

Healthcare

Apprenticeships

NHS
England

NHS MANAGERS TOOLKIT



Recruiting and Retaining Care Leavers in Employment

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*"You can only go as far as you
can see."*

**CARE
LEAVER
COVENANT**

Purpose:

What does it provide:

This toolkit has been designed, with lived experience of care, to provide practical guidance and insights to support the NHS in fulfilling their commitment to supporting care leavers into employment. The NHS is a signatory of the Care Leavers Covenant and this toolkit will support the commitment to the Covenant, fulfilment of the role of Corporate Parents and the ambition of the NHS in acting as a force for social mobility.

The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme through which organisations from the private, public, and voluntary sectors pledge to provide support for care leavers aged 16 to 25 to help them to live independently.

As one of the signatories of the Covenant, which is delivered by Spectra, the NHS have set an ambition to provide 1,000 internship or early-stage career opportunities for care experienced young people over the next three years. Care leavers will be supported into the 350 jobs available across the NHS.

The commitment, and focus for this toolkit, will support the understanding that there is a basis in employment opportunities, but a wider desire to more broadly support care leavers, addressing disparities between communities and health inequalities.



This goal will be realised by promoting, advocating for, and establishing employment opportunities that ensure equal access throughout the NHS. The NHS will assist care leavers in accessing employment, education, and training opportunities, in a welcoming environment, within the NHS.

By recognising the value that care leavers bring to the workplace, the NHS stands to gain numerous benefits, contribute positively to society and empower care leavers to thrive. This toolkit will support the understanding of the benefits of this commitment and provisions the NHS can take to achieve this goal.

Defining and Understanding Care Experience:

A Care Leaver is defined as a young person aged 16-25 who has spent 13 weeks or more in state care. This includes diverse experiences, from those who have spent their entire childhoods in state care to those with shorter durations. Care encompasses foster care, residential care, and kinship care.

These children often enter the care system due to challenging home environments marked by neglect, abuse, or household dysfunction. It is crucial to acknowledge that circumstances leading to a child's placement in care are often beyond their control and far from 'faults of their own'.

More than 10,000 young people leave care annually, experiencing varied levels of personalised support in their 'leaving care journey.'

Unfortunately, care leavers face significant disadvantages in later life outcomes, with 41% of those aged 19 to 21 not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This statistic is notably higher than the general population. Understanding the contributing factors, such as frequent

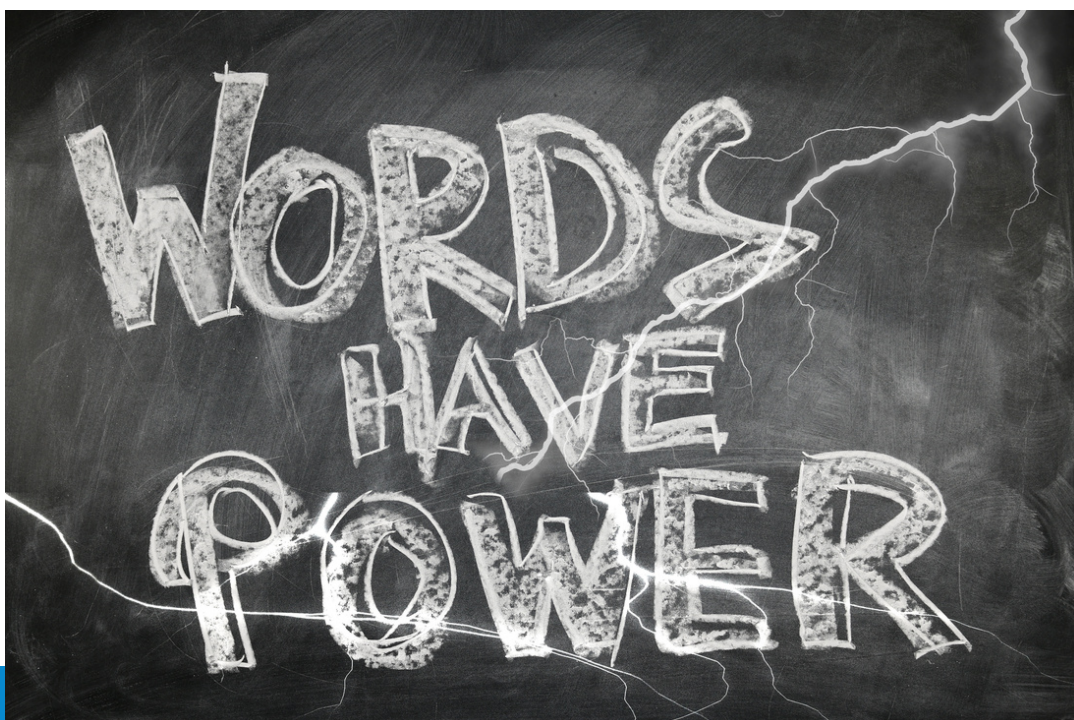
placement changes, instability in caregivers and the potential long term impact of early adversity is essential.



From a care-experienced perspective, challenging stereotypes and fostering a strengths-based approach are paramount. Over the last two years, Mary-anne Hodd has surveyed hundreds of professionals in sharing their insights into the language that surrounds care leavers in which she is majoritively met with phrases such as 'challenging behaviour', 'hard to engage' or 'naughty'. This pervasive view of care leavers must be replaced with a more nuanced understanding of their resilience, determination and potential. While societal views often include limiting terms, those who actively support care leavers share qualities and language that brings these young people to life with words such as 'caring, kind, funny, determined, resilient and trying'.

This toolkit encourages a shift towards celebrating individual potential, recognising that care leavers are more than the statistics or stereotypes that might surround them and actively challenges a limiting, or deficit lens of care leavers potential.

Acknowledging the challenges care leavers face, especially the impact of trauma and adversity, is crucial. Understanding the long-term implications of early adversity and trauma behaviours is integral to supporting care leavers in their employment journey. The toolkit provides practical insights to address these challenges and promote equity in their employment opportunities..



From a lived experience perspective, the term 'care experienced' is gaining preference, emphasising the well shared expression from care leavers that "care leaves us, we don't leave care". The concepts of the 'care cliff' and 'instant adulthood' underlines the abrupt transition care leavers face without the support afforded to their non-care experienced peers. If we think about this in relation to the general population, young people often leave home at the average age of 23 and since the 1980s have been part of the boomerang generation, where they will move out of home for a period of time (to study, move in with a partner etc) and then return home (in holidays, when relationships break down, to save for a mortgage etc). This is a privilege that the care experienced community is not afforded; this transitional time can be a lonely and frightening process when a young person suddenly needs to learn how to live independently without adequate support.

Being a 'Corporate Parent' involves a collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for care leavers. This section offers insight into the challenges faced by care leavers, aiming to inform an employment approach that addresses their unique needs and challenges, whilst working from a strengths-based perspective.



The Benefits:

"The learners have been some of the most resilient, engaged, and brilliant young people I've had the pleasure to work with. You just need to understand the barriers these young people face so you can provide the right support." - [Hannah Vincent, NCA NHS Trust](#)

Unlocking Potential:

From a lived experience perspective, care leavers, when provided with appropriate support, have the opportunity to redefine their potential and achieve good outcomes. They can leverage their talents, emphasise strengths, and translate skills from their time in care into their careers and future endeavours. Providing a relational approach and commitment to employing care leavers, tapping into this resource, can unleash the energy, enthusiasm and determination that care leavers will bring to the NHS. Focusing on the strengths, attributes and potential of care leavers in employment provides many benefits from an employers perspective, from a talent pool that brings a wide variety of skills.

Corporate Parenting:

Understanding and providing meaningful opportunities for care leavers in employment contributes to fulfilling the role of Corporate Parents. This offers stability, possibilities, and aspirational practices as part of the commitment to care leavers. Fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment aligns with the NHS's responsibilities as corporate parents, contributing to the positive development and success of care leavers as they transition into the workforce. It's important to keep in mind the question "would this be good enough for me, my own or friend's children or family".

Good Business Sense:

Care leavers form a significant portion of the population served by the NHS, bringing a lived experience understanding that enhances service delivery. Providing robust support not only improves public perception but also facilitates engagement with a section of the service base. Simultaneously, it empowers employees to be productive, confident, and fulfilled, making good business sense for the organisation.

Wider Employee Benefits:

Understanding the diverse backgrounds and challenges faced by staff can be challenging. However, establishing strong support systems for care leavers creates a workplace culture that fosters accessibility to support for all employees. These positive changes can yield broader benefits for the entire staff.

A Diverse Workforce:

Care leavers often develop problem-solving skills, resilience, and independence through their experiences, contributing to a diverse and dynamic team. Offering guidance and support empowers care leavers, enhancing the overall diversity of the workforce.

Making a Difference:

A positive learning or working experience and a journey into employment can help care leavers overcome difficulties, supporting their personal and professional development whilst providing experiences that can contribute to a happy, successful and independent adult life. The employment journey provides holistic opportunities to make a real difference in young people's lives, helping them thrive in their futures.

Recruiting Care Leavers:

This section of the toolkit aims to provide valuable insights and practical tips for supporting care leavers throughout the pre-employment, recruitment, and selection processes. The suggestions outlined here are not rigid guidelines but rather offer insights into various options and potential enhancements for your recruitment procedures.

The pre-employment and recruitment stages present excellent opportunities to offer care leavers exposure, support, and guidance in employment and application processes, fostering their long-term success in the workforce.

Opportunities – Exposure:

"You can only go as far as you can see."

Providing job shadowing, work experience, workplace visits, or 'day in the life' opportunities can offer care leavers valuable insights into working in specific roles within the NHS. This exposure helps them understand the roles better, ensuring they apply for positions that align with their skillset and aspirations. Given the potential missed opportunities due to instability, facilitating workplace visits and tours can alleviate anxiety and help care leavers envision their potential future roles.

Accessibility:

Care leavers are more likely to have accessibility challenges which we can address and support in the recruitment process. An example of such challenges concerns the costs of attending events like job shadowing or workplace tours. Consider addressing these challenges by providing practical support, such as help with travel costs for transportation or offering remote alternatives for experiencing events and opportunities. You may also want to consider if you can provide a dual accessibility option, offering remote options for care leavers to experience these events and opportunities where necessary and applicable.

Advertising:

When advertising roles, ensure care leavers are informed about their rights and specific benefits when applying for NHS positions. Care leavers may be reluctant to disclose their care leaver status; others may not exactly know or understand if they qualify as a care leaver. Counteract this by clearly defining what it means to be a care leaver, guarantee interviews for care leavers, and express a welcoming attitude toward applications from individuals of diverse backgrounds. Explore avenues such as social media, college partnerships, and collaboration with local authorities or care-focused organisations to effectively reach care leavers.



Employee Skills:

Identify essential skills for your employees and consider how you can assist care leavers in developing these skills.

Recognise that care leavers may require additional support in understanding how to excel in their roles, what it means to 'be a good employee' and what is expected of them. This is the perfect opportunity to outsource or connect with partners to provide employment skills opportunities and workshops to prospective care leavers. Organisations such as Catch 22, and The Princes Trust provide suitable employment support programmes and workshops.

You can also direct care leavers to charities such as The Rees Foundation, who have a support line where care leavers can phone in and get support with specific challenges in relation to employment.

Other organisations such as Amazing Apprenticeships provide specific care leaver and employee guides on routes into apprenticeships and alike. You can find links to these in the further resources section at the end of the toolkit.

Application Requirements & Timeframes:

Providing good support, clear, step by step expectations and timeframes can help streamline the recruitment process and ensure care leavers and young people in general know what to expect, and what is expected of them at each stage. Consider creating visual and online accessible timelines of the recruitment process and what is required at each stage.

The [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#) acknowledges that candidates for direct entry roles often drop out of the recruitment process as they can secure a quicker start date with other employers. Providing a clear, visual timeline of the recruitment process and what happens at each stage can help care leavers prepare and plan for this process.

Consider what documents are necessary for the recruitment process and the timeline for the completion of these. For example, DBS' are most often delayed due to misinformation; can you support with the request and completion of these. Consider if, for example, 5 years of address history is necessary. For a care leaver who may have lived in multiple homes in one year, this can be a huge ask. If this is a necessary requirement, what support can you put in place, or connect them with when completing the application forms. Even a birth certificate may be a challenge for a care leaver to have access to; keep this in mind and consider how you can provide support with flexible timelines for the receipt of such documents.

Set clear expectations, from the beginning, of shift patterns, role activities and any other additional requirements, from the practical such as driving licences, to the interpersonal skills such as communication and transferable skills.

Interviewing:

You can help care leavers prepare for interviews by providing questions in advance and offering pre- and post-interview support.

Give candidates a call, or contact them via their preferred method, in the lead up to the interview to confirm details, let them know you're looking forward to interviewing them and answer any last minute questions.

Structure interviews to be approachable and predictable, considering diverse interview methods such as role-playing scenarios, presentations, tasks, and exercises. The variety of methods allows individuals strengths to be explored; where possible, provide a choice in the interview method.

Accommodate challenges care leavers may face, such as potential lack of confidence or experience, with a supportive and understanding approach. Keep in mind that if a care leaver comes across as less confident, or under prepared that it might be likely they have not had parental support leading up to this process, or this may be their first experience of an interview process.



Get Creative:

Explore creative ways to connect with care leavers in the recruitment process.

Utilise social media and platforms young people access for advertising; filming 'a day in the life of' current employees in various roles and sharing this on social media platforms; offering interactive 'question and answer' sessions, or creating interactive reels with FAQs can be a great way to provide insight into the roles and recruitment process in a user friendly, accessible way. Previous NHS programmes have explored with promoting jobs on Tiktok with a great response: "Care4Notts have started using TikTok and it was incredibly well accessed!" Emma Cross, Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Consider establishing specific care leaver points of contact; offering informal drop-in sessions, and agree on preferred communication methods. The more opportunities that care leavers have to understand who to contact to ask questions and how to do so, whilst having a less formal approach to the recruitment process, can support care leavers feeling comfortable and confident throughout the process. It is useful in this case to curate a specific 'care leavers in recruitment' email address.

Provide creative check-ins and online accessibility options for care leavers, ensuring they feel supported and informed throughout the recruitment process. For check-ins, The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust provides a great example, by sending a series of three handwritten postcards from: the chief nurse, their ward leader and a colleague that they'll be working with. Online accessibility options can vary from access to maps, timetables and tours, to induction processes and recruitment

Consider the timeframe between recruitment process and employment; be specific with dates linked to when they will receive their first paycheck. If this is a significant period of time, do you have provisions to provide financial support before the first paycheck comes in, in order for them to be able to survive financially without struggling during this time. The increased Care Leaver's Bursary could support with this. If you are an employer provider you could access 2 x £1000.

Retaining Care Leavers:

This toolkit section aims to provide practical guidance for supporting care leavers during employment, ensuring their longevity in roles, and facilitating career progression. The insights presented here are not rigid directives but rather offer valuable options and considerations.

Expectations, policies and processes:

This might be a care leavers first experience of employment; provide clear, concise and where possible, visual processes, policies and guidance for the fulfilment of their role. Where possible, provide ongoing access to this guidance in an online format.

As highlighted in the recruitment section, workshops and events can help care leavers understand the fundamentals of being a successful employee. Working with a good apprenticeship provider can ensure this as well as offering access to additional pastoral support/mentors, contributing to a holistic approach to skills development.



Support – Valuing contributions:

Ensuring care leavers feel valued in the workforce is pivotal. Celebrate their strengths and accomplishments formally or informally, fostering a sense of belonging. Opportunities for connection within the team, or even specific care leaver groups, can contribute to their overall job satisfaction.

Explicit task support:

Care leavers may need additional support to understand the role, they may need tasks to be demonstrated explicitly rather than being directed to a task without demonstration. You can focus on the strengths of each individual, whilst providing practical guidance and support in how to complete each element of the job role and what is expected at each stage. Similarly, it is important to keep in mind that what we may think is obvious, might not be to a care leaver, it's important we do not assume knowledge and are therefore specific with information presented at each stage. For example, providing maps or tours of where they will spend their lunch times; providing demonstrations of the 'clocking in and out' processes; demonstrating how to apply for holidays or what to do if they are sick etc. Another example of this consideration is with their uniform; will they receive a uniform, do they have to pay for it, when will they get it, how many uniforms will they receive; all questions that would be good to explore with the care leaver in the entry into their new role. Having this information can help ease care leavers into the role with them planning their time and budget in preparing to start. Utilising the care leaver's bursary can support with this.

Summing up, practical areas of support to consider might include:

Attire and Tools:

- Consider dress codes for interviews, is school uniform acceptable, many young people may not have formal business wear. State this in your advert. What work attire is needed and equipment for the job, utilising the care leaver's bursary can support with this.

Commute Assistance:

- Assistance with transportation, including providing rides or guidance on the best public transport routes.

Respecting Boundaries:

- Guidance on establishing and respecting personal and professional boundaries in the workplace.

Building Relationships:

- Strategies for getting acquainted with colleagues and fostering positive working relationships.

Punctuality Guidelines:

- Tips and practices for maintaining good timekeeping and punctuality in the workplace

Financial Assistance:

- If the salary is paid monthly confirm with the new recruit that they have adequate funds to live on. Is it possible to provide access to lunch at work or support with travel costs in the interim? Again the care leaver's bursary could support with this.

Differentiated support roles:

Differentiating roles for care leavers' support can be beneficial. Utilising both a line manager and mentor allows for comprehensive everyday assistance while maintaining consistency in employee expectations. The role of mentor can be useful for the more informal check-ins, for example, on their wellbeing; ensuring they have the means to get to work; check in on any challenges. Having this separation of points of contact can be a useful way to support care leavers in understanding what is expected of them, whilst having comprehensive, holistic support. These different roles can be further useful when it comes to disciplinary processes; care leavers deserve additional opportunities to be understood, but will also not want to be treated differently when it comes to these processes. For example, if a care leaver does not show up to work and does not call in to advise of this, it's important that the usual protocols are followed but that they are not immediately reprimanded without attempting to understand what might be going on and without assumption as to why this is happening. The role of mentor can be appropriate in having these conversations, whilst the role of line manager is useful in following through with the expectations of the employer and relevant processes.

Building positive relationships:

Focus on building positive relationships, working with a relational approach to employment. It can be particularly useful for care leavers to feel empowered in the workplace by having relationships with managers that provide opportunities to understand and connect with them and their experience.

Progression and Development – Clarifying potential career paths:

Clarifying potential career paths and providing insights into career progression can motivate care leavers to envision a long-term commitment to the NHS. Career pathways are available from Level 2 to Level 7 via the apprenticeship route for many professions, so ensure your new recruits understand how to access these opportunities. Aspirations for career advancement should be ingrained in their employment journey, helping to challenge stereotypes and expectations.

It's therefore important that these high aspirations and expectations of care leavers thriving in employment is an inherent part of their employment journey and experience.

Skill development opportunities:

Conversations in this area may look like asking care leavers what they want to be doing in the future; in understanding and highlighting the skills they are demonstrating and building in their current roles and how this can help with progression. It is important that there are opportunities for exploration of future potential opportunities and routes of employment; these routes and opportunities can be shared from current employees sharing their own routes of employment and career progression, for example.

Alongside the potential progression and career development potential, it is necessary that care leavers have opportunities to develop their personal and professional skills in the role they currently have, aligned with where they want to go. This may be in the aforementioned employability skills, working with your apprenticeship provider to offer these and ensuring your new recruits have full access to existing training and CPD programmes relevant to their role. More informal development opportunities may come in the form of shadowing more experienced colleagues, for example.

Meaningful feedback:

Provide meaningful feedback opportunities, where care leavers can express their views and opinions to be heard by line managers and alike. Helping care leavers know that their voice matters in the workspace. Providing space to hear care leavers' thoughts, experiences and the impact can contribute to them feeling accepted and valued which can have a positive impact on their self esteem and their contributions in the workplace.



Navigating challenges, a proactive approach:

In any journey, unforeseen challenges may arise, and the path to supporting care leavers within the NHS is no exception. Plan ahead and acknowledge challenges and hurdles that may emerge, preparing and implementing strategies to address them. Whether it's addressing unforeseen personal challenges faced by care leavers or adapting support mechanisms to evolving circumstances, this toolkit provides insights and practical guidance to help managers plan for contingencies; consider how you can bring these insights into your continued employment journey. There is an emphasis on flexibility with this in mind, creating supportive environments that can weather challenges and ensure the sustained success of care leavers within the NHS workforce.

Rights and Entitlements:

Provide clear and accessible information that supports care leavers in understanding what they are entitled to and what their rights are; both as an employee and as a care leaver in employment.

This is where their entitlement of the Apprenticeships Care Leaver Bursary can be explored; on 1st August 2023 the Care Leaver Bursary was increased to £3000 per eligible apprentice with an additional £1000 available for both employers and training providers.

Additional benefits can be explored in terms of NHS specific employee opportunities; examples may include gym memberships, bus passes, store discounts etc. Providing opportunities for them to explore what their payslip means and how it works; understanding their contract and their rights in relation to sick pay, time off and ill health is also important.

Community and Connection – Team building and connections:

Provide opportunities for care leavers to connect with team members, to feel a part of a wider team and community. Some care leavers might enjoy being connected to other care leavers; think about setting up an employee network group, for example, they can join. Equally, care leavers may not want to be 'put into a box' with other care leavers; think about other opportunities for groups and events for employees to connect to their close and wider teams and colleagues. Having this sense of connectedness can be an important factor in supporting care leavers in the longevity of their role.

Foster a sense of connection by offering various team-building opportunities. While care leavers might appreciate connecting with others in similar situations, it's essential to respect individual preferences. Providing diverse options ensures inclusivity.

Diverse engagement strategies:

Consider employing creative strategies to maintain engagement, such as social media groups or online events. Clear expectations and guidelines should accompany these initiatives. Providing this sense of connectedness is important in supporting the longevity and success of employment.

Personal touch:

Keep in mind critical dates; aligned with the role of Corporate Parent and a relational approach to employment, can you check in on Christmas, send birthday cards etc. The little things can make a big difference.

Cultivating a culture of care:

Establishing a culture of care within the NHS is fundamental to creating a workplace environment where every individual, including care leavers, feels valued, supported, and empowered. This cultural transformation involves fostering an atmosphere of empathy, understanding, and inclusivity. The NHS can achieve this by encouraging open communication, actively listening to the diverse needs of its workforce, and implementing policies that prioritise the well-being of all employees. Recognising and celebrating the unique strengths and experiences that care leavers bring to the organisation is a crucial aspect of this cultural shift. By embracing a culture of care, the NHS not only enhances the working experience for care leavers but also contributes to a broader ethos of compassion, collaboration, and shared responsibility, aligning with its commitment to the Care Leavers Covenant.

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Summary:

This toolkit, crafted through the lens of care leavers' lived experiences, stands as a comprehensive guide for the NHS in championing the inclusion and success of care leavers in the workforce. Aligned with the principles of the Care Leavers Covenant, the toolkit addresses the unique challenges care leavers face, emphasising the importance of tailored support. Championing this strengths-based, interdependent and relational approach to employment seeks to harness the inherent potential of care leavers, not only contributing to their individual success but also aligning with the NHS's commitment to being a beacon of social mobility.

The content of this document has been written by © Mary-anne Hodd.



References, Further Reading and Resources:

[Home - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](#)

[Care Leavers Covenant Toolkit](#)

[Care Leavers Guide - Amazing Apprenticeships](#)

[Moving on up - Amazing Apprenticeships](#)

[Mary-anne Hodd: Lived Experience Consultant](#)

[Resources to support care leavers into apprenticeships - Learning and Work Institute](#)

[National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum | Catch22 \(catch-22.org.uk\)](#)

[The Rees Foundation: Home](#)

[The Princes Trust: Finding a Job, Resources](#)

[Case Study: Louise Faircloth - apprenticeships and care experienced young people - HASO \(skillsforhealth.org.uk\)](#)

[HASO Resources- Care Experienced Apprenticeship Recruitment](#)

[HASO: Achieving the benefits of apprenticeships A guide for employers](#)

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References, Further Reading and Resources:

[Penna News: A Lived Experience Conversation on Employment for National Care Leavers Week](#)

[Home For Good: Care Leaver Statistics](#)

[Gov.UK: Apprenticeships care leavers' bursary guidance](#)

[Blog: Recruiting young people from care into NHS careers](#)

[Apprentice Support Centre: Support for Care Experienced Apprentices](#)