

Generally, you're a 'care leaver' if at any point from the age of 16 to the first day of your first academic year, you have not been under the legal care of your parents; and, for three months or more, you have been in the custody or legal care of, or have been given accommodation by, a local authority (LA).

How do I know if I qualify for Care Leaver status?

You can apply for student finance as a care leaver if:

- You have not been under the legal care of your parents and for at least three months, you have been in the custody, legal care or have been given accommodation by a LA and the care ended on or after you turned 16 and before the first day of the first academic year of your course.
- You must also not have returned to the care of your parents between the age of 16 and the first day of the first academic year. However, you could still qualify as a care leaver if you've returned to live with your parents, but are still under the care of the LA. For example, if you have returned to your parental home for a trial period of reunification but are still receiving the same support from the LA, then you can still qualify as a care leaver for student finance purposes.

If you've been officially adopted, we will use the household income details of your adoptive parent(s) to work out how much you can get.

We cannot grant independent status as a care leaver for students who are under the care of another family member, or who have been living in supported housing (such as the YMCA). These students will need to apply under another reason such as estrangement.

How do I apply as a Care Leaver student?

You should submit a letter from the LA or your case worker / social worker confirming that you:

- were under local authority care (this includes being placed in foster care by your LA)
- are a care leaver
- the dates you were in care
- that you've not returned to the care of your parent(s) prior to the first day of the first academic year of your course (if you have returned to live with your parents but are still under the care of the LA, you can still be classed as a care leaver).

This letter should be signed and dated and be on letter headed paper.

You can liaise with your Personal Advisor from your Leaving Care Team, and they will be able to support you with providing your evidence letter.

What else do I need to know?

If you are awarded independent status as a care leaver, we will not ask you for sponsor income details. You will be awarded maintenance loan based on where you reside during your studies ie Home, Elsewhere or Overseas. Please be aware that if you are residing at your parental home, whilst still under the care of the LA you will be awarded the 'Home' rate of maintenance support.

Universities and colleges can also provide care leaver student support, and you can talk with advisers who are usually found within the Student Services, Student Wellbeing or Student Union Teams at your university or college. You can check your university or college website to find the appropriate services.

Important links

UCAS: www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/care-experienced-students

Office for Students: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/effective-practice/care-experienced/

NNECL: www.nnecl.org/

EaCES: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/imo/your-stories/estranged-and-care-experienced-students/