

## Supporting young people in statutory care to obtain a driver licence – change in guidelines

### How did the rules change, when and why?

Previous *Guidelines on the provision of assistance after leaving care* (the Guidelines) included driving lessons as an after care contingency and stated:

- *“Payment of 10 driving lessons is also allowed where this would improve a young person’s employment prospects. In cases where the young person has no access to a private vehicle, the payment of additional lessons may be considered.”*

The effect of this was to limit support to the provision of lessons only, albeit with some flexibility around the number of lessons. Also, it did not sufficiently emphasise the importance of having a licence before leaving care.

In June 2017 [new guidelines](#) were issued that do not mention driving lessons but incorporate driver licences into leaving care planning from 15 as follows:

- *“Plans also address knowledge and understanding of personal history including cultural background, contact with family members, independent living skills including financial management and obtaining a provisional driver’s licence”.*

The intention of this was to identify driving as a skill to be incorporated in plans prior to 18 years of age and to allow greater flexibility in the type of support provided. The aim is now more clearly to obtain a licence, not just the delivery of a set number of lessons. This change reflects the broader community where most young people aspire to have their licence by the time they turn 18.

### What is the current policy position?

Young people should be supported to obtain a driver licence when they are ready to do so. It is preferable that this be before they turn 18 as it will contribute to their independence, improve employment prospects and may increase options for education and training. It is also likely that while living with the foster family there will be greater access to a private vehicle and licenced driver for learners to build up hours for their log book. Whether still in care or post care, the amount and type of assistance provided is a local decision based on individual need and circumstances.

### **Misconceptions about the change**

Some people interpreted the change as an indication that driving lessons may no longer be provided after a young person has left care. That is not the case. Support to obtain a licence is available until a care leaver reaches 25 years of age provided it is included in their plan.

Others may interpret the change as indicating that FACS is obliged to provide unlimited driving lessons and any other support necessary until the young person achieves their licence. That is also not the case. FACS may make a contribution to costs in accordance with individual circumstances such as readiness to learn, access to a private vehicle in which to practice and the availability of transport options. As with all forms of financial assistance it is at the discretion of the approving officer to determine the degree and type of assistance provided.

Assistance to obtain a licence while in care is the responsibility of the agency managing the placement.

### **Free Safer Drivers course**

Any young person who is learning to drive should be referred to the RMS Safer Drivers Course (Disadvantaged Learner Initiative), which is free of charge for young people in OOHC and care leavers. On completion of the course young people are credited with the equivalent of 20 hours of supervised log book driving time.