
A SUBMISSION FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
TO THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND

DELIVERING A CARE LEAVERS' STRATEGY FOR TRAINEESHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

August 2016

Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) exists to put social justice at the heart of British politics. Advancing social justice is about identifying the root causes of poverty and providing a way out to those it affects. Our progress in life is often described as a journey up a ladder but, for some people, the very first rung of that ladder is out of reach. The CSJ exists to help those people.

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them through recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantage and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

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Children's Commissioner

The post of Children's Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. Her remit includes listening to what children and young people say about things that affect them and encouraging adults making decisions to always take their views and interests into account.

The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, acts as the 'eyes and ears' of children in the system. The Commissioner's unique powers enable her to help bring about long-term change and improvements for children, in particular the most vulnerable, including those who are in care.



Recommendations

1. Allow care leavers to retain their benefits during the first month of an apprenticeship.
2. Allow care leavers to retain their Housing Benefit at the existing level for the first month of an apprenticeship or traineeship to ease transition.
3. Extend 'Staying Put', the Government's policy of allowing looked-after children to stay in foster care until the age of 21, to residential care leavers.
4. Use the Apprenticeship Levy to support care leaver apprentices.
5. Make it a requirement for every local authority to allocate 'small sum discretionary funds' for each care leaver.
6. Make higher education funding portable for 16–19-year-olds, allowing it to be used flexibly.
7. Use the 'Barnet' Hub model, or similar, in all local authorities to give holistic support to care leavers looking for employment.
8. Through Central Government, establish a 'Children in Care National Forum' for local authorities, voluntary organisations and stakeholders to share best practice, as one way to improve the status and profile of care teams within local authorities.
9. Enhance the role and status of personal advisers and make it a requirement that personal advisers be better trained for their role. The content of the training must also play a crucial role in this improvement.

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10. Make it a requirement that personal advisers connect with children in care from the age of 14 and continue with them until the age of 25, rather than 19 as is currently stipulated. Make personal advisers a care leaver's principle source of support, information and advice.
 11. Improve provision and content of Personal pathway plans for care leavers.
 12. Get care leavers 'work ready': the role of traineeships for care leavers. Improve funding and delivery and clarify traineeship terminology.
 13. Consider starting traineeships at the age of 14, using schools as Traineeship Centers.
 14. In consultation with care leavers, establish a 'Disability Confident' model for care leavers – 'Apprenticeship Confident'.
 15. Ensure apprenticeships are of good quality and have built in aspirational progression.
 16. The Department for Education should work closely with schools to encourage the promotion of apprenticeships for all school leavers as well as care leavers.
 17. Give Ofsted and the Skills Funding Agency special dispensation for employers who take on more challenging groups, including care leavers.

Preface by Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England



I spend much of my time talking to young people in who are in – or who have recently left – care. Too often I hear the same story on repeat. A troubled family life, a disrupted time in care, too little advice on life outside the care system, and too few opportunities. The young **PHO** I meet all want the same thing that other young people want: a stable home, a loving family, and a job. We have a duty to help them build these foundations. The Department for Education's recent strategy for care leavers, Keep on Caring, is very welcome and has the potential to help many more young people thrive when they leave care.

As I have travelled around the country, I have been particularly concerned to hear that young people in and leaving care often find it difficult to move into work. Apprenticeships are an excellent pathway into employment offering experience, training and professional contacts. It is still the case that too few care leavers go to university, it is essential that we continue to improve access and create additional routes into sustainable employment. Apprenticeships should be one of the major routes available to them.

Yet, as my office's research has recently shown, if you are not at university in this country you are eight times more likely to get an apprenticeship if you are not a care leaver than if you are. This is quite wrong. For this reason, I asked the Centre for Social Justice to look at the barriers that prevent care leavers finding apprenticeships and training.

Their suggestions, presented in this report, offer policymakers an excellent opportunity to help more disadvantaged young people in our country get a foot on the ladder of employment and begin their journey to independence. I hope that national and local governments, and employers, will now use this research to help all care leavers who would like to try an apprenticeship to do so.

Introduction

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has been asked by the Children's Commissioner to look closely at policies that will improve the take up and successful completion of apprenticeships and traineeships by care leavers. The CSJ supports the Government's continued commitment to improving the life chances of children in care and looked-after children.

This paper sets out a series of policy recommendations to support the Government's continued development of services for and support to care leavers, focusing particularly on traineeships and apprenticeships. Some policies in this paper apply to all care leavers, regardless of the pathway they choose.

Governmental apprenticeships and traineeships are designed to help young people train up and enter the workforce in England. Scotland and Wales also have programmes that run in a slightly different manner, and so throughout this report we shall be discussing English apprenticeships and traineeships only.^{1,2}

Apprenticeships in England are paid at the National Apprenticeship Wage (£3.30 per hour) for the first year of the apprenticeship, if the apprentice is 19 or younger. If older, or a year or more into the apprenticeship, then the apprentice will be paid at the appropriate minimum wage.

The Government has committed to creating 3 million apprenticeships during the course of this parliament, and two bills (The Welfare Reform and Work Bill and the Enterprise Bill) have been put in place

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- 1 As seen on My World of Work website, Modern Apprenticeships [accessed via: <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/getting-job/modern-apprenticeships> (29.07.16)]
 - 2 As seen on Business Wales website, Skills Gateway for Business [accessed via: <http://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/#tabs-6> (29.07.16)]

to back up their commitment to achieving this manifesto commitment.³ In 2015, there were just under 500,000 apprenticeships in England, a 14% increase on the previous year.⁴

Essential definitions

Traineeship

Traineeships are education and training programmes designed for people who want to get an apprenticeship or job but who don't yet have appropriate skill or experience. They are for people aged 16–24, last up to a maximum of 6 months and provide essential work preparation training. Employees are not required to pay trainees.

Apprenticeship

An apprenticeship combines practical training on the job with study. An apprentice can expect to work alongside experienced staff, gain job-specific experience, earn a wage (with holiday pay), and be able to study towards a related qualification. To start an apprenticeship, the apprentice must be over 16, living in England, and not be in full-time education.

Care leaver

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning until their 16th birthday.

Sources for definitions^{5, 6, 7, 8}

3 Ibid

4 House of Commons, *Apprenticeships Statistics England (1996–2015)*, London: House of Commons, 2015

5 As seen on UK Government website, Traineeships [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516462/NAS-P-100146_Traineeships_Fact_Sheet_Individual.pdf] (29.07.16)]

6 As seen on UK Government website, Traineeships [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traineeships-programme>] (29.07.16)]

7 As seen on UK Government website [accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide/overview>] (29.07.16)]

8 As seen on Care Leavers' Association website, What is a Care Leaver? [accessed via: <http://www.careleavers.com/careleaver>] (29.07.16)]

Surveys have shown that businesses recognise the value of apprenticeships and traineeships, and that individuals who engage with these schemes can be significantly better off: people with an Advanced Level Apprenticeship earn on average over £100,000 more over the course of their career than those without.⁹

During our research and deliberations, it became obvious that by and large the systems to ensure pathways to apprenticeships already exist.¹⁰ Where there are barriers, these can prevail because of uneven and sometimes poor local authority provision.¹¹ It should therefore be possible for Government to continue to improve provision with little or no increase in budget commitments but with continued reform and improvement of the system.¹²

In December 2015 the Department for Business Innovation and Skills published their 'Skills Support for Care Leavers' strategy. From this we know that 6% of care leavers enter higher education, compared with 47% of the general population.¹³ Furthermore, 38% of care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared with 11% of all young people.¹⁴ Figures for completion of courses are not clear nationally. It is also evident that very little is known more generally about care leaver destinations and longer-term life destinations.

9 As seen on the National Careers Service Website, Earn while you learn with an apprenticeship [accessed via: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/courses/typesoflearning/Pages/apprenticeships.aspx> (29.07.16)]; As seen on the All About Careers website, Business Apprenticeships [accessed via: <http://www.allaboutcareers.com/careers-advice/apprenticeships/business-apprenticeships> (29.07.2016)]

10 Evidence given to the CSJ in May 2016

11 Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), *Learner Drivers: Local Authorities and Apprenticeships*, London: IPPR, 2015

12 See Appendix 1: Table of calculations for costs

13 Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), *Skills Support for Care Leavers*, London: BIS, December 2015; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), *Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic Years 2006/7–2013/14 (Provisional)*, London: BIS, September 2015

14 Department for Education (DfE), *Statistical First Release: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014*, London: DfE, 2014; House of Commons (HoC), *NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training*, London: HoC

In July 2015 the National Audit Office published the 'Care Leaver's Transition to Adulthood'. It showed that the average annual per capita local Government spends on care leavers is £6,250, with a total annual budget of £260 million.¹⁵ However of the total leaving care, 41% of care leavers are NEET (not in education, employment or training), compared with 15% of all 19-year-olds.¹⁶ According to the NAO, the cost of being a NEET is £56,000/annum.¹⁷ Furthermore, as there are increasing proportions of children in care, this cost is only set to rise.¹⁸

Built into NEET costs are statistics that include 22% of female care leavers becoming teenage parents¹⁹ and 49% of male care leavers under the age of 21 coming into contact with the criminal justice system.²⁰ Government can therefore achieve substantial cost savings by continuing to improve and reform the current care leavers system. The proposed costs in this paper fall far short of the NEET cost of £56,000/annum. Not only will the Government find cost efficiencies if the care leaver system functions properly but in the name of social justice it is imperative that young care leavers are given the same opportunity as their peers.

15 Department for Education, *Care leavers' transition to adulthood*, London: Department for Education, National Audit Office, 2015

16 Ibid, p7

17 £56,000 over the working lifetime of a young person based on 3 elements, i) benefits ii) tax loss and reduction of tax yields due to lower consumer expenditure iii) national insurance. This statistic is found by calculating the lower aggregate costs divided by the total number of NEET individuals, and includes welfare loss to the individual and the family. As written on the University of York's website, 'Estimating the life time cost of NEET [accessed via: https://www.york.ac.uk/media/spsw/documents/research-and-publications/NEET_Final_Report_July_2010_York.pdf (01.06.2016)]

18 In 2015, there were 60 children in care for every 10,000 of the population, compared with 58 in 2011. The number of looked-after children has increased steadily over the past seven years and it is now higher than at any point since 1985. Department for Education, *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2015*, London: DfE, 2015

19 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Finding their feet: Equipping care leavers to reach their potential*, London: CSJ, 2015, p14

20 Foundations, *Care leavers, looked-after children & the criminal justice system: A multi-agency round table discussion*, London: Clarks, Ministry of Justice, 2015, p4

National Government, Voluntary organisations and some local authorities have recognised the vital role that traineeships and apprenticeships can play in ensuring that care leavers have good life chances. For the purposes of this policy document, we recognise much more work is needed in this area, particularly through ensuring a uniform nationwide provision of support and services for care leavers.

The CSJ strongly endorses the Government's continued ambition to ensure that these young people, rather than living a life of dependency and low expectation, should transition into an adult life that is both productive and fulfilling.

This paper presents policies that, if implemented, will ensure that possibility becomes a reality.

1. Allow care leavers to retain their benefits during the first month of an apprenticeship.

A care leaver embarking on an apprenticeship has their benefit withdrawn at the start of the apprenticeship.²¹ Employers tend to pay employees' monthly salary at the end of the month. This creates a period of time during which a care leaver would have no income. This compares negatively with a care leaver starting Higher or Further Education, where both the living and academic loans are distributed before the start of any course.

21 JSA is only available for those not in full-time work or study (must be under 16 hours a week) As seen on the Government's website, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance/how-to-claim> (29.07.16)]

Worked example

An 18-year-old looking for work can receive up to £57.90 per week in Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). If they then transition into an apprenticeship, they will be paid the apprenticeship wage of £3.30 an hour. Their wages for a 40-hour week, therefore, will be £132 meaning they will be better-off overall.

The new apprentice will be paid monthly (at the end of each month). However, JSA payments were paid fortnightly (at the start and the middle of the month). This means that during the transition from JSA to an apprenticeship the 18-year-old would have a four-week period in which they have no income. Given that it is incredibly difficult to save on JSA, they would have little money to buy food, pay for travel etc. during that first month, which could force them into debt.

As care leavers tend not to have a family on whom they can depend, this gap in income has the potential to create a serious disincentive for care leavers to take up apprenticeships, even though apprenticeships can be an attractive option for them. They prefer the security of welfare rather than engaging in Further or Higher Education and the student debt that that could incur.

Most professionals who look after children leaving care confirm that the fear of debt and the reality of debt are very high in the minds of this group of young people.²² It deters them from taking up apprenticeships.²³ Ensuring that benefits are not withdrawn in the first month should increase the uptake of an apprenticeship by care leavers and ease their transition into adulthood.

22 As seen on the Who Cares Trust website, latest news, [accessed via: <http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/news.php/447/new-website-aims-to-increase-number-of-care-leavers-pursuing-higher-education> (29.07.16)]

23 Ibid

2. Allow care leavers to retain their Housing Benefit at the existing level for the first month of an apprenticeship or traineeship to ease transition.

This Government's policy of allowing Looked-after children to stay in foster care until the age of 21 (Staying Put) will mean there are fewer children in care who find themselves in a difficult housing situation after 18.²⁴ However, for those who do choose to live independently, a month's transitional Housing Benefit will make an apprenticeship a possible choice.

For example, an 18-year-old care leaver living in Newham is entitled to claim up to £181.80 per week in Local Housing Allowance to cover the rent for a self-contained, one-bedroom flat.²⁵ When seeking work, he/she could also be able to claim £57.30 in JSA, as explained above. If they enter a 40-hour-per-week apprenticeship they will earn £528 per month, equivalent to £6864 a year or £132 a week; however, as Local Housing Allowance is calculated from income, the amount of LHA benefits received would consequently be reduced. Combined with the loss of JSA, this reduction could actually leave such a care leaver worse off than if they hadn't taken the apprenticeship – and as rent is paid at the start of the month and they would not get paid until the end of the month, again there would be a shortfall where they will be expected to pay more despite not have access to any additional funds.

For residential care leavers who do not have the possibility of 'Staying Put' this gap in income has an even greater potential to create a serious disincentive.

24 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2015*, London: DfE, 2015

25 As seen on Newham's website, Local Housing Allowance, [accessed via: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Local-Housing-Allowance.aspx?11=100001&12=200008> (29.07.16)]

3. Extend ‘Staying Put’, the Government’s policy of allowing looked-after children to stay in foster care until the age of 21, to residential care leavers.

Children in residential care are often more vulnerable than children who live in foster homes and frequently have needs that are more complex.²⁶ This group often needs more support than their fostered contemporaries. Sir Martin Narey’s recent recommendation that young people in care homes should be encouraged to maintain contact with and gain support from their old care home is very welcome.²⁷ However, in the long term, it Government should consider extending Staying Put to young people in residential care.

These children in care are often keen to live independently once they reach the age of 16. In many instances this attempted independence fails. Local authorities should commit to offering housing for post 16 and post 18 care leavers, thereby offering similar support to one’s own family.²⁸ Given the vulnerability of this group, this support should be on offer until the age of 25.

4. Use the Apprenticeship Levy to support care leaver apprentices.

In the same way that care leavers are supported by the Department for Education in Higher Education with bursaries of up to £2,000/annum and in Further Education with bursaries of up to £1,200 (Educational Maintenance Allowance Replacement), the Apprenticeship Levy could be used to support care leavers’ apprentices.

26 EveryChild, *Fostering Better Care*, UK: EveryChild, 2011

27 Narey, M, *Residential Care in England: report of Sir Martin Narey’s independent review of children’s residential care*, London: Department for Education, 2016, [accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534560/Residential-Care-in-England-Sir-Martin-Narey-July-2016.pdf (29.07.16)]

28 In either residential care or supported living depending on which is most appropriate for the individual.

The minimum wage for an apprentice is £3.30/ hour, which was designed with the expectation that most young people would be living at home.

This salary is not enough to live on for care leavers even when supplemented by Housing Benefit. Having no family of their own they are often trying to live independently, paying for rent, travel, food, clothing and other necessities. Extra support from the Levy would go some way to ensuring they can cover their costs.

The Apprenticeship Levy

The Apprenticeship Levy will be a levy on UK employers to fund new apprenticeships. The levy will be charged at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's pay bill, and will only affect employers whose pay bills are over £3 million (less than 2% of all employers). The levy is forecast to raise £3 billion per year, and fund 3 million apprenticeships.

Source: As seen on HM Revenue & Customs website, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy/apprenticeship-levy>; BBC news, Autumn Statement: Apprenticeships levy to raise £3bn, 25 November 2015

We propose that the Levy should be used to pay a 16–18-year-old care leaver on an apprenticeship the minimum wage afforded to 18–21-year-olds. In this way a 16–18-year-old care leaver, at £5.40/ hour for a 40-hour week would have an income of £11,232/annum – £4,368 more than the £6,864 they would currently earn through the minimum apprentice wage. Given that local authorities also have a duty to continue to provide housing for this age group, this package would provide the necessary security to care leavers, making apprenticeships very attractive.

In the same way, care leavers in the 18–21-year-old age bracket could be paid the 21–25-year-old minimum wage. Thus at £6.70 for a 40-hour week, their income would be £13,936/annum, £2,704/annum more than they currently receive. Again, together with Housing Benefit continuing to support care leavers through apprenticeships, this package becomes a very attractive opportunity.

By paying this wage to care leavers, it has the further advantage of ensuring that work pays rather than creating benefit dependency.

5. Make it a requirement for every local authority to allocate 'small sum discretionary funds' for each care leaver.

Care leavers often find they are out of pocket for such essentials as a pair of work shoes, or a suit.

“The young people we work with often have real trouble getting even the most basic financial assistance from the local authority to increase their chances of employment. The processes for small sums are long and bureaucratic. As a result, getting £2000 for a higher education bursary can be easy, but getting £40 for new work shoes can be very tricky, and by the time the money comes through it may be too late to be of any use.”

Evidence from New Choices for Youth

Many local authorities do offer discretionary sums to care leavers, but the offer is patchy nationally. The Government could ensure that this small sum, say £500/care leaver, is a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities.

Personal advisers could manage the funds. This funding is already available to local authorities if they choose to use it. Government could, for example, consider making its use mandatory to ensure national consistency.

6. Make higher education funding portable for 16–19-year-olds, allowing it to be used flexibly.

In 2015, 1,630 16-year-olds left care – 5% of all of the children who left care that year.²⁹ A way to encourage them into apprenticeships would be to allow them to use the Department for Education funding already allocated to all 16–19-year-olds for Further Education – a bursary of £1,200.³⁰ This could be used by the employer to supplement the wages of the apprentice (as discussed in section IV, above). For example, a student that is 16–18 and enrolled in a full time studying course (600 hours annually) has £4,000 allocated to them, as per the National Funding Rate.³¹

This funding could still contain an educational element, especially if the care leaver needs to attain Level 2 English and Maths, allowing them to progress to higher apprenticeship attainment.

Currently this funding is allocated through the National Funding Formula, which means the money can only be allocated to regulated educational institutions. It is not money that can be used flexibly. In reality it is money that only becomes available when an educational institution with a contract for this funding places an individual on an accredited course. The CSJ recommends that the Government

29 Ibid

30 As seen on the Government's website, 16 to 19 Bursary [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund/what-youll-get> (29.07.2016)]

31 Education Funding Agency, *Funding guidance for young people academic year 2016 to 2017, Funding rates and formula*, London: Education Funding Agency, 2016, p8

makes this funding available as a “Second Chance” education funding stream for care leavers as they re-engage with education and training streams.

7. Use the ‘Barnet’ Hub model, or similar, in all local authorities to give holistic support to care leavers looking for employment.

Drive Forward is a charity that aims to tackle problems specific to care leavers, by providing them with practical and emotional support, as well as helping them develop key skills, confidence and motivation for work, education or training.³² Together with the London Borough of Barnet, Drive Forward has pioneered a successful model offering services to care leavers. These centres co-locate a full range of services that include a job centre, care team support, and access to employment consultants. They are now operating in Barnet, Enfield, Camden, Islington, Haringey and Bromley.

As a result of their unique position in London, being the sole organisation to offer employment opportunities exclusively to care leavers, the DWP invited Drive Forward to participate in a DWP backed pilot in Barnet in May 2014 funded through Flexible Support Fund (FSF) funding.

DWP had identified care leavers as a vulnerable group and wanted to address their employability needs. Job Centres can be difficult places for care leavers, as many staff do not have an adequate appreciation of the challenges that care leavers can face.³³ Therefore, a Hub was set up to incorporate Drive Forward and the local Job Centre within

32 As seen on Drive Forward’s website, About Us, [accessed via: <http://www.driveforwardfoundation.com/about-us> (29.07.16)]

33 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Finding their Feet, Equipping care leavers to reach their potential*, London: CSJ, January 2015, p66

the leaving care team premises.³⁴ Having Drive Forward on site meant that issues were expedited more efficiently – when care leavers who have engaged with the initiative were surveyed, 100% said they were satisfied.³⁵ The young people were more relaxed in their new ‘signing-on’ surroundings, trust was established far more quickly and as a result the level of sanctions fell dramatically. Higher levels of engagement and outcomes have also been experienced as a result of this multi-agency approach.

“Central to Drive Forward’s approach is the building of trust in order to effectively support this client group.”

Martha Wansborough, CEO, Drive Forward

Drive Forward employment consultants are assigned to the various hubs for one day a week and work with care leavers between the ages of 16–26.

The hubs are specifically set up to work with young people from the care system. In a normal Job Centre they would have to self-declare as care leavers if they are to have access to the support and opportunities available to them as vulnerable young people. But as some care leavers are reluctant to self-declare, so many omit their status and thus miss out on these opportunities and support. Hubs thus have the added advantage of avoiding the stigma of having to ‘self-declare’.

34 Evidence given to the CSJ in May 2016; Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Finding their Feet, Equipping care leavers to reach their potential*, London: CSJ, January 2015, p61

35 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Finding their Feet, Equipping care leavers to reach their potential*, London: CSJ, January 2015, p67

A Barnet Hub case study

A 23-year-old young lady with two children under 6. She does not have custody of her children but does have regular visits with them. She is a highly motivated young person and considers most opportunities put her way. She didn't really have any preferences for what she wanted to do and was willing to take on almost anything to occupy her time – voluntary, training or paid employment.

When I first met this young lady, she had been engaged with Drive Forward for 4 weeks. She was not happy as she had applied for a retail post and was told she had been shortlisted and had not heard anything from them. I contacted them and we decided that it was not the best opportunity to match her personality or mind set.

She was quite frustrated about the whole situation and I thought it best we go in a completely different direction. I found an apprenticeship for a nursery nurse and it seemed like something she would enjoy. She was very excited about this and agreed. We went through interview preparation, referred her for some appropriate interview clothing. We researched her route and requested a month's travel from JCP. She had an initial screening with the vacancy broker and they were very pleased with her. She was very quickly offered an interview with the actual Nursery and they wanted to offer her a placement straight away. Unfortunately, that's where it all went downhill. The Nursery did not know what her wages were going to be, or if they were the ones to be paying her. They were also unaware of the hours she would be doing or when she could start. She was then told she would have to complete a DBS, and may not start until after that but was unsure. For some reason they didn't seem to have any information about anything we asked. I spoke to the broker and told them that this was totally unacceptable and that we needed a new well informed placement as soon as possible! She was then offered a new placement for which I specified that those questions needed to be answered before she went for the interview. They were, and she began her training straight away. She was then allowed to start working with the children as soon as her DBS was received. She is still on this apprenticeship currently.

8. Through Central Government, establish a ‘Children in Care National Forum’ for local authorities, voluntary organisations and stakeholders to share best practice, as one way to improve the status and profile of care teams within local authorities.

In some local authorities, there is evidence that care teams are silo-ed out from other local authority departments, leading to a feeling that care teams are the ‘graveyard’ division. This is not best practise. Such low status for care teams inevitably leads to low morale and poor corporate parenting. In our 2015 publication, *Finding Their Feet*, we found evidence of poor retention rates, and unreasonable caseloads.³⁶ These in turn led to low or no contact time with care leavers. Current estimates put children’s social worker turnover at a national average of 16%, but this can rise as high as 56% in some local authorities and be as low as 0% in others.³⁷

Case study

There are examples of excellent corporate parenting practice in some local authorities. The leadership of Trafford Council takes a serious interest in their role as corporate parent. It is the only Council that Ofsted has marked as outstanding in its care of looked-after and residential care children. Another example of good practice is the Borough of Sutton which encourages local authority employees from across the whole authority to become a mentor to a Sutton child in care.

³⁶ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Finding their Feet, Equipping care leavers to reach their potential*, London: CSJ, January 2015

³⁷ There was 0 turnover in York, and Department for Education, *Experimental official statistics: Children’s social work workforce during year ending 30 September 2015 for England*, London: Department for Education, February 2016

The National Audit Office, in their July 2015 report *Care Leavers' Transition to Adulthood*, showed that Ofsted only judged 34% of Local Authorities as 'good' in their provision to children in care. And as mentioned above, only one was outstanding.³⁸

The NAO also highlighted that it is very difficult to ensure that provision for children in care becomes more uniform across England, as there is no regular reporting of progress or outcomes to Central Government, no evidence taken to show sustained effort to continuously improve, and no life-time monitoring of care leavers.

Together with the NAO, the CSJ recommends that Government set up a National Forum for children in care to ensure the sharing of best practice and to raise the profile of those who work with this vulnerable group.

The 'New Belongings Care Leavers Foundation' is one example of an already existing forum that Government could continue to support and extend.³⁹

9. Enhance the role and status of personal advisers and make it a requirement that personal advisers be better trained for their role. The content of the training must also play a crucial role in this improvement.

Depending on the local authority, personal advisers are paid somewhere between £25,000 and £35,000 per annum. Their role is to provide advice and guidance to children and young people between the ages of 13 and 19 on education, personal development and their

³⁸ Department for Education, *Care leavers' transition to adulthood*, London: Department for Education, National Audit Office, 2015

³⁹ As seen on The Care Leavers' Foundation, New Belongings [accessed via: http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/About_New_Belongings (29.07.16)]

future career plans. However, many personal advisers receive little or no training.

The provision of the personal adviser system is patchy and inconsistent across England, and can be affected by the same poor retention rates found across local authority care teams, characterised by high levels of turn over. The central purpose of a care team is to be an excellent corporate parent to the children in their care. Stabilising staff turnover should in turn stabilise relationships built with care leavers and children in care. Stable relationships are crucial to a young person's sense of security. Without this stability young people struggle to navigate life transitions.

The Government should require that local authorities train their personal advisers with the aim of ensuring they develop stable long-term relationships with their charges. Beyond training on essential statutory requirements, training should include information about locally available educational and health support, traineeships, apprenticeships, and job opportunities for care leaver. How to build relationships with this vulnerable group must be a vital and central part of the training.

Consistent nationwide training of personal advisers will contribute to personal advisers being recognised and appreciated as professionals within the local authority and the wider community.

One major local authority shared service provider, the Local Government Shared Services (LGSS), trains personal advisers for several local authorities. However, the training appears to be predominantly about safeguarding, and equality issues.

The CSJ strongly recommends that central to a personal adviser's training is the need to know how to build and maintain strong and

trusting relationships with this vulnerable group of children. With a stable and consistent relationship, personal advisers can then build trust with care leavers, who in turn will be more likely to listen to advice and take up support that is on offer.

Furthermore, improving the professional status and training of personal advisers and local care teams should in turn also help improve the low expectations that care teams have of care leavers.

There is also likely to be considerable mileage in helping care leavers train to become personal advisers, so allowing them to use their experience of the care system to help themselves and others.

10. Make it a requirement that personal advisers connect with children in care from the age of 14 and continue with them until the age of 25, rather than 19 as is currently stipulated. Make personal advisers a care leaver's principle source of support, information and advice.

Research shows that young people have as many as five different 'voices' speaking to them as they grow up.⁴⁰ These include a primary carer, foster carer or key worker, an independent reviewing officer, an advocate, an independent visitor, and a personal adviser. Yet with all these people assigned to their care, these children still speak of not being cared for. Our research shows that children flourish when they know there is one consistent committed adult in their life with whom they can build a relationship of trust. Starting that relationship with the personal adviser from the age of 14 would allow time for a relationship to already be established before the young person leaves care.

⁴⁰ Evidence given to the CSJ in May 2016

Currently the idea is that there is a 'team around the child'. This should be turned on its head to become a 'team around the personal adviser', who can then be properly supported in their one-on-one relationship with the care leaver and, in most cases, the foster carer who is looking after them.

As the central source of support, information and advice, a personal adviser can also solve another related issue. The financial, educational and personal support for care leavers already exists but care teams often struggle to know what is available. This is for two reasons. First, teams can become so involved in the chaos of the young people's lives that they cannot see that these young people have the possibility of being able to aspire to a life beyond benefits and lifelong dependency. Second, there is a huge range of support, and that support constantly changes.

An important part of improving the status of care teams, is to encourage them to have greater aspirations for the children in their care.

The personal adviser can make sure that the child and their foster carer they have up to date information about any support that can help the young person make a successful transition to independent adulthood.

This is an opportunity to streamline and simplify engagement with children in care and care leavers by ensuring that there is strong consistent support in the young person's life until they reach the age of 25.

11. Improve provision and content of Personal pathway plans for care leavers.

Care teams have a duty to develop individually tailored 'pathway plans' that include packages of already available support. These are key tools for personal advisers – another part of a personal adviser's training should include best practice for pathway plans.

Only 15% of young people currently find these plans very useful and 26% find them of no use at all.⁴¹ Feedback from young people underlines the fact that these plans, where they exist, are often not drawn up with the young people in mind.

“They just repeat my old reviews and never update them...
it’s more for the social worker than me”

19-year-old female care leaver

To make Plans more user-friendly they could be broken down into manageable steps and promoted as a contract between the corporate parent and young person. They could become a useful tool for driving changes. Introducing more accessible one-page summaries that pull together agreed actions and encourage young people to take ownership of their plan by working together with their personal adviser.

The plans should include and consider the full range of issues that may be affecting a care leaver. These will incorporate issues of finance, mental health, social integration, education and employability. Personal advisers, as part of the central role in a child’s life, should be primarily responsible for pathway plans for looked-after children from the age of 14–25.

12. Get care leavers ‘work ready’: the role of traineeships for care leavers. Improve funding and delivery and clarify traineeship terminology.

If care leavers do not have the necessary work ethic to succeed in an apprenticeship this creates barriers to both entry and success.

There are several examples of good practice where local Government has worked with private sector providers to deliver targeted

41 Catch22 NCAS Peer Researchers, *Corporate Parenting for young people in care – Making the difference?*, University of York, February 2015 [accessed via: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/CparentSumRep.pdf> (29.07.16)]

programmes to children in schools and the care sector. These employer-approved traineeships can teach a range of soft skills essential to becoming work ready, and include learning to be on time, to eat well and to wear the right clothing. They can also teach interview skills and CV preparation.

Case study: Hampshire Futures Traineeship

In 2013/14, Hampshire County Council's Cabinet approved the 'Hampshire Youth Investment Programme'. It is a programme that commits to create a minimum of 150 traineeships – using their capacity as a major employer.

The 150 traineeships are funded by the Education Funding Agency (16–18) and Skills Funding Agency (19–23) funded. Locally titled 'Traineeship Plus', places are prioritised for young people for whom the County Council has a corporate parenting responsibility and priority groups are identified in the Children & Young People's Plan.

The programmes are 20 weeks in duration and have 2 cohorts per year. The first two weeks are run as an induction programme, preparing the young people – most of whom have no or few qualifications from school, none have GCSE English and/or Maths at grade C or above – to undertake their extended work placement in weeks 3–20 inclusive. The induction includes a short programme delivered by the University of Winchester.

Originally, the County Council offered children in care/care leavers a 12-month fixed term contract of employment – locally titled 'Internship Plus'. Whilst this was seen as a ground breaking initiative, and indeed provided about 50 young people with an opportunity for employment, the reality was that few remained in their role for the full 12-month period and fewer still achieved their apprenticeship framework. It was clear that a new model was required to better prepare the target cohort for the work place, and for them to sustain success in their placement.

The revised programme is modeled as a traineeship. This requires the County Council to secure an EFA contract that they did through a business case (zero funded in year 1).

For 16–18-year-olds (in care), they receive £3,300 for a 450 hours programme (20 weeks) plus £480 disadvantage uplift for care leavers, paid by the local authority. If the young person has an Education, Health & Care Plan then they get a further £6,000 pro-rata to provide specialist-learning support.⁴² This relates to programme and learning support funding. Each care leaver is then entitled to the 16–18 Bursary that is £1,200 p.a. minimum for a full time student, paid at £40/week. This bursary is administered through the school, college or training provider, but paid from the EFA.⁴³ Hampshire County Council adds to this to provide an ‘enhanced bursary’ of £57/week, equivalent to Job Seekers Allowance plus a payment of up to £750 over two weeks, paid as three £250 bonus payments for attendance, attainment and progression. They then pay all travel on top of this. The total ‘enhanced bursary’ is £1,550 plus travel, the County Council paying £350 plus travel for children in care. The impact on benefits depends on (1) whether they are receiving benefits to start with, and (2) interpretation by each JCP. The programme provides support and pre-enrolment advice during the programme to help them make a positive progression, preferably to an apprenticeship.

For 19–23-year-old care leavers, Traineeship Plus is funded by the SFA. They receive c. £2,400 for a 20 week programme, i.e. 33% less on average than a 16–18-year-old. This, of course, is the main age group of care leavers. This could be addressed by counting care leavers as 16–18-year-olds for funding purposes, as per those with an Education and Health Care plan to 24. They are also not entitled to the £1,200 min 16–18 bursary – the County Council covers these costs from a discretionary budget.

To improve the funding cover for the 19–23 age group, the Department for Education should consider extending the 16–19 bursary to 20–23-year-old care leavers. The bursary is intended to assist individuals with education-related costs, for example clothing,

42 As seen on the Government’s website, Children with special and educational needs and disabilities (SEND) [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help> (29.07.16)]

43 As seen on the Government’s website, 16 to 19 Bursary Fund [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund/further-information> (19.07.16)]

books, transport and lunch on the days of study/training.⁴⁴ The principle would create equity with the support for those going to HE.

The Government should consider clarifying and aligning the offer by replacing 'Supported Internships' with 'Supported Traineeships' and applying the same flexibilities and entitlements to them as they do to Supported Internships.

Primary responsibility for identifying children in care who would benefit from a traineeship should lie with the personal adviser.

Personal advisers could also work with local authority employees with responsibility for EET to identify the individual interests of children in care ensuring that this will lead to fulfilling study and employment. This should also be part of the Personal Development Plans, and these explorations should again start at the age of 14.

13. Consider starting traineeships at the age of 14, using schools as Traineeship Centers.

Case study: Think Forward

Currently Think Forward is working with 14 schools in Shoreditch. The organization puts a professional coach in each school to work alongside Heads of Year with years 9 through to 13.

The coaches develop a long-term relationship with their children over the 5 years, eventually becoming an adult that the young person can trust. Think Forward identifies young people in each school through a scoring system to try and ensure that selection process is as objective as possible to identify the 10 most vulnerable or problematic young people from year 9 when Think Forward start to work with the young people.

⁴⁴ As seen on the Government's website, 16 to 19 Bursary Fund [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund/further-information> (29.07.16)]

These young people are not exclusively care leavers. The total number they work with in each school is 50, 10 per year. The coach seconded to the school has one 20 minute meeting each week with each of the 50 pupils and also offers other group meetings and activities. The coaches do not teach, they direct the young person to the most relevant interventions that exist for that person. This approach has been developed with the understanding that the most vulnerable children are those who are most unaware of what help is available to them and if they are aware of what is available, they are wary of it or do not have the confidence to ask for help. The Think Forward coach takes an 'in loco parentis' role, encouraging and helping each child take the necessary steps to become more confident, better behaved, more educated and more skilled.

Think First trains their coaches in 'Change Management' strategies that have proven commercial applications and success.

Think Forward, along with other practitioners such as Tomorrow's People, believe that starting a traineeship at 16 is too late. Starting at 13 or 14, a young person is old enough to take responsibility, but young enough not to have become cynical through the disappointing experience of being in care.

Successful school to work transition: Think Forward case study

Now 17, Jenny went into care when she was 14. Up until then she had experienced great instability as her mother had passed away and had been well known to social services before going into care.

After her mother's death, unable to cope with the stress, Jenny was sectioned for two weeks in January 2015.

She was introduced to her coach 'Dan' by Think Forward when she was 14 and since then he has been one of the few constants in Jenny's life, meeting her every week and keeping up his high expectations of what she could achieve. Jenny said "my coach kept me going. He kept allowing

me to see the best in the worst situations. I never used to see the right side of things. This helped me to clear my mind and be grateful for what I have.”

Jenny is now on her way to finishing a Level 2 in cabin crew training in September will be starting with the RAF.

Coach Dan – “Jenny is an inspiration to her peers and is a true testimony to young people and their resilience.”

Think First trains their coaches in ‘Change Management’ strategies that have proven commercial applications and success.

14. In consultation with care leavers, establish a ‘Disability Confident’ model for care leavers – ‘Apprenticeship Confident’.

Similar to the ‘Disability Confident’ campaign to raise awareness amongst employers about the specific needs of potential employees with a disability, a Care Leaver Confident campaign could promote the following best practice and advice to employers:

1. Establish as best practice an ‘In-Work Buddy’ system that is connected to a care leaver’s personal adviser:

The ‘In-Work Buddy’ system is hugely popular with company staff. They feel they are adding a tremendous amount of social value in their work place by spending time with a care leaver apprentice. It is crucial, however, that buddies are properly trained to understand the needs of care leavers. Evidence suggests that staff should be carefully chosen, through interviews, so that the most appropriate employees go forward to train as buddies.

Case study

Drive Forward are working with American Express's European Head Office in Brighton who have taken care leavers as apprentices. American Express have been very keen to ensure their staff are well trained by Drive Forward. The training gives them a clear understanding of who the care leaver population is and how they need to be supported. American Express is paying care leaver apprentice travel costs to Brighton as part of their support.

Case study

Tomorrow's People. A boy leaves home because his mother had a new boyfriend. The boy was 16 when he came to Tomorrow's People wanting to find a job. Tomorrow's People paid for him to stay in a B&B until he found a job. The new employer was told of the boy's situation and of the boy's ambitions to improve his skills by learning to drive. The employer paid for the driving lessons and now the boy drives a van for work.

Evidence shows that the most successful way to ensure a care leaver engages with and completes an apprenticeship is when they are supported both by an In-Work Buddy and their personal adviser. When the personal adviser and the Buddy work together to support the care leaver, the best results tend to ensue.

2. Employer organisations, such as the CBI, should increase the involvement of companies in the offer of apprenticeships to care leavers. 76% of employers nationally⁴⁵ do not target the training or work opportunities they offer at disadvantaged young people. However, 42% would like to offer more opportunities to this group.

⁴⁵ As seen on CentrePoint website, Unlocking Potential: Tackling Youth Unemployment Among Disadvantaged Young People [accessed via: <http://www.centrepoinpoint.org.uk/unlockingpotential> (29.07.16)]

- Employers should be less stringent about the need for job applicants to have attained certain qualifications such as 5 A*–C GCSE grades including Maths and English.

Companies can ensure they have sympathetic websites and many do. When care leavers look at a website with a view to applying for an apprenticeship, it should be clear that qualifying exception will be made for them.

- A relationship with employers built up over time, introducing them to the needs of children in care long before they might employ a care leaver apprentice.

When professional care teams understand the needs of employers and bring employers on a journey with them, it is more likely to lead to employers offering care leavers and apprenticeship. Care teams therefore need to work to ensure each party understands the needs of the other.

Case study: North Somerset Council, care leaver apprenticeships

For the last two years, we have focused on supporting our care leavers into an apprenticeship position with the council.

We already had a thriving apprenticeship programme, but were concerned that care leavers were not taking advantage of these opportunities. Our North Somerset Partnership Board pledged to work together to address this as a priority.

Team North Somerset, a multi-agency team, was created with ambitious targets around improving access to employment and training. They also wanted to understand from care leavers what was stopping them choosing council apprenticeship positions.

As a result, we have taken on six care leaver apprentices and are hoping to recruit another three over the next couple of months.

To do this, we have had to make several changes to our policies and practises, which have been well supported by our senior leaders.

For example, we have:

Relaxed our recruitment criteria:

- rather than stipulating Maths and English GCSEs as essential requirements, we now support young people to achieve these qualifications as part of their apprenticeship
- we now offer flexible part time positions for young parents
- we now guarantee all care leavers interviews and provide feedback on their performance
- we now offer a fresh start to those who have previously been involved with police/custody.

Provide financial support:

- salary increase every six months
- we pay council tax costs for all apprentices (this has now been extended to all care leavers not just those on our apprenticeship programme)
- we provide transport costs
- we pay an initial grant of £400, to help avoid financial difficulties in the first month of the apprenticeship (with the support of a local benefactor).

Chances

- we are sensitive to the external demands on our young people from outside work and provide several chances, as required, for them to succeed.

Partnership

- we have a shared vision and commitment across our partnership, particularly with Weston College.

It is important to note that despite the changes we have made, an apprenticeship is still an extremely difficult choice for care leavers.

It is almost impossible to cover all the costs involved with living independently, even with a more generous apprenticeship wage.

Young people who live at home with a parent or guardian who pays for their day to day living expenses have a very different experience to care leavers who must pay for food, bills and rent each and every month.

15. Ensure apprenticeships are of good quality and have built in aspirational progression.

There is evidence of some very poor apprenticeships available to young people. Two examples include a young man wrapping up fish and chips and another wrapping flowers for a super market. Whilst these jobs are important, an apprentice should be on an aspirational progression towards improving employability and skills.

16. The Department for Education should work closely with schools to encourage the promotion of apprenticeships for all school leavers as well as care leavers.

Many schools measure their success according to how many of their leavers are accepted into Further or Higher Education.

Government should raise a high profile campaign in schools to promote the benefits and advantages of apprenticeships.

The Department for Education should also include, as a measure of a school's success, placement in apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships should be classified by the DfE as having 'learning status' thereby allowing care leavers in apprenticeships to have the support of the local Authority care team.

17. Give Ofsted and the Skills Funding Agency special dispensation for employers who take on more challenging groups, including care leavers.

Ofsted and SFA inspectors judge apprenticeships according to successful and timely completion rates. This creates a situation where employers who take more challenging groups, including CLs, onto apprenticeships, may be judged as failing. The SFA and Ofsted should consider a greater degree of flexibility when dealing with the care leaver and Vulnerable Group category.

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