

Scottish Government Care Leavers Payment consultation – January 2024

intandem response

Submitted: 26 January 2024

The Scottish Government proposes the establishment of a Care Leaver Payment. The purpose of the payment is to help reduce some of the financial barriers which young people face whilst moving on from care into adulthood and more independent living.

intandem submitted the following response to the consultation after seeking the opinions of partner organisations and young people.

1. How well do you think the name of the payment represents its purpose and intention?

- Name of the payment represents the purpose and intention of the payment

We consulted young people supported by intandem and our partner organisations regarding the proposed Care Leavers Payment. The young people consulted all have experience of care including time in kinship care, foster care, residential care and being looked after at home.

The young people were comfortable with the name of the payment and felt it represented its purpose and intention. They felt the name was straightforward and explained the point of the payment.

2. Do you think the payment can fulfil the purpose? [The purpose of the payment is to help reduce some of the financial barriers which young people face whilst moving on from care into adulthood and more independent living]

- Yes

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted, 94% felt the payment could fulfil the purpose of reducing some of the financial barriers young people face while moving on from care.

One young person commented “I had to leave home and ended up in homeless accommodation, it was very stressful. £2,000 would have meant I got myself on my feet much quicker”.

Another commented “I live in residential care, and the one thing I’ve always worried about is not having enough money to move out. Or having the money to move out but not keeping up with it.”

For these young people, the Care Leaver Payment would have removed some of the financial barriers to independence.

**3. What are your views on the revised approach proposed by the Scottish Government?
[Previous commitments made by the Scottish Government indicated that the Care Leaver Payment would be an annual payment of £200 for 10 years. The Scottish Government now proposes the Care Leaver Payment is a one-off lump sum payment of £2000.]**

Whilst it is understandable to revise the payment to reflect the current cost of living and the potential limited impact of yearly payments of £200, the young people we consulted felt that receiving £2,000 in a lump sum payment could be very overwhelming.

One young person commented “I’ve never had any more than £100 in my bank account, I think I’d freak out a bit with £2,000. I wouldn’t know what to do!”.

Another commented “Not a lot of people will know how to correctly spend that money”.

Based on feedback from our partner organisations and the young people consulted, a lump sum payment of £2,000 comes with significant risk it will be spent unwisely, and it could even be harmful in terms of giving young people the means to make poor life choices or be exploited by family and friends.

4. How helpful would a payment of £2000 be at the point of moving on from care?

- Very helpful

When asked whether a payment of £2,000 at the point of moving on from care would be helpful, one young person commented “really bloody helpful by the way”. This sentiment was echoed across our partner organisations and the other young people we consulted.

One of our partner organisations told us “This could be a life changing opportunity for some – it could either provide the essentials for moving into their own home for someone preparing to move on from care, driving lessons for someone who has already left care and looking to improve employment opportunities or a holiday abroad for someone who has left care but has never had the opportunity to go abroad before.”

Another partner organisation commented “Any kind of change is stressful. Financial challenges are particularly stressful. Whilst this payment won’t eradicate that stress it could go a long way towards easing the pressure.”

In addition, partner organisations noted it would give young people the opportunity to get savings behind them, helping them furnish their own home or even buying clothes for themselves. It could also be helpful for young people moving into further education and play a major role in making student life more manageable.

5. Would it be beneficial for applicants to have a choice in how their payment is made? For example, having the payment made in instalments of smaller amounts over a period of time rather than as a lump sum.

- Yes
All the young people we consulted felt they should have a choice in how the payment is made. One commented “it depends what you need the money for” and another said, “I wouldn’t spend it on things I don’t need if it was in instalments”. Another commented “I don’t like waiting on money, so I’d want a lump sum, but only with support to help me know how to spend it”.

Of our partner organisations, 75% said they felt young people should have a choice about how the payment is made.

It was clear from consulting with young people and partner organisations the money will be used in different ways so providing flexibility on how the payment is made is positive and may reduce the risks associated with the payment.

6. At what point would it be most helpful for care leavers to receive the payment? [In preparation of moving on from care, at the point of moving on from care, within one year of moving on from care, within 18 months of moving on from care, or other.]

- Other

Across our partner organisations and the young people we consulted, there were a range of thoughts on the most helpful point for care leavers to receive the payment. Opinions ranged from in preparation of moving on from care, to one month after a young person leaves care, to at the age of 25 years when support ends.

With no obvious consensus on the best point for care leavers to receive the payment, it is clear the decision is very individual and what works for one young person may be very different for another. There should be flexibility around when a young person can access the payment.

7. What might this payment help young people achieve when they are moving on from care?

The young people we consulted spoke about two key areas of their life this payment could make a big difference – accommodation and employment.

They felt the payment could help them to live independently, lightening some of the financial strain of moving into their own home or a shared property.

The young people also talked about the payment helping with their employment prospects. Whether it is driving lessons or buying a vehicle to widen their employment options or being able to buy essential items e.g. steel toecap boots for working on a building site, or equipment for being a beautician after college, the payment was seen very positively in terms of helping set them up for employment success.

8. Do you think this payment could have any negative impact on young people leaving care?

Across our partner organisations and young people consulted, they all raised concerns about potential negative consequences of the payment.

The first issue raised by the young people we consulted was the risk of the money being spent without much thought, or on alcohol or drugs. One young person commented “Getting landed £2,000 out of the blue, it could go very quickly. It could be spent on stupid sh*t, instead of things that will benefit you longer.”.

The second issue raised by the young people consulted was the risk of family and friends taking the money. One young person with this experience, commented that it can create a very difficult situation with family members, a situation they wouldn't want for any other young people to experience.

Our partner organisations echoed the concerns of the young people. One partner organisation commented “the risk of all the money being recklessly spent will be extremely high”, with another highlighting “the money could be used irresponsibly”.

Many partner organisations raised a concern about the payment leading to harmful behaviour. One organisation commented “handing a young person at the age of sixteen £2,000 makes it easier for them to access and purchase substances, facilitate and make it easier for them to make poor life choices and form an addiction to substances”. This was echoed by another, commenting “If the payment was made without any support or consideration for the young person's individual needs, it could be potentially harmful if alcohol / drug misuse or gambling problems are known”.

Confirming the concerns of the young people, partner organisations also raised the issue of young people being exploited. Organisations commented “Given the vulnerability of some young people and possible issues around gatekeeping then acquaintances might look to get some benefit from the money” and “There is a risk of family members or friends having access to this payment and it not being used in a way that benefits the young person”.

Finally, partner organisations raised a concern that young people may be tempted by the £2,000 payment and leave the care system before they are ready to be independent. One commented “There may be a possibility of the young person opting out of the care system and support networks if they know they’ll receive the payment”.

9. What are your views on the proposed eligibility criteria for applicants of the payment?

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted there was a strong view that young people looked after at home should be included in this payment.

One young person commented “I want to emphasize to the Scottish Government that all care experienced people should have this opportunity because we all went through care. Yes, there are different types of care but at the end of the day we’ve all had to deal with the care system, it doesn’t matter what part of the care system you’re in.”

Another young person commented “it doesn’t seem fair that looked after at home wouldn’t get this payment. They still have to go to meetings, go to Hearings, and they might be living in a toxic environment at home and really unhappy. They need this payment.”

This was echoed by our partner organisations with one commenting “The Care Leavers Payment should not go ahead unless looked after at home young people are included also. They have likely very similar or shared experiences as the proposed criteria and yet again being forgotten about.”.

10. Is there anything else you think the Scottish Government should take into consideration related to eligibility criteria for the Care Leaver Payment?

An important issue raised by our partner organisations was the consideration of young people who leave the care system just before their 16th birthday.

One partner organisation noted “There may be young people who were looked after for a significant period of time but then were no longer in care at the point of turning 16. There may be a sense of inequity here.”

Another echoed this concern, commenting “Potentially those where a CSO has recently been removed (last 6 months) or where a kinship/foster placement has changed should be eligible. These young people are still care experienced and would still hugely benefit from this payment, despite circumstances recently changing.”

Therefore, careful consideration should be given around eligibility and any cut off ages or stages to prevent perceived inequity or possible potential negative incentives to cease continuing care measure after age 16 years.

11. What are your views on the proposed age requirements for applicants of the payment?

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted there were a range of views on the proposed age requirements. However, many felt the proposed age requirements should be increased beyond age 25 because this is the age they cease to be supported and may benefit from the Care Leavers Payment after this point.

12. What are your views on an applicant's income impacting their eligibility for the payment?

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted, they agreed that an individual's income should not impact on their eligibility for the payment.

13. What are your views on this payment impacting an individual's entitlement to other support?

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted, they agreed that receipt of this payment should not negatively impact an individual's entitlement to other support.

14. What should the experience of applying for and receiving the proposed Care Leaver Payment look and feel like for applicants?

The young people consulted felt an online form would be the best way to apply for this payment. They want the online form to be simple and not use jargon or confusing words.

The process should be something simple enough they can do it themselves if they want to, but support should be available for those that prefer to be supported.

This was echoed by our partner organisations, one commented “If the forms are intuitive enough to complete then little support should be needed. However, I think the support would more be needed to inform the young person that the money is available and where they can apply for it.”

One young person suggested that as part of the application process there could be a mandatory online tool that educates young people about budgeting and managing money. This may help mitigate the risk of spending the payment unwisely when it is received.

15. Do you think young people should have support to apply for the payment?

- Yes

16. What support might a young person need when applying for the payment?

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted, all felt it was important to have support available. Having the option of a trusted adult to help with the application process was essential and there were many suggestions of who this could be – a through care and after care worker, social worker, school, mentor, intandem coordinator, support worker or family member.

Partner organisations highlighted the application process could be used as an opportunity to help the young person consider what they are requesting the Payment for and to ensure the money would stay with them. They also highlighted the importance of support around form filling, English language/translation services, literacy and financial literacy.

17. How should this support be provided?

As highlighted above, among our partner organisations having a trusted adult to support a young person was felt to be very important. One commented “I think the young person should have someone from their current support network that has a good knowledge of that young person and their experiences to be a part of the application process and ensure that the payment is beneficial and not harmful to the young person.”

Having support available in the young person’s local community via a person or organisation they trust should be an important consideration as part of the Care Leavers Payment implementation.

18. What support might a young person need once they have received the payment?

Among our partner organisations and young people consulted, all felt it was important to have support available to help ensure the money was spent wisely.

The young people felt budget support was needed. One young person commented “I would need financial advice or there is a danger of the money being blown”.

This was echoed by partner organisations, one noted “I think financial management support will be required to help the young person plan how to spend or save the money wisely”. Another partner organisation commented that support could take the form of a life skills course covering how the young person will spend the money, help to shop around if purchasing particular products, understanding credit, budgeting, prioritizing and future planning.

19. How should this support be provided?

Support needed will vary from individual to individual but a tool or course helping young people to understand budgeting and financial management life skills could be very useful. Having the option of a trusted adult to support at this stage is important to ensure any tools or courses are attended and understood.

20. Are there any other communication channels you think we should consider which have not been set out? [public awareness campaigns, social media, community hubs, healthcare practices, educational establishments, and key workers in the lives of children, young people and their families]

The young people consulted also felt it was important that organisations/charities working with young people are an important communication channel. They are often trusted by young people and are well placed to support and educate.