biggest difference to their lives. Lots of children told us that they wanted to be in a good home, and to not have to move placements. They also wanted choice of where to live.

Children and young people over the consultation period told us that changing placements can be very hard for children in care and can affect all areas of their lives:

"It got harder to make new friends."

"It confused me and also made me angry and afraid."

"This causes emotional upset and creates low self-esteem."

"Stop the moving around."

YOUR IDEAS

Children should be able to visit the place where they're going to live before they move there so it is not so scary having to move.

Training

"I've had loads of different [carers]. The problem is you get to know them then they move on and you get another."

70% of children in care in the written consultation thought that carers and staff should get more training.

It has to be somewhere where you have a constant loving family who are there when you need them no matter what.

YOUR IDEAS

You thought carers should get training on

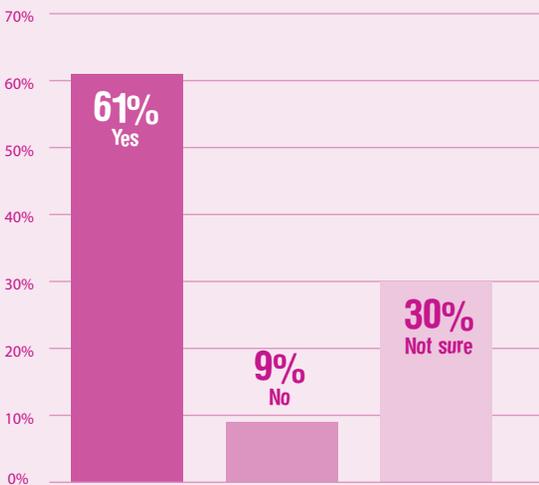
- how to communicate with young people
- how to deal with bad behaviour
- health
- how to support education
- how to teach life skills such as cooking
- training on different cultures and religions

One idea in *Care Matters* was that foster carers and people working in residential homes should get more training on how to help children in care. Most children and young people agreed that **carers should get more training**. They thought that this could stop children having to move placements so often.

A few children and young people felt that the foster carer's personality is what makes a good carer rather than training. Some people thought that carers should not become carers unless they could be sympathetic and caring, which is something that training cannot give.

"I am not interested in what qualifications my foster carer has. I am interested only in their kindness and understanding and commitment to me."

Should a 'tiered' approach to fostering placements be developed?



Residential Care

Children and young people told us that standards in residential care are often not good enough. They thought that failing children's homes should be given a change to improve as this would stop homelessness and it was better than having no place to go. Children and young people also told us that children's homes should be more homely and not look or feel too different from where other children lived. Some people thought that residential care could be the best option for some children, compared to foster care.

"Both are good for different people."



A FIRST CLASS EDUCATION

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Care Matters set out a number of proposals to help children do better in education. Young people told us that there is a lack of understanding and awareness in schools of what it's like to be in care and why some children come into care.

Children and young people have told us that carers can play an important role in supporting their education and should get more support and training so that they understand education better.

70% of children and young people thought that carers could be more involved in the education of children in care by attending school events such as parents' evenings

Almost all the children and young people that we met who had been in residential care were negative about their experience of education. Most of them had not been encouraged by the home to go to school or be involved in education.

"In residential care they don't make us go to school."

YOUR IDEAS

One group of young people that we talked to thought the local authority or residential home should be taken to court for children not attending school, as other parents are.

Designated Teacher

One idea in *Care Matters* was to make the role of designated or named teacher for children in care a legal requirement, with clear guidance on what their role should be. Most children and young people thought this was a good idea. They thought that children would get more support in schools and have someone they could talk to within the school. Some children and young people thought that the designated teacher should work with carers and social workers so that the key people in a child's life were all supporting their education.

"I have personal experience of having a designated teacher. It can work."

Schools need to stop judging young people on their care status.

A number of people had not heard of 'designated teachers' and did not know that they had a role in schools to support children in care. Some young people were worried that having a designated teacher might single them out and make children in care more likely to be bullied. Many children and young people said how stigmatising it was to be identified as a child in care and how insensitive some teachers were in revealing this fact. They thought that teachers should be more aware of children's wishes for confidentiality.

Personalised Learning

Another idea in the Green Paper was that the Government could give social workers £500 per child per year to support the education of children in care. Most young people thought that this was a good idea. Many people had questions about what it could be spent on and some people thought that £500 was not enough to make a difference. Some young people thought that social workers wouldn't know how to spend the money as they don't always know the child well enough.

YOUR IDEAS

You thought that if social workers had £500 to support your education it could be spent on:

- extra tuition
- books
- college courses
- stationery
- computers
- school trips
- sports equipment
- musical instruments and tuition

Virtual Head Teacher

Another idea in the Green Paper was to pilot a 'virtual head teacher'. This would be a senior person working for the local authority, whose job it would be to raise the standards in the education of children in care across the local authority.

There were mixed views on this idea. Children and young people thought the term 'virtual head' was confusing – that the name made it seem this would not be a real person.

Some people felt that it would be good to have someone to support children in care across the local authority and in schools. Some thought that it would be adding another person to the many professionals who are involved in the lives of children in care.

Progression

Care Matters had a number of ideas to help more young people in care carry on in education after 16 and to support them once they left school. One of these ideas was to extend access to a personal adviser until the age of 25.

“Lead professional until 25 should be available if the young person needs extra support.”

Young people generally supported this idea. However, some were not sure that Connexions would be the best agency to provide this service. Many young people felt that Connexions advisers are not trained to deal with specific issues arising from care. Some people thought personal advisers should be located within leaving care teams.

Should young people have access to a personal adviser until the age of 25?

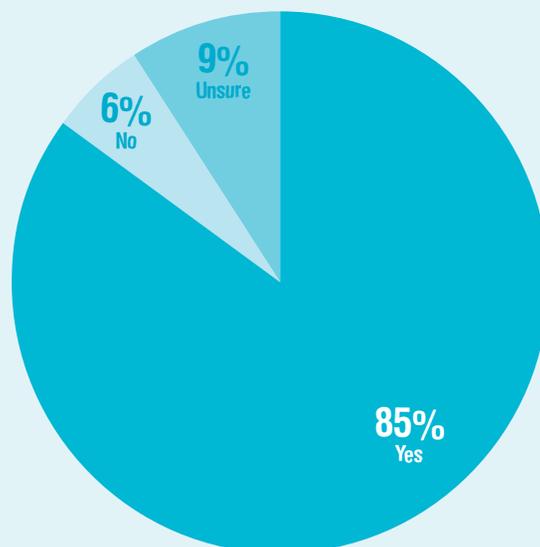


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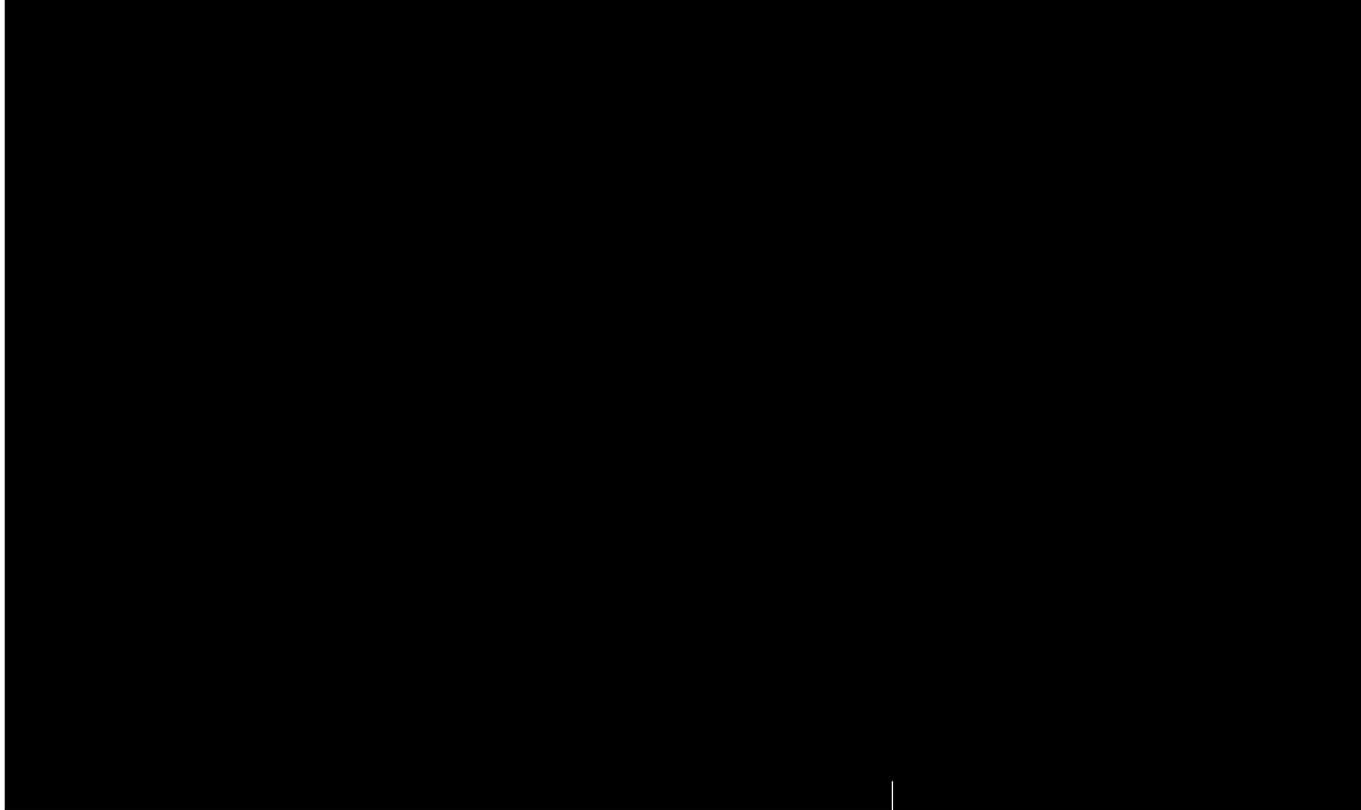
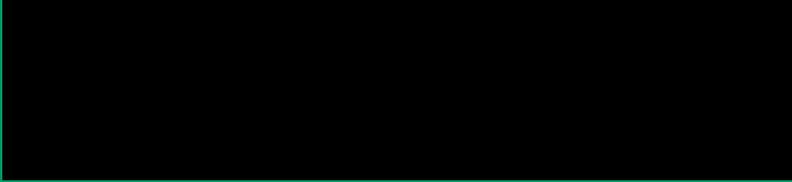


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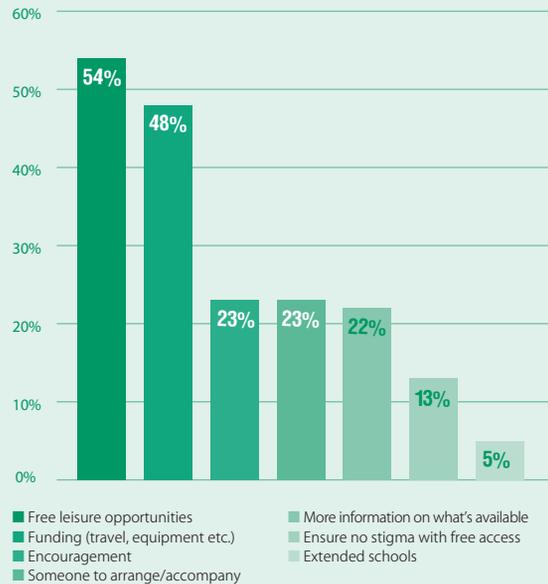


Enjoying and Achieving

Care Matters said that young people in care should have the chance to take part in sport and activities. One idea to help this was to encourage local authorities to give children in care free access to places like leisure centres and sports grounds.

Children and young people told us that cost was the main thing that stopped them doing activities like sports. They thought that **free access to sporting, leisure and cultural activities was a good idea**. They also wanted it to be made clear what they are entitled to. Children and young people told us that they did not want to be singled out and were worried about people finding out they were in care if they didn't have to pay.

What more could we do to help young people in care to participate in sporting, leisure and cultural activities?



...many people that are in care or leaving care tend to have nothing to do when it comes to leisure time...

Being Healthy

The Green Paper set out ideas to meet the health needs of children in care. This included a named health professional, training for carers on health, and better access to mental health services.

Children and young people agreed that **carers and social workers should get more training on health needs**. They told us that carers needed particular training on dealing with developmental, behavioural and emotional and mental health issues.

“Regular check ups went by the wayside when you’re in care, mostly because the social workers don’t insist that your health be top priority.”

Crime and Anti-social Behaviour

Too many children in care end up committing crimes or behaving in an anti-social way. *Care Matters* set out ideas to help control behaviour and prevent young people committing crimes, as well as to support young people if they did commit a crime and ended up in custody.

93% of young people thought that local authorities should continue to support young people in custody by providing a leaving care service.

Children and young people thought that carers should get more training on how to handle behaviour, and in understanding why some young people might behave badly. They also told us that young people in care who end up in custody should be supported by local authorities and visited by social workers.

"Help to get them back on the right track."

"They've forgotten about us."

– Child in care in young offender institution

We went to talk to young people who were in young offender institutions. Many of them had been in residential care and said that they felt children's homes were often powerless to stop young people behaving badly. They thought that there were no limits or boundaries on what they could get away with and this had meant their behaviour did not improve.

"In residential care there aren't many rules and punishments are slack..."



TRANSITION TO ADULT LIFE

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Staying in care longer

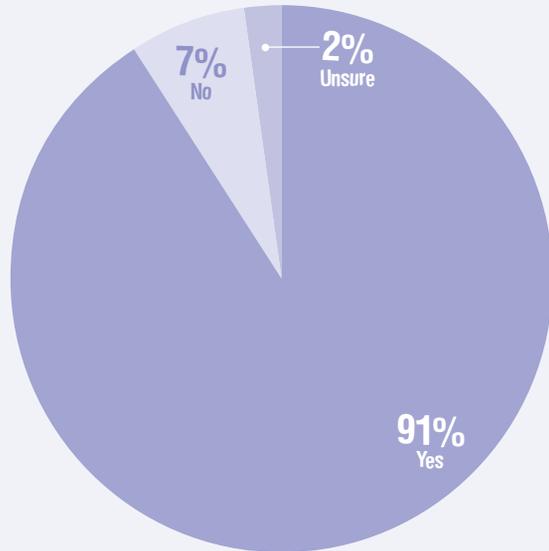
Care Matters proposed allowing children the right to refuse to move on from care before 18 and looking at ways to allow young people to stay with foster carers until 21. Children and young people agreed strongly with these ideas. They thought that **young people were often not ready to leave care at 16**, and that they would feel more secure and settled if they knew they could stay in care longer.

"Kids need more help with adulthood."

Children and young people were worried that children in residential care would not be allowed to stay in care until 21, but those in foster care would. They felt strongly that those in residential care have as much right to stay until 21 as those in foster care.

"What about residential care? This is discrimination against young people in residential care."

Should young people be able to stay with a foster carer until 21 if they want to?



Young people should have a choice to leave care between 16 to 21 years old so that they leave when they feel ready.

Accommodation

"Find them a place to live. Don't put them in places where they can fail, give more support."

Young people said that it was important to have the right place to live when they move on from care. People agreed with the idea in the Green Paper to build more accommodation for young people leaving care. They thought that at the moment too many young people lived in places like bed and breakfasts which did not support their needs properly.

YOUR IDEAS



Young people should be able to have a trial period of living on their own or in supported accommodation, perhaps living independently for half a week and with carers for the other half.

"I would like to have a trial to see if I can handle moving out, or I want it. That way I have the choice to go back home if I can't cope."

Higher Education

The Green Paper had a number of ideas to help young people go on to university, including giving children in care £2000 to support them if they went on the higher education.

Young people were in favour of this idea and thought it would encourage more children in care to go to university. People thought it was unfair that the bursary and support would not be available for young people going on to further education, vocational and other training courses.

"Think positive and aim high."

YOUR IDEAS

Government should promote positive role models of care leavers who had been to university, carers and social workers should have more knowledge of higher education, and there should be more open days and visits.

83% of young people thought that the £2,000 bursary for higher education was a good idea.

MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK

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Greater Voice for Children

It is so important to hear what children and young people themselves think can make a real difference to their lives. One of the Government's ideas was to require every local authority to have a 'children in care council'.

89% of children and young people thought that all local authorities should have a children in care council, but only 63% thought that having a council would make a difference to provision

Children and young people thought this was a great idea. They said it was really **important that the council had power** and that young people's views were taken seriously. They

thought that senior management within the local authority should be involved in the council so it has status and power and can really make a difference.

YOUR IDEAS

Children in care councils should be well organised but in an informal setting, all young people in the local authority should have an equal opportunity to be involved, there should be other ways as well in which young people can get involved in decision-making such as inspection of services and staff interviews.

“People in power should listen to young people in care because they never will have gone through half of what we have.”

Monitoring Performance

The written consultation asked 'what would help to let Government know how well children in care are doing?' **Children and young people thought that Government should ask children themselves**, as well as measuring things like exam results and health. Suggestions of how to do this included consultations, questionnaires and for Government workers to visit children and speak to them in person.

YOUR IDEAS

Some of you thought that MPs and councillors should get more involved and talk to children in care so that they understand what life is like being in care.

"All local MPs should visit all the care homes, good ones and bad ones."

Independent Reviewing Officers

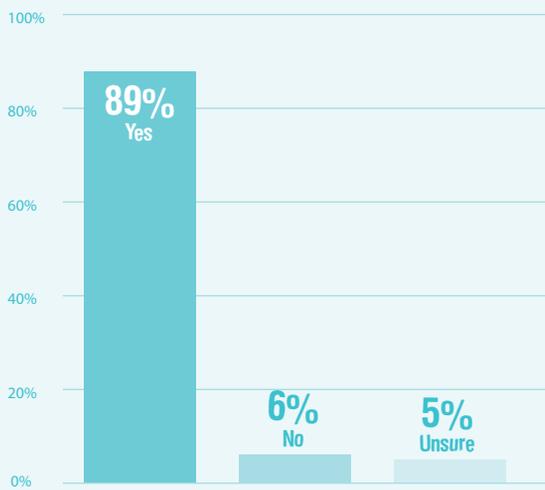
We asked children and young people whether Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) should be more independent of the local authority. There were mixed views on this. Some people thought that they should stay in local authorities, so that there is expertise. They thought that some people would feel safer if IROs were employed by the local authority.

10% of children in care told us that it did not matter where the IRO was employed, as long as young people were given the opportunity to voice their opinions and were listened to

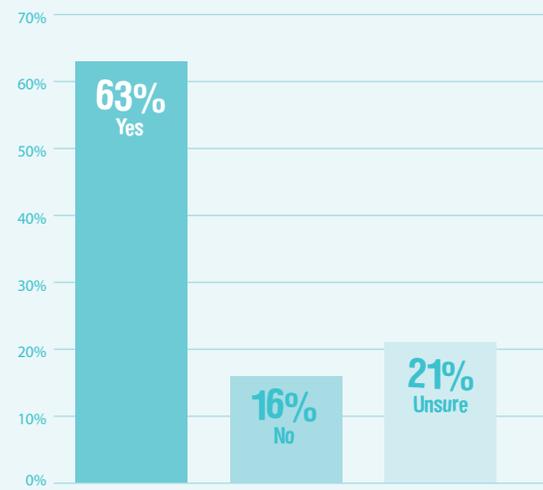
Other children and young people thought that independence might let IROs challenge the local authority more, as they would not be challenging the people who employ them.

"Independent reviewing officers should be totally independent so that they can challenge social care."

Do you think that children and young people should be able to influence the work of a local authority by participating in a children in care council?



Do you think that having a children in care council would make a difference?



NEXT STEPS

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We want to change things for children and young people in care not only in the future but also now. We have **four working groups** looking at four different areas of the Green Paper. There is at least one young person with experience of care on each group. The reports of the four groups will be published later in spring.

We will publish a report later in the year **setting out how we will be taking forward the ideas in *Care Matters***. We will look at all the responses and views that we have heard during the consultation and the working group reports to make sure that what we do will really help children and young people in care.

**Come help me deal with my anger,
Don't just say I am bad,
In my life there has only been anger
Most of the time I was sad.**

**Not a kiss or a hug off my mother,
Just a slap and a kick off my dad,
There were times I lashed out in anger,
But don't just say I am bad.**

**The money for food was at the boozier,
The clothes on my back never new,
I sat in the cold and the darkness,
At that age what else could I do?**

**Then one day you came to my rescue,
You took me away from that place,
You helped me deal with my anger,
You helped put a smile on my face.**

**They say time is a healer,
And your love may ease the pain,
But my dreams will always be haunted,
And the scars will always remain.**

*Reminiscence, by Danny Day,
young person in care*

Care Matters: Young people's responses

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