



# BENEFITS FOR CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

October 2020

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We work to understand what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives, and how it can be prevented and solved – for good.

We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need.

## Introduction

This factsheet looks at when students who have been in local authority care and are eligible for a care-experienced bursary might also be eligible for social security benefits, and how the bursary interacts with these benefits.

The factsheet covers:

- the care-experienced bursary
- eligibility for universal credit – care-experienced students
- eligibility for other means-tested benefits – care-experienced students
- how the care-experienced bursary affects benefits
- local authority support

If you need advice, speak to your college or university student services adviser, or go to your local citizens advice or other advice agency.

## The care-experienced bursary

A care-experienced bursary is available in full-time non-advanced education (further education) and in full-time advanced education (higher education). It is for students who have previously been in local authority care (sometimes referred to as 'looked after') at any time in the UK. It doesn't matter if this was for a very short period. Before the 2020/21 academic year students had to be under 26 at the start of the course to qualify, but this age limit no longer exists.

Students in advanced education who are eligible can get a [grant of £8100](#), paid instead of a student loan. In non-advanced education the care-experienced bursary is part of the discretionary bursary maintenance allowance, and is a grant of £202.50 per week. [Guidance for colleges](#) advises they should make 'the optimum funding award' for the student, which may be to award an education maintenance allowance or a lower award of bursary maintenance allowance if the student is getting social security benefits. In both advanced and non-advanced education the grant is not income-assessed, so it is paid regardless of household income.

## Eligibility for universal credit – care-experienced students

### 16/17-year-old students

Universal credit (UC) is restricted for 16/17-year-old students who are care leavers. You count as a care leaver if:

- you were looked after by the local authority at your 16th birthday or after that date;  
*and*
- you were looked after away from home by the local authority for at least three months since the age of 14. The three months don't have to be a continuous period;  
*and*
- you are no longer looked after by the local authority.

If these rules apply, you are only eligible for UC if you have a child, or are ill/disabled (see below for what that means). Even if you qualify on this basis, your UC cannot include help with rent when you are 16/17, as local authorities have a duty to provide you with accommodation.

## Students aged 18 or over

The rules allow non-advanced students under 21 who are 'without parental support' to get UC. If you are a care-experienced student aged under 21 in full-time non-advanced education then you should be eligible for UC under these rules.

The rules apply if you are under 21 (or are 21 but were under that age when you started your course) on a full-time non-advanced course and are 'without parental support' (see definition, below), eg, you are estranged from your parents or living away from them in other specified circumstances.

Definition 'Without parental support' means you:

- have no parent; *or*
- are living away from parents because you are estranged from them, or because there is a serious risk to your physical or mental health, or you would suffer significant harm if you lived with them; *or*
- are living away from parents who cannot support you financially because they are ill or disabled, in prison, or not allowed to enter Britain.

'Parent' includes someone acting in place of a parent.

[UC guidance](#) confirms that such students are eligible for UC:

*'Whilst claiming universal credit care leavers are able to undertake full-time non-advanced education, up to the age of 21 or the end of the academic year in which they reach the age 21 (or at the end of the course if earlier).'*

If you don't fit these rules, then you may qualify for UC because you are in one of the other groups of students who can claim. These are:

- you are responsible for a child who is under 16, or is 16-19 in full-time non-advanced education - most commonly this will be because you are a parent and your child lives with you;
- you are ill/disabled. You must have limited capability for work (assessed by the DWP's work capability assessment) and also get personal independence payment (PIP) or disability living allowance (DLA);
- you are a single foster parent, or a student couple and your partner is a foster parent (this includes some kinship carers);
- you are over pension age (reaches age 66 October 2020) and your partner has not yet reached that age (NB since 15 May 2019 such couples must claim UC);
- you have taken time out because of illness/disability or caring responsibilities and have now recovered or your caring responsibilities have ended, and you are not eligible for a grant or loan;

- you are a student but your partner is not a student, or your partner is also a student and would be entitled to UC him/herself while in education.

You can read more about who counts as a student for UC, and who is eligible for UC, in CPAG's factsheet '*Universal credit and students*'.

## Eligibility for other means-tested benefits – care-experienced students

If you are a care-experienced full-time student on other means-tested benefits such as income support, income-related employment and support allowance or housing benefit, then you may be able to stay on these while you study. The rules are different for each of these benefits. The most common rules are outlined in summary, below, but if you are on one of these benefits and start studying you should seek advice.

Lone parents with a child under five who start studying can stay on income support. See CPAG's factsheet '*Benefits and tax credits for lone parent students*' for more information. Students under 21 in non-advanced education who are without parental support (see above) can also stay on income support.

If you get income-related employment and support allowance and start studying you continue to be entitled if you also get PIP or DLA.

If you are on housing benefit and start studying you remain eligible in various circumstances, including if you are under 21 and in non-advanced education. See Chapter 6 of CPAG's *Benefits For Students In Scotland Handbook* for more information.

Note that you cannot usually stay on income-based jobseeker's allowance while you are studying.

If you are of pension age and getting pension credit and/or housing benefit, you continue to be eligible for these while you are studying.

## How the care-experienced bursary affects benefits

The care-experienced bursary counts as a student grant. Most student grants count as income for UC and other means-tested benefits. Some student grants are disregarded, such as grants for course costs, travel costs or childcare costs. The care-experienced bursary counts as income for UC, with £110 disregarded in each monthly assessment.

### *Examples*

*Lewis is a 19-year-old care experienced student on a full-time non-advanced course. He is eligible for UC of £620 per month. He is awarded a care-experienced bursary. The care-experienced bursary counts as income for UC. The monthly amount of bursary taken into account is higher than his UC amount. Therefore he gets no UC during his course.*

*Kimberley is a 23-year-old care-experienced student on a full-time advanced course. She has a 3-year-old child. She is eligible for UC of £1300 per month. She is awarded a care-experienced bursary. The care-experienced bursary counts as income for UC. It reduces her UC to £600 per month during the course.*

For more information about how student income affects benefits see CPAG's factsheet 'Universal credit and students', and part 3 of CPAG's *Benefits For Students In Scotland Handbook* (see the end of this factsheet for a link to this publication).

## Local authority support

Some care-experienced young people can get support from the local authority. This varies depending on the young person's age and other factors. If you are a care-experienced young person aged 16 and 17 and you are excluded from universal credit (UC) because of the special care leaver rules, the local authority should be paying you at least the amount you would otherwise be able to get under UC and also providing you with accommodation. The local authority is allowed to take account of other income you have.

More generally, the local authority has a responsibility towards care-experienced young people who were looked after by that local authority on or after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. This can be advice, guidance and/or assistance and can include financial help. The responsibility lasts up to when the young person is 26.

See Chapter 10 of CPAG's *Children's Handbook Scotland* for more details (see the end of this factsheet for a link to this publication).

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP IN SCOTLAND'S ADVICE LINE FOR ADVISERS AND SUPPORT WORKERS

0141 552 0552 Monday - Thursday 10 am to 4 pm; Friday 10 am to 12 pm

Email: [advice@cpagscotland.org.uk](mailto:advice@cpagscotland.org.uk)

CPAG in Scotland's advice line is only for advisers. If you are a student or thinking of doing a course of education and are in need of advice, contact your local college/university student welfare services, or your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

### WHO CARES SCOTLAND

[whocaresscotland.org](http://whocaresscotland.org)

Advice and support line for care-experienced people

Tel: 0330 107 7540

Text: 0775 604 7389

Email: [help@whocaresscotland.org](mailto:help@whocaresscotland.org)

### OTHER INFORMATION

- CPAG in Scotland's Benefits for Students Project go to [cpag.org.uk/scotland/students-and-benefits-project](http://cpag.org.uk/scotland/students-and-benefits-project)
- CPAG in Scotland's free online *Benefits for Students in Scotland Handbook* and *Children's Handbook Scotland* go to [askcpag.org.uk/publications/Scotland](http://askcpag.org.uk/publications/Scotland)
- View our full range of factsheets online at [cpag.org.uk/scotland/factsheets](http://cpag.org.uk/scotland/factsheets)
- CPAG publishes the *Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook*, a comprehensive guide to benefits and tax credit for claimants and advisers, online at [askcpag.org.uk](http://askcpag.org.uk) and in print at [cpag.org.uk/bookshop](http://cpag.org.uk/bookshop)
- We run a wide range of training courses on students and benefits for workers of different levels of experience. Go to [cpag.org.uk/scotland/training](http://cpag.org.uk/scotland/training) to find out more. We also have a NEW students and benefits elearning course. See this and other elearning courses at [cpag.org.uk/scotland/training/elearning-zone](http://cpag.org.uk/scotland/training/elearning-zone)
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