

Schemes to support young people leaving care to remain at home when they reach 18

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CASCADE Infrastructure Partnership



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Summary

The aim of this report is to: *explore how “When I am Ready” is operating in Wales as a compliment to the work of Voices from Care Cymru, and what can be learned from other similar schemes in the UK to support young people to remain in their homes after they turn 18.*

This review focuses on the “When I am Ready” scheme in Wales. As there is limited data available about “When I am Ready”, the review used a range of methods to explore how the scheme is working in Wales. The review was carried out in four stages:

1. A literature review of peer reviewed and grey literature.
2. Comparison between “When I am Ready” and schemes in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland highlighting key differences.
3. Consideration of metrics of successful outcomes
4. Stakeholder consultations sessions in Wales exploring the way “When I am Ready” is operating, and ways that it could be approved.

A search of the literature revealed that there is very little peer reviewed literature in this area. Key themes identified in the literature: the importance of pre-existing relationships, a lack of awareness of polices, finances for carers ad young people, the need support and training for carers and young people, the need to build towards transitions and manage endings, inconsistency of access for young people, and the need for a cultural shift to enable the wider implementation of policies.

There were key differences identified between policies across the UK including disparities in **Implementation support**, with Local Authorities in England received funding to implement the scheme. **Eligibility** for schemes differed across the UK. Elsewhere, young people are expected to leave home when they turn 21, whereas in Wales they can remain until 25 if they are in education or training. This is likely to change in Scotland and England with the implementation of the findings from their care reviews. Only in Scotland residential and kinship care arrangements mentioned explicitly as being eligible for young people to remain in their home. **Endings** are also managed differently. The Welsh, Scottish and English guidance states that, if an arrangement breaks down but the young person and the carer are happy to begin it again, this should be an option. In Wales, there is a provision in the guidance that if the arrangement breaks down, there should be a 28-day cooling off period in which the carer and young person could repair the relationship and reinstate the arrangement. In Scotland, there is no time limit, and there is an explicit statement that another Continuing Care arrangement could be sought if in the best interests of the young person. In England, the guidance indicates that while there is no right for the young person to return, if the young person and the carer want this, it is good practice to enable a return.

There are limited data to draw from to evaluate implementation or outcomes of When I am Ready. To date there has not been a review of “When I am Ready” across Wales, and the data returned by Local Authorities in the Looked After Children Census covers limited areas of the scheme.

The policy guidance in Wales gives clear indications of what should be happening to provide “When I am Ready” arrangements. These are described in the full report, along with details on the extent to which we can currently understand (or not) how the policy is working in practice. In summary,

data is not collected that would allow for an understanding of how “When I am Ready” is working. The areas explored include: *Information; Planning; Support; Monitoring*.

Uptake of schemes: By 2021, 187 care leavers were in a “When I am Ready” arrangement with their former foster carer (Statistics for Wales, 2021), 11% of young people who turned 18 and left care. In England in 2021 (60%) of young people in England leaving care while in a foster placement were staying with their former foster carer 3 months later. It is not possible in this report to calculate exactly what percentage of these young people were not eligible for Staying Put (i.e. in residential care). In Scotland in 2020, 229 young people who ceased to be classed as ‘looked after’ beyond the age of 16 entered a Continuing Care arrangement. A further 77 young people were identified as already being in such an arrangement, bringing the total number of young people were recorded as being in a Continuing care arrangement to 306 (Scottish Government, 2021). In Northern Ireland in 2018 22% of 16-18-year-olds leaving care and 29% of 19-year-olds were in a GEM placement (Department of Health, 2018). No up-to-date data about GEM uptake was located.

Variation in uptake in Wales : It would be useful to have the same data for all young people aged 18 eligible for “When I am Ready” to explore further patterns in who enters the scheme and who does not – and further qualitative research to understand variations in uptake. There is data publicly available that shows by Local Authority the number of young people who have ceased to be classed as ‘looked after’ at the age of 18 and who have entered “When I am Ready” arrangements. It is unclear how many independent fostering agencies support “When I am Ready” arrangements.

Consultation and discussion

In total, five consultation sessions were carried out including: two with care experienced young people, one with foster carers and two with practitioners. Areas highlighted included: *Training and awareness; Relationships between carers and young people and practitioners and carers; A lack of support for carers, young people and practitioners; Differences between approach for kinship care and other forms of care arrangement; Uncertainty about finances, differences in payments and long waits; A lack of monitoring and transition planning; Issues with the use of language in “When I am Ready”; Insufficient alternative options for young people who did not want “When I am Ready”, or for when they were ready to move on.*

Recommendations

Recommendations are made for policy, practice and research. The overarching recommendation is that, in line with the recommendations of the Fostering Network’s State of the Nation 2021 report, this review highlights a need for a full review of the “When I am Ready” scheme and how it is operating across Wales.

Introduction

Background

In recent years, there has been an increased recognition that young people should not have to leave care at the age of 18 (CELCIS 2019; Scannapieco et al. 2016; van Breda et al. 2020). While most young people can leave home when they feel ready and prepared to do so, often young people in care feel a pressure to become ‘independent’ much sooner than their peers (Stein 2006). As the average age of young people leaving home is increasing, with well publicised pressures on young people’s access to housing, the ‘cliff-edge’ for young people in care seems increasingly unfair.

“When I am Ready” was introduced to Wales in 2016, via the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014. It is specific to Wales, enabling young people in foster care the opportunity to remain with their carers past the age of 18. Before “When I am Ready” young people had to leave their foster carers following their 18th birthday, whether they wanted to or not. The scheme is similar in aim, but different in detail, to other schemes across the UK that have been introduced in the last decade. In **Northern Ireland**, the ‘**Going the Extra Mile**’ was formally launched in 2010. This scheme allows young people to stay with their carer until the age of 21, if they are in education, training or employment. In **Scotland**, the ‘**Continuing Care**’ programme was implemented in 2015 and offers a range of support for young people including supporting them to stay in their home up to the age of 21. In England, the ‘**Staying Put**’ scheme was also implemented in 2015 and can apply to young people up to the age of 25 if they remain in education and training.

The hope is that these schemes can provide stability and support in a caring home, giving young people time and space to be ready for independent living. However, there are uncertainties about how the scheme is operating. The most recent (2021) State of the Nation’s Fostering survey, carried out by The Fostering Network, received responses from 256 foster carers in Wales. A report (The Fostering Network 2022) focused specifically on Wales included questions about When I’m Ready. The report calls for a full cross departmental review of how successfully When I am Ready has been implemented in Wales.

Overview of this review

This policy review focuses on the “When I am Ready” scheme in Wales. As there is limited data available about “When I am Ready”, the review used a range of methods to explore how the scheme is working in Wales. The review was carried out in four stages:

1. A literature review of peer reviewed and grey literature.
2. Comparison between “When I am Ready” and schemes in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland highlighting key differences.
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Methods

This policy review focused on “When I am Ready” scheme in Wales. There was an intention to explore international schemes similar to UK schemes, but a recent international review (Strahl et al. 2021) has met this objective and provides an extensive overview internationally.

As there is limited data available about “When I am Ready”, the review used a range of methods to explore how the scheme is working in Wales. The review was carried out in four stages.

The first stage involved a literature review. This focused on literature from all four countries of the UK. Although a systematic approach was taken to the literature review, through searching academic databases, a lack of available peer reviewed literature necessitated a broader search for grey literature. This was identified through database and website searches, snowballing, and stakeholder recommendations. Literature was analysed to identify key themes across the literature.

The second stage compared the key points of the policy with similar policies in the other countries of the UK – Scotland, England and Northern Ireland - highlighting key differences. The areas focused on were informed by meeting with Voices from Care Cymru, and an initial stakeholder consultation meeting with practitioners working within Local Authorities across Wales with a remit covering “When I am Ready”.

In the third stage of the review, metrics of successful outcomes of the policy were explored. These include uptake of the scheme across Wales from 2016 until 2021, using Children in Care census returns data collected by Stats for Wales data, with an illustrative comparison with uptake of similar schemes across the UK.

Finally, the fourth stage of the review involved carrying out stakeholder consultations sessions in Wales towards the end of the review with young people (two sessions with 9 young people), foster carers (one session with 14 carers) and practitioners (two sessions with 11 and 10 practitioners respectively). These sessions explored the way “When I am Ready” is operating at the moment, and ways that it could be improved. A survey with key findings and a document with recommendations was also circulated to practitioners and the Voices from Care Cymru advisory group.

Literature review

A search of the literature revealed that there is very little peer reviewed literature in this area. Therefore, the literature included in this section includes identified peer reviewed literature (n=2), grey literature reports (n=10), a book chapter, and Master of Social Work dissertations from Cardiff University (n=2).

Of these, 6 were related to “When I am Ready”, with the others focusing on other policies in the UK. Two (Munro et al. 2012 and Dennell et al. 2022) evaluated the pilot of Staying Put in England and the implementation of Continuing Care in Scotland respectively.

The studies related to “When I am Ready” are the main focus of this section, with some others included where relevant. There were a number of key themes identified in the literature: the importance of pre-existing relationships, a lack of awareness of policies, finances for carers and young people, the need support and training for carers and young people, the need to build towards transitions and manage endings, inconsistency of access for young people, and the need for a cultural shift to enable the wider implementation of policies.

Relationships

Studies that explored the decision making of carers and young people to enter a post-18 arrangement together highlighted the importance of a strong, positive, pre-existing relationship between the carer and the young person. One study (Davies, 2021) interviewed 8 foster carers across 2 local authorities in Wales. A recurring theme was that carers who entered a “When I am Ready” arrangement were already very committed to the young people in their care

“We were ready for the long haul, if she wanted to leave at 24 or 30 or whatever, if she never leaves then fair enough... but of course, if they were brought in as family, you’re gonna treat them the same anyhow aint you.”

“If it had been that “When I am Ready” wasn’t in place, we would still have gone through with him staying anyway... you commit to a child for the duration don’t you.”

(Foster carers with experience of “When I am Ready”, Davies 2021)

While this is no doubt very valuable for those young people, many young people who are not ready to transition from care may not have such strong relationships already. There is evidence that children and young people who have experienced multiple moves during their time in care may struggle to transition more than other children (see for example Chambers et al. 2018; Scannapieco et al. 2016). These young people therefore may need post-18 care to help them to transition, but may be less likely to have carers willing to provide it.

The evaluation of the pilot of Staying Put (Munro et al. 2012) highlighted that carers and young people who entered into Staying Put arrangements had a good relationship prior to the young person turning 18. The evaluation included interviews with 31 foster carers, and the most common reason that carers gave for offering Staying Put was that they viewed young people as ‘part of the family’. In interviews with 32 young people a key factor influencing young peoples’ decisions to stay put was a sense of belonging. The evaluation highlighted that Staying Put could

provide stable and supportive relationships with ongoing emotional support for young people who were not developmentally ready for adulthood at 18 years.

“Stay put ‘til you feel secure and emotionally and financially ready to move. Don’t jump the gun. It may look nicer: the grass is not always greener on the other side, it’s really not.”

(Tim, young person stayed put, Munro et al. 2012: p107).

Conversely, the most common explanation young people provided for not wanting to stay put was poor quality relationships with their carers or others in the placement.

Awareness of policies and information

Most of the literature identified was included young people and carers who had accessed “When I am Ready” or an equivalent scheme, so it is difficult to know from this what awareness there is in the wider care population of the ability to remain at home post-18.

In 2018, The Fostering Network reported their State of the Nation Survey which 4,037 carers in England completed. The survey indicated that young people and their foster carers are not made aware of the policies in their area and the option is not introduced to them with sufficient time to plan. 31% of foster carers who had entered a post-18 arrangement stated that they did not receive additional training or support to assist them in their new role (The Fostering Network 2019).

Regarding the awareness of professionals, one study (Dennell et al. 2022) found that professionals felt that the principles of continuing care were well understood, but that areas such as implementation and roles and responsibilities less well understood.

This is similar to an earlier study (McGhee 2017) which noted that while “The spirit of the policy and legislation is to ensure that, for the young person, the day-to-day experience is the same. The clear intention is that a young person’s care should be based on their developmental stage and individual needs, rather than bureaucratic constructs” (p4), residential care workers did not feel this was supported on the ground

“There’s been no training on it or discussion, or literature...it’s something we’ve had to seek ourselves.”

(Residential care worker, McGhee 2017: p6)

Although this study was based in Scotland, the finding that there is not specific literature or training on the policy for practitioners based in the Welsh context seems to hold true, which will be discussed in the following section.

Inconsistency of access

There are differences in eligibility for post-18 support across the UK, which are highlighted by organisations that work closely with care experienced young people and carers. The ‘Hidden Ambitions’ report from the Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2017) argued for parity of provision between young people in foster care and residential care. In Scotland, a response to changes to Continuing Care by CELCIS (Morton 2018) drew on work with care experienced young people across Scotland and highlighted the inequity of access for young people in external commissioned

placements. These placements have higher cost implications for local authorities, and the report highlighted concerns that young people may be routinely denied the opportunity to ‘stay put’ because of financial pressures.

“Children in out of authority or commissioned placements are often those considered most disadvantaged and vulnerable to poorer transitions and outcomes, and could arguably benefit the most from continuing care. It is imperative that resourcing and arrangements for continuing care are considered within commissioning, and planned for from the outset of each individual placement.” (Morton 2018: p.3)

A 2021 survey (McGrath and Ashley 2021) of 1,651 kinship carers across England and Wales carried out by the charity Kinship found that only 3% of carers reported having been offered or given post-18 support. This indicates that even where carers are eligible to enter “When I am Ready” arrangements or Staying Put, they may not be told about the option.

Finances

Money is an important consideration in the literature – both from personal budget concerns of carers and young people, and the overall budget concerns of the Local Authority.

There are indications that the support that carers and young people receive when entering a “When I am Ready” or equivalent arrangement might be insufficient. Findings from the 2018 State of the Nation survey (The Fostering Network 2018) revealed that in 44% of the cases where Staying Put arrangements could not go ahead, carers stated that they were prevented by local policies and payments, despite young people wanting to stay. Many carers were not in the financial position to receive a reduced income and 82% of the foster carers who entered such an arrangement did so at their own expense (The Fostering Network 2018).

“There have been several times we wanted to offer a Staying Put arrangement to a young person we were fostering but haven’t been able to. Staying Put offers a reduced fee and allowance. As fostering is our main income and we only have one spare room, we could not afford to offer it to a care leaver. It is a sad reality that most of the young people we have supported struggle for up to a year when they move from us and are in fact still emotionally and sometimes financially supported by us.” (The Fostering Network 2018: p2)

The most recent State of the Nation survey (The Fostering Network 2022) found similar. The 2021 survey included 21 When I am Ready carers in Wales in their sample. Their findings indicated that

“Some fostering services are not ensuring that their foster carers maintain their approval, even when it is their intention to return to fostering. This, and the drop in financial support, are likely to be key barriers to more young people entering When I am Ready arrangement.” (The Fostering Network 2022: p8)

They reported that 74 per cent of carers across the UK who had entered an extended care arrangement had experienced a drop in income as a result. Foster carers in England and Wales were more likely to report a drop in income than in the other nations. It is not possible to know how widespread this issue is across Wales, or what impact financial considerations are having on carers’ decision-making.

A much smaller qualitative study (Davies 2021) also found evidence of issues around finances raised by carers in Wales

“We just didn’t know what to do, we didn’t know what we had to register him with, what he was entitled to, how it worked, what they paid him, what we had to still contribute, there was just basically no support”.

The financial shortfall can lead to real dilemmas for foster carers, as is demonstrated by one foster carer in England

I love [young person], I really love him. And I can’t imagine, I can’t imagine ever saying, for any reason that [young person] had to go. I can’t imagine that. But my husband’s been diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat, so his job has changed, so my husband is now earning half the income he used to earn. I can’t imagine ever saying [young person] is going to have to go and you’re going to have to give me one that I’ll get paid, full pay, I can’t ever imagine that. But, in the real world, [laughs] if we were about to lose the roof over our head...

(Foster carer in Munro et al. 2012 : p.87)

The evaluation of the pilot of Staying Put (Munro et al. 2012) calculated the potential costs of the scheme to Local Authorities in England, based on their projections from the evaluation of the number of young people who might enter such an arrangement, and the length of time they might stay. They estimated a cost on an average of around £17,500 per local authority per year (based on between three and four care leavers staying put in each authority). They also argued that the cost of providing Staying Put may be offset over time as continuity and stability serve to minimise the risk of adverse outcomes and promote more positive life trajectories. However, these cost savings are not likely to be seen by children’s services departments who would be allocating their resources to a scheme such as “When I am Ready”.

Support for carers and young people

Beyond financial support, Davies (2021) found that carers reported variable support for themselves, and that they were often reliant on their fostering social worker. Both local authorities had a “When I am Ready” facilitator and carers mainly reported a good relationship with them. Not all local authorities have this post, and “When I am Ready” could be among a number of responsibilities that workers have. One carer reported having very little support despite other carers in the same local authority being happy with the support they received.

This indicates that the support available for carers could be variable within local authorities, never mind across them.

For the young person, support is provided by their personal advisor, and in some local authorities a link worker. In England, a 2017 Coram Voice review of the evidence on care leavers’ transitions noted that young people said that services focused on helping them develop practical skills, with little attention given to preparing them emotionally for leaving care (Baker 2017). This left them feeling unprepared for living alone.

This is reflected in another study (Davies 2021) where in Wales carers talked about the support that young people in “When I am Ready” arrangements. Although they mentioned a number of support people around the young person, the type of support described was practical rather than emotional

“...they [Link worker] are responsible then with helping them apply for Universal Credit, and to help them with all the UCAS applications, college, you know, so there’s lots of support for the child”.

(Foster carer in Davies 2021: p.36)

In cases where young people have a strong relationship with their carers, their carers may provide this, and it may not be lacking overall. Young people who have had sufficient support in similar arrangements value the support that they received.

“I’d say stay put because it has just given me that much more support before I move out. Like, without that I really would have felt that I would have gone under; I think I would have crashed and burned.”

(Michelle, Young person who stayed put in Munro 2012: p.105).

However, as noted earlier, there are young people who may not be close or able to open up to their carers, who would benefit from “When I am Ready” but would then perhaps have a gap in the support offered.

This could be felt on a practice level also, as illustrated in the evaluation of the implementation of Continuing Care (Dennell et al. 2022). A majority of respondents to a survey (13 of 20) aimed at professionals at in Local Authorities responsible for delivering continuing care felt that there was not sufficient resourcing to support continuing care provision in their local authorities.

Training for carers

Although the Good Practice Guide (Welsh Government 2016) states that carers should have appropriate training when they enter into a “When I am Ready” arrangement, one study (Davies 2021) found that only 3 of the 8 carers interviewed had received specific training. As noted earlier, “When I am Ready” is not mandatory training for carers, although it is expected that this will be available to them when they enter an arrangement. However, the carers in Davies (2021) study did not feel that they needed additional training, as they viewed the arrangement as a continuation of often long-term arrangements.

“I mean you can’t... Like, what training would there be? You know, we’re trained as foster carers anyway. So, all you’re still doing is caring for the child.”

“...because they’ve been young people in our care and grown into teenagers, then 18-year olds, you don’t need training because they’ve been with you.”

(Foster carers in Davies 2021 who had experience of “When I am Ready”)

These findings echo the findings of the Fostering Network survey in England, which found that 31% of foster carers who had entered a post-18 arrangement said they received no additional support or training.

The training and information that was available seemed to focus more on the practicalities of the arrangement, such as finances, rather than specific training to support carers to help young people transition after “When I am Ready”. As these carers had experience of “When I am Ready” providers, and those that did receive training were offered this once they had already begun that role, it is not possible to know if carers would be more willing to enter these arrangements with earlier training opportunities. This is different in some other countries (see for example Van Breda et al, 2020 who notes that in Switzerland all carers must complete training prior to a placement continuing post-18 as the needs of young people at this age are seen to be different to those under 18).

In Scotland, CELCIS (2019) argue that training is particularly important at the time of beginning one of these arrangements as carers may not have the knowledge, skills and confidence required in meeting the developing needs of older young people, areas in which some carers may have less experience. The work can be emotionally challenging as they support young adults navigate and make sense of evolving adult opportunities, roles and responsibilities. They link this with the overall change in arrangement, which, especially with the change in finances but also the change in language and roles and responsibilities for young people and carers, can destabilise what were previously settled living arrangements (CELCIS 2019).

This indicates that, even though carers do not feel it is necessary, there may be particular gaps in their skills and knowledge in which training would be beneficial to support the young person.

Preparation for transition from extended care

One study (Owens 2019) focused on support available for young people leaving residential care, interviewing two residential care workers, three after care workers and five young people who had lived in residential care. Although “When I am Ready” is not available for young people to remain in their residential home, one participant had entered a “When I am Ready” arrangement with one of the residential care workers. The participant talked about how this allowed her gradually become more independent

“a lot less scared yes, cause you go from B (residential care home) and there’s three staff working at all times, there’s children there at all times so there’s always someone there, to K’s (“When I am Ready” placement) when at the beginning she had a couple of weeks off and G had a couple of days off and it was like oh nice, then G went back to work and K went back to work and their shift patterns, so I just got used to being on my own a bit more.”

(Residential care worker with experience of providing “When I am Ready”, Owens 2019)

This quote demonstrates the importance of the carer having the time and resources to be able to be available for the young person as they got used to a different environment, and then easing into being in the house on their own over time – rather than a more stark transition from residential care into independent living. This study found that on the whole, professionals interviewed thought that it would be helpful for young people to have an option of extended provision as they often

experience “chaotic periods between the ages of sixteen and seventeen leaving them unable to respond to support until they mature.” (Owens 2019: p.36).

This report also recommends better planning of housing options for young people, including using the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework developed by Barnardo’s, coupled with practical independent living skills such as opening a bank account, paying bills and cooking, supported by a consistent Wales-wide offer of grants for setting up home, rather than the current position where LAs have discretion. It recommends that care experienced young people should receive additional support to help them navigate the benefits and housing benefit systems and that councils should offer training and job opportunities to care leavers, and use their links to local businesses to offer a wider range of training & employment options.

Outcomes for young people

There has not been an evaluation of “When I am Ready”, so it is not possible to examine the impact that the scheme has on outcomes for young people. However, there is some evidence of positive impacts from other countries. The evaluation of the pilot of Staying Put in England (Munro et al. 2012) showed positive transition outcomes such as greater housing stability within a secure family-type environment. They hypothesised that this stability facilitated engagement in education or training and employment including improved access to higher education, and enabled young people to undertake a gradual transition not dissimilar to their peers in the broader community. These positive outcomes were identified as resulting in both individual and societal benefits, including greater future earnings and less reliance on income support payments by the young people, and associated savings in government expenditure. Conversely, concern was expressed that the eligibility criteria could exclude young people leaving residential care who were likely to have the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and be particularly at risk of homelessness due to ongoing mental health challenges. The evidence from the pilots indicated that young people who stayed put were twice as likely to be in full time education at 19 than those who did not (Action for Children 2020).

A systematic review (Gunawardena and Stich 2021) explored the outcomes of from post-18 support interventions in high income countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Denmark and Israel. They found evidence of positive impacts on outcomes including reducing homelessness, reducing involvement in the legal system and increased educational attainment in the US. However, the only other evaluation they included was in Denmark which concluded there was no or little evidence of effectiveness on employment or education outcomes. The review included other types of interventions that could compliment schemes to support young people to remain in their homes.

Endings

While the post-18 policies are in part aimed at enabling young people to stay in their home until they are ready to leave, in reality the policies still include age cut offs, rather than open ended, individual timings.

“Imagine your parents kicking you out because of your birthday.”

“Support should be there regardless of age due to complexities. These do not go away when someone turns 21 and has an impact on a person’s whole life.”

(Care experienced young people, Sutherland 2019: p17).

The ‘Hidden Ambitions’ report by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2017; 2018) highlighted how disruptive these endings can be for young people, with examples of young people are being moved out of foster care or residential care as soon as they turn 18, when this is in the middle of an important year of studies such as A-levels. This is an issue that was raised through stakeholder consultation which will be discussed in more depth later in the report.

In England, the Fostering Network suggests that there are ongoing issues around endings, such as supporting care leavers at University to return to their former foster carers during holidays (Fostering Network, 2019). One paper (Alnatt 2020) illustrated this uncertainty through ‘Alice’s’ story of beginning university when she had been living with her foster carers in a ‘When I am Ready’ arrangement:

“Alice did not know if her placement with her foster carers would remain ‘open’ for her to return on a formal or informal basis. This type of arrangement would ordinarily have been discussed as part of a pathway plan, but limited contact with social work staff had made it difficult to make concrete decisions before term commenced. This was a cause of unnecessary concern and upset during a time when she felt she should be enjoying and integrating into university life.”
(p278)

In Scotland a report published in 2019 raised concerns about children being moved on from their accommodation at short notice (CELCIS, 2019). This highlights a need for post-18 policies to account for the complexity of endings and transitions from these arrangements.

Implementation and embedding

Research in Scotland highlighted overwhelming support for the concept and practice of staying put, particularly amongst key groups of front-line practitioners and managers (McGhee et al, 2014). However, this view was often tempered with a note of caution, and reports that some managers were already questioning requests for placements to be maintained. Culture and practice, combined with pressing financial challenges make the path to full and equitable implementation of this policy challenging.

“I wouldn’t say we were discouraged, but wouldn’t say we were encouraged”

(McGhee 2017: p.8)

McGhee (2017) argued that legislation and policy can provide an enabling context, but the culture and leadership within organisations play a vital part in its implementation with young people either actively encouraged to enter a post-18 arrangement, or facing pressure to move on before they are ready (McGhee 2017). CELCIS (2018) reported that they were aware of young people who have been advised they were ‘outgrowing’ their placement setting, and encouraged to move to semi-independent living options they are not ready for, rather than care placements developing to meet the evolving needs of older teenagers and young adults. A range of factors, including limited capacity within the system, finances, and limited understanding of the needs and rights of young people by decision makers, can interact with value judgements and lead to older young people being unable to remain in their placements despite their needs.

This is contrasted with a later study (Dennell et al. 2022) who report a shift towards continuing care becoming the ‘norm’

“[W]e are promoting the expectation at the moment that all young people will be expected to stay with us up to the age of 21... So definitely it's a default of ours, we would say. So there's an expectation. We're talking about staff, and that part of that expectation that we're communicating across our services. Now when I say our services, I mean everything from the expectations of field workers staff, to our dedicated throughcare and aftercare team. To our residential staff, for our foster carers as well”

(Senior practitioner, Dennell et al. 2022: p.16)

Research has not been carried out in Wales to explore the qualitative experiences of the implementation of “When I am Ready” so it is not possible to say to what extent the scheme is embedded across services, but this will be explored in the following sections.

This section has summarised some of the main areas highlighted in the research regarding schemes across the UK and how they are experienced by young people, carers and practitioners. The following section will explore these issues in depth with a specific focus on “When I am Ready”, using available data and policies.

Findings

Overview

This section explores schemes across the UK to offer home based foster care to young people once they have turned 18 and are no longer classed as ‘looked after’ children. This section begins with an overview of the four main schemes across the UK, highlighting key differences between them and their supporting policies. The following section focuses on indicators of successful implementation – drawing on key elements of “When I am Ready” and highlighting practice and resources from across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This section includes some data on what is publicly available about the uptake of arrangements across the UK, and also a discussion on the limitations of the comparability of the data. The final section gives some examples from approaches further afield that could have relevance in the UK.

What do the schemes look like?

After campaigning by organisations such as the Fostering Network and Voices from Care Cymru, all four nations of the UK have a scheme to enable (some) young people to stay in their foster placement beyond the age of 18. In Wales ““When I am Ready”” arrangements were introduced across the country in April 2016. In England the “Staying Put” scheme was introduced in May 2014. In Scotland the “Continuing Care” scheme was introduced in April 2015. In Northern Ireland the “Going the Extra Mile (GEM)” scheme was introduced in 2006.

The following table highlights areas of similarity and difference across the schemes. It should be noted however policies may be changed, replaced or updated over the next few years across the UK which may impact on the schemes. For example, The Promise, the implementation of the findings from Scotland’s Independent Care Review, called for care to be extended to all young people until they chose to leave. There is an on-going review of children’s social care in England, and one has been announced for Northern Ireland. In Wales, although there is not a full review of the children’s social care system scheduled, the on-going review of corporate parenting ([CAB\(19-20\)18 - Extending Corporate Parenting across Public Services.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)) notes the intention “to ensure “When I am Ready” is flexible and meets the needs of young people” (p5).

Table 1: Comparison of post-18 accommodation schemes

	Implementation support	Stated aim of the policy	Statutory?	Key provisions from LA / fostering agency	Eligibility	Endings
<p>Wales</p> <p>“When I am Ready” 2016</p>	<p>Funding: No specific funding for the scheme.</p> <p>Guidance: “When I am Ready” Good Practice Guide was published in March 2016 and has not been updated since.</p>	<p>Supporting transition to independent living Should be a ‘positive choice’ and working towards achieving aspirational outcomes for children identified in their pathway plan, and which form part of the ‘Living Together Agreement’.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>“When I am Ready” arrangements must always be considered the preferred option for the majority of care leavers who have been in foster care.</p>	<p>Information: Provide appropriate and accessible information to carers and young people in separate meetings – ensuring the positive aspects are not dismissed.</p> <p>Planning: Pathway assessment to inform pathway plan by 16, updated every 6 months until 21 / 25. At 16, “When I am Ready” planning meeting, separate to Looked After Child review. Living Together Agreement meeting at least six months before the young person is 18. Explore ways of overcoming barriers (financial or other) to the carer providing a “When I am Ready” placement where a young person has expressed a desire for one. Foster Carer Review carried out and where there are likely to be other children in foster placements in the household, DBS check on the young person entering into the “When I am Ready” arrangement. Where the DBS check highlights a potential risk, need to undertake a risk assessment. Return to the fostering panel due to the change of circumstances.</p> <p>A plan for post “When I am Ready” living arrangements should also be developed and revised with the young person at the six-monthly pathway planning review meetings.</p> <p>Support: Allocate Personal Adviser, offer of an independent advocate. Training and support for the carer focused on developing skills and capacity to assist the young person achieve the</p>	<p>Age: 18</p> <p>Previous care experience: The young person was looked after and living with approved foster carers in a placement arranged by the local authority immediately prior to their 18th birthday.</p> <p>(The guidance notes that children living in residential care, while they cannot stay in their home, should be made aware of “When I am Ready” and be supported to move into a foster placement to commence a “When I am Ready” arrangement by the time they reach 18). No explicit mention of kinship care but presumably covered under foster carers.</p> <p>Other criteria: Both carer and young person both wish to enter arrangement, and the arrangement has been set out in the young person’s pathway plan.</p> <p>The local authority is satisfied that such an</p>	<p>Age: Can last until 21 or 25 if in education or training, if young person remains continuously in home after their 18th birthday</p> <p>Must end when: Young person reaches their 21st birthday and are not in an agreed programme of education or training, or young person (aged 21 – 25) completes their agreed programme of education or training, or young person who is still taking part in an agreed programme of education or training reaches the age of 25.</p> <p>Ability to return: Provision for a 28-day cooling off period for reconciliation if a young person leaves with no notice. When a young person goes away to university or college, joins the Armed Forces or takes up any other training or employment programmes that require them to move away from home for a period. they should be able to return to the carer’s home during the holiday breaks.</p>

				<p>specific outcomes detailed in the living together agreement.</p> <p>The Welsh Government recommends that the financial support should amount to the same as the National Minimum Allowances paid to foster carers, not including any element to be given to, or spent on, the young person such as personal items, clothing, travel or holiday allowances, as these will be replaced by the young person's earnings or benefit entitlement when they reach 18.</p> <p>Monitoring: No explicit guidance</p>	<p>arrangement is not inconsistent with the young person's well-being.</p> <p>A proportion of the allowance paid to the "When I am Ready" carer will be paid for by the local authority.</p>	<p>Consideration should be given to keeping the arrangement open. The local authority may look to reduce payments to the "When I am Ready" carer while the young person is away.</p>
<p>England</p> <p>'Staying Put' policy introduced under Children & Families Act 2014 Enacted in 2015</p>	<p>Funding: Department for Education Implementation Grants</p> <p>Guidance: Good practice Guide (Staying Put (basw.co.uk)) published in 2014; statutory guidance (DfE (publishing.service.gov.uk)) published in 2015 and most recently updated in January 2022.</p>	<p>The "Staying Put" framework is aimed at former relevant children who require an extended period with their former foster carer/s due to delayed maturity, vulnerability and/or in order to complete their education or training.</p> <p>Staying Put (basw.co.uk)</p>	<p>Yes: The local authority must provide advice, assistance and support under this Act in order to facilitate a staying put arrangement if the local authority determine that it would be appropriate to do so (unless the staying put arrangement is not</p>	<p>Information: No specific guidance</p> <p>Planning: When carrying out the assessment of the child's needs, the local authority must determine whether it would be appropriate to provide advice, assistance and support to facilitate a staying put arrangement, and with a view to maintaining such an arrangement, after the local authority cease to look after him or her.</p> <p>Support: to provide advice, assistance and support to the former relevant child and the former foster parent with a view to maintaining the staying put arrangement. Support provided to the former foster parent under must include financial support.</p> <p>Monitoring: Monitor the staying put arrangement. As a minimum, local authorities will need to ensure the "Staying Put" arrangement is deemed 'suitable</p>	<p>Age: 18</p> <p>Previous care experience: A young person who was looked after and living with approved foster carers in a placement arranged by a Local Authority of Independent Fostering Agency immediately prior to their eighteenth birthday (as an eligible child) and continues to reside with their former foster carer/s. There is no requirement on the length of time a young person is placed with their foster carer before they are 18 in order that entitlement to staying put is established; in theory, it could be one night.</p>	<p>Age: 21</p> <p>Must end when: the young person first leaves the "Staying Put" arrangement; or the young person reaches their twenty-first birthday, if continuously, and still living in the arrangement; or the young person completes the agreed programme of education or training being undertaken on their twenty-first birthday, if continuously living in the arrangement since their eighteenth birthday.</p> <p>An 'excluded licensee' can be asked to leave the property by the "Staying Put" carer, who must give 'reasonable</p>

			consistent with the welfare of the former relevant child) and the eligible child and the local authority foster parent wish to make a staying put arrangement.	accommodation' and meets the requirement of Regulation 6, 7 & 9 and Schedule 2 of the Planning Transition to Adulthood Guidance, which includes the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.	Although children in residential care are not offered a staying put arrangement, "Staying Close" is being trialled which is a variant of Staying Put for those leaving residential care. Other criteria: The "Staying Put" arrangement is set out in the child/young person's Pathway Plan. A proportion of the allowance paid to the "Staying Put" carer/s is paid by the Local Authority Children's Services.	notice'. In extreme circumstances it may be considered reasonable for the "Staying Put" carer to give very short notice and ask the young person to leave on the same day. Ability to return: Young people who leave do not have a right to return, but this is covered in guidance, is permissible and is good practice.
Scotland "Continuing Care" guidance consolidated into legislation by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, implemented in 2015; amended in	Funding: £5 million year for implementation, increasing annually until 2020. Guidance: Staying Put Scotland Guidance (2013) (Staying put Scotland: providing care leavers with connectedness and belonging - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)). Updated with Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014: Guidance on Part 10: Aftercare .	The aim of Continuing Care is to provide young people with a more graduated transition out of care, reducing the risk of multiple simultaneous disruptions occurring in their lives while maintaining supportive relationships.	Yes: If requested, and carer is willing to provide it, they can remain in their current care placement until they turn 21. The only reason for failing to provide Continuing	Support: Young people in Continuing Care are entitled to the same supports (i.e. accommodation and other assistance) as when they were looked after. Monitoring: A local authority must consider whether continuing to provide an eligible person with Continuing Care would significantly adversely affect the welfare of that person at intervals not exceeding twelve months (the first interval starting from the date on which the person ceases to be looked after by the local authority); and by carrying out a welfare assessment of the person. A young person's Continuing Care placement cannot be ended because there are concerns regarding the	Age: 16-18 Previous care experience: Any young person born after 1 April 1999 who is looked after in foster, kinship or residential care is eligible to request Continuing Care (but not secure care or looked after at home). Continuing Care must also be provided by Residential Schools who provide a targeted service. It may be that these resources can only offer	Age: 21 Must end when: The person leaves the accommodation of their own volition; the accommodation ceases to be available, or the local authority considers that continuing to provide the care would significantly affect the welfare of the person. Ability to return: If a placement breaks down an alternative placement should be sought if it is in the best

2019 to extend to 21.	Could be replaced with the implementation of The Promise.		Care is if to do so would significantly adversely affect the welfare of the young person. This must be evidenced in a Welfare Assessment.	welfare or wellbeing of another person in the same placement. It can only be ended if the welfare of the young person in the Continuing Care placement is significantly adversely affected. Planning: Flexible approach which can be part of the pathway planning process, but this is not mandated. A young person over sixteen years in Continuing Care, who remains in the same placement, may require a DBS check depending on their specific individual circumstances e.g. where there are unrelated children in the same household. The outcome of any Disclosure check would not impact on the provision of a Continuing Care placement.	Continuing Care until age eighteen which is the age at which children must leave Secondary Education. Includes care purchased by the local authority from private and third sector providers.	interests of the young person. Where an initial attempt at independent living fails, it is incumbent on local authorities to consider the variety of ways that these young people can be helped. If the Continuing Care placement or looked after placement is still available, there is no reason why the young person cannot return to it as accommodation provided under section 29 (Aftercare) of the 1995 Act.
Northern Ireland "Going the Extra Mile" scheme 2006 piloted, formally launched 2010	Funding: Unclear Guidance: Unclear	The aim of this scheme is to promote continuity and stability of living arrangements in post-care life for young people living with foster carers by ensuring that financial support is available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of these young people until they reach the age of 21.	No, although the Adoption and Children Bill (NI) seeks to make 'continuing care' arrangements statutory.	Support: Carers receive allowances in line with local foster care fees for looking after 16-year-olds and additional support for the young person is provided until they are 21 by a "16 Plus" social worker.	Age: 18 Previous care experience: Foster care or kinship care. Other criteria: in education, employment or training.	Age: 21, although 'support' through the GEM scheme can continue after 21.

Key differences

There are key differences between the schemes which can be seen in the policies and guidance as highlighted in Table 1.

Implementation support

One of the main differences as highlighted in discussions with practitioners working in “When I am Ready” contexts is that there is funding in some of the UK for the implementation of post-18 schemes, and not in others. In Wales, there has not been additional funding from the Welsh Government for the implementation of “When I am Ready”. This was a consideration for Local Authorities when considering their own implementation of the scheme, as is evident in the Neath Port Talbot [report](#) of the Head of Children’s Services about the implementation plans :

“The cost of implementing “When I am Ready” for the existing young people who are living with former foster carers post 18 in Neath Port Talbot will be a maximum additional £50,420 for the first year, and an additional £28,028 for the following year (see appendix 2 – financial implications). These costs will be met from existing budgets.”

(Jarrett 2016)

Whereas in England, Local Authorities have received grants to implement the scheme. The latest round of grants was announced in 2022 outlining funding allocations to local authorities until 2026 ([Staying Put grant determination letter to LAs 2022 to 2025 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)). An Action for Children [report](#) from 2020 outlined the different funding options that the government could use. While it was acknowledged and welcomed that there had been a £10 million uplift in the funding (from £23.77 million the previous year to £33.28 million in 2020/2021), the report also indicated that to adequately fund Staying Put and to ensure that carers were paid an allowance and a fee, not expecting any contributions that young people could make, funding would need to rise to £82.1 million in 2021. This was not the case, and the funding remained at £33.28 million in the costing announced by the DfE.

In Northern Ireland, the government announced £500,000 to maintain and extend the Going the Extra Mile scheme ([Minister O’Neill committed to engaging with Looked After Children | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#)). There is a process on-going to introduce a new bill (the Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill) which includes extending support for GEM but the details are not yet finalised.

In 2014 the Scottish Government announced it had guaranteed £5million year, increasing annually until 2020, for the implementation of the Continuing Care provision within the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Part 11). The net total costs each year from 2016-17 to 19-20 were lower in the first year of implementation at £4.2 million, rising to 9.3 million by 2019-20 at which point they were expected to stabilise. However, concerns have been raised about the sufficiency of the funding allocated, and how it has been used by Local Authorities (Dugdale and Cameron 2018).

In England, the pilot of Staying Put (2008 – 2011) was accompanied by a funded evaluation (Munro et al. 2012) which led to implementation recommendations for other Local Authorities to

follow when introducing the scheme. Similar evaluations were not carried out in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales.

Eligibility

There are differences in the age young people can remain in their homes under policies. In all countries aside from Wales, young people are expected to leave the home when they turn 21, whereas in Wales they can remain until 25 if they are in education or training. This is likely to change in Scotland with the implementation of ‘the care review’ which calls for decisions about when a young people moves on to be made based on their best interests, not eligibility criteria. In England, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care also recommended that

“Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” expectation.”

(MacAlister, 2022: p134)

In Northern Ireland, young people are only eligible for ‘Going the Extra Mile’ if they are in education, training or employment, and this is not a statutory offer. There is current suggestions however to extend this to young people in residential care ([Looked-After-Children-Strategy-Version-V-3.0.pdf \(exchangewales.org\)](https://www.exchangewales.org))

Regarding previous care experience, all schemes include young people in foster care, but vary regarding other care types. Only in Scotland are residential and kinship care arrangements mentioned explicitly as being eligible for young people to remain in their home. In Wales, there is provision for a young person to move from a residential home into foster care and enter a “When I am Ready” arrangement when they turn 18. In Northern Ireland, it is not clear which arrangements ‘Going the Extra Mile’ includes. In England, the ‘Staying Close’ scheme is being trialled to support young people to remain in contact with their residential home but not to remain living there.

Endings

The Welsh, Scottish and English guidance explicitly state that, if an arrangement breaks down but the young person and the carer are happy to begin it again, this should be an option. In Wales, there is a provision in the guidance that if the arrangement breaks down, there should be a 28-day cooling off period in which the carer and young person could repair the relationship and reinstate the arrangement. There are no restrictions on this happening after this point but ‘re-entry’ is not covered in the guidance. In Scotland, there is no time limit put on this, and there is an explicit statement that another Continuing Care arrangement could be sought if this was in the best interests of the young person. In England, the guidance indicates that while there is no right for the young person to return, if the young person and the carer want this, it is good practice to enable a return.

How is “When I am Ready” working in practice?

This area focuses on the performance of “When I am Ready” across Wales, drawing on practice and data from Scotland, England and Northern Ireland as comparisons and for practical suggestions.

Based on the Welsh Government guidance, there are key outcomes and areas of practice that could indicate successful implementation of the policy. However, there are limited data to draw from to evaluate implementation. To date there has not been a review of “When I am Ready” across Wales, and the data returned by Local Authorities in the Looked After Children Census covers limited areas of the scheme.

This section of the report is in three main parts. This first section highlights what data are available, and where there are gaps. Available data and gaps are mapped against key indicators of success in the scheme, and the types of data that could indicate successful implementation and outcomes. The second section includes the available data which can evaluate these outcomes. Finally, stakeholder consultation sessions in Wales, with young people, foster carers and practitioners are presented to further understand how “When I am Ready” is operating in Wales, what areas in the policy could be improved, what other data is needed and what else might be needed to support young people transitioning from care in Wales.

Available data and gaps

Each country in the UK collects different data about young people ceasing to be classed as ‘looked after’. Table 2 is reproduced from a report by the British Academy (Grauberg 2019).

Table 2: Variation in data gathered across UK

England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Care leavers on 17th-21st birthday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodation • activity 	Young people ceasing to be looked after on or after 16th birthday and up to 26th birthday. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age at time of ceasing to be looked after • destination on discharge • final accommodation type • pathway plan and pathway co-ordinator on date they ceased to be looked after 	Care leavers aged 16 and over <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activity • age, gender • reason care ceased • personal adviser • pathway plan • accommodation 	Care leavers 16-18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational attainment • health • accommodation • activity • age, gender, religion, disability • duration of care
	Young people eligible for aftercare services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age, gender, ethnicity • disability status • accommodation type • economic activity • episodes of homelessness since becoming eligible for aftercare services 	After 18 no longer updated since 2016	Care leavers on 19th birthday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodation • activity • age, gender, religion, disability • duration of care • young parent status

Data Source: Assessment Report 265 Statistics on Looked After Children (UK Statistics Authority, 2013).

Data mapped against key indicators success

The policy guidance in Wales gives clear indications of what should be happening to provide “When I am Ready” arrangements. These are described below, along with details on the extent to which we can currently understand (or not) how the policy is working in practice.

Information

Provide appropriate and accessible information to carers and young people in separate meetings – ensuring the positive aspects are not dismissed.

It is not possible to consider how accessible information is for carers and young people, and if what is provided in separate meetings, and how the benefits of the scheme are communicated. This would entail qualitative research with young people, carers and practitioners from across Wales. Voices from Care Cymru have produced a website (<https://www.whenimready.co.uk/information#what-changes-in-a-when-i-m-ready-arrangement>) and materials that can be used with young people to explain the process. It would be helpful to know how widely these are accessed, along with other examples of good practice with young people and carers within Local Authorities. An example used for Staying Put carers in Hampshire County Council can be viewed here: [Staying put leaflet Sept 2014.dochf.pdf](#) (whatdotheyknow.com). North Yorkshire County Council has a webpage for young people to consider their accommodation options: ([Care leavers: your accommodation and where you live | North Yorkshire County Council](#)). The Who Cares Trust in Scotland have developed resources to explain to young people what their rights are regarding Continuing Care: [Rights-To-Care-Booklet.pdf](#) (cypcs.org.uk). Local Authorities in Wales have developed some of their own resources to communicate this information, but these are not publicly available.

Planning

At 16, “When I am Ready” planning meeting, separate to Looked After Child review. Living Together Agreement meeting at least six months before the young person is 18.

To understand how the planning process is happening for young people and whether it is happening in a timely manner in order to consider whether “When I am Ready” is right for them, planning meetings where “When I am Ready” is discussed would need to be recorded. Good practice, for example, regarding how these conversations take place, how often, and the language used could helpfully be shared between Local Authorities. An example of how this can work is through practitioner forums. As part of the “When I am Ready” project run by Voices from Care Cymru, practitioner forums in North and South Wales were set up for practitioners to share experiences. These transitioned to online during the COVID-19 pandemic. These gave an opportunity for practitioners to hear about events related to When I am Ready that were taking place, and opportunity to give feedback on training and resources that were developed.

In Scotland, membership groups consisting of frontline practitioners and managers from Scottish local authorities and third sector and private sector providers (the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum) have worked collectively to identify obstacles to implementation and shared good practice: <https://www.staf.scot/implications-of-continuing-care-report>.

Explore ways of overcoming barriers (financial or other) to the carer providing a “When I am Ready” placement where a young person has expressed a desire for one.

Although the good practice guidance (2016) states that both parties (young person and foster carer) need to want to enter the arrangement, the guidance also states that, where the young person wanted to enter into the arrangement, the local authority should explore ways to overcome barriers for the carer. It would be helpful to have data on which young people do and do not enter “When I am Ready” arrangements, and the reasons for these decisions. Unfortunately, this data is not available. It would be helpful to start recording and collating such information which could help improve understanding around what support is needed to enable carers to provide these arrangements, and for Local Authorities to ensure that their offers appeal to foster carers.

A plan for post “When I am Ready” living arrangements should also be developed and revised with the young person at the six-monthly pathway planning review meetings.

To explore the success of “When I am Ready” in improving the readiness for young people to transition into independence, it would be helpful to know where young people go after “When I am Ready”, and the factors that influence next destinations, again this data is not collected. The Barnardo’s Accommodation and Support Framework illustrates key steps and areas that should be focused on to support young people when they reach 18 ([Care leavers accommodation and support framework for Wales October 2016 \(PDF\).pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)).

Support

Allocate Personal Adviser, offer of an independent advocate.

Who Cares Scotland provides some examples of when advocacy can be important for young people thinking about a Continuing Care arrangement: [WCS-report-on-Continuing-Care-Dec-17.pdf \(whocaresScotland.org\)](#). Although the good practice guidance (2016) notes that young people should have access to a personal advisor and be offered an independent advocate to help with decision making around “When I am Ready”, there is no data available on how often young people are offered the services of an independent advocate, or in which situations regarding “When I am Ready”. It would be helpful to understand on which criteria Local Authorities decide to offer the services of an independent advocate with a specific focus on “When I am Ready” in Wales.

Training and support for the carer focused on developing skills and capacity to assist the young person achieve the specific outcomes detailed in the living together agreement.

The Fostering Network Cymru delivers training to fostering services in Wales through a “When I am Ready”: Preparing for Placements’ course which is designed to help foster carers develop a greater understanding of “When I am Ready” arrangements. Currently however “When I am Ready” training is offered under additional training in the post approval training framework ([LD-Framework E-1.pdf \(afacymru.org.uk\)](#)) rather than core learning. Different local authorities take different approaches to training, but not having “When I am Ready” training as part of mandatory training indicates that not all carers will receive this training.

The Welsh Government recommends that the financial support should amount to the same as the National Minimum Allowances paid to foster carers

The fees paid to foster carers vary in different Local Authorities across Wales. The guidance indicates that the financial support should amount to National Minimum Allowances, not including any element to be given to, or spent on the young person, such as personal items, clothing, travel or holiday allowances. However, the money paid to foster carers may come from different sources depending on the circumstances of the young person, including from their wages, benefits they may be eligible for, or student bursaries. It is difficult to know what financial support foster carers in a “When I am Ready” arrangement receive across Wales, and how this is funded as this is something that is dependent on the individual circumstances of the young person, and agreed as part of the “When I am Ready” arrangement.

In 2018, The Fostering Network carried out a survey of all 22 local authorities in Wales using freedom of information (FOI) requests to monitor the allowances paid to foster carers. As can be seen in table 3, in 15 of the 22 Local Authorities, the allowances paid to carers decreases from the allowance they would receive for children between the ages of 16-18.

Table 3: Foster carers' “When I am Ready” allowances across Local Authorities

LA	16-18 allowance	“When I am Ready”
Blaenau Gwent	£215.74	£215.74*
Bridgend	£224.37	£185.00*
Caerphilly	£206.00	£206.00
Cardiff	£221.13	£189.00*
Carmarthenshire	£200.00	£200.00
Ceredigion	£215.74	£238.00
Conwy	£206.00	£206.00*
Denbighshire	£206.00	£82.00 †
Flintshire	£217.00	£206.00
Gwynedd	£221.13	£206.00
Isle of Anglesey	£239.98	£206.00
Merthyr Tydfil	£206.00	£140.00
Monmouthshire	£223.00	£160.00*
Neath Port Talbot	£206.00	£221.00*
Newport	£349.00	£64.00 - £131.00
Pembrokeshire	£215.42	£147.39
Powys	£232.34	£206.00
Rhondda Cynon Taff	£206.00	£170.00
Swansea	£206.00	£185.00*
Torfaen County	£209.30	£206.00
Vale of Glamorgan	£173.67	£190.00
Wrexham	£215.74	£189.00

Boxes shaded in blue indicate where former foster care allowances decreased when a placement changed to a “When I am Ready” arrangement.

* the young person is expected to contribute and/or claim some kind of benefit and this is included in the amount.

† this is the amount paid by the local authority but more is given to the former foster carer through young person’s contributions and/or the benefits claimed by the young person

Table 3 also indicates that in 8 Local Authorities, the allowances are made up from payments by the Local Authority directly and contributions from the young person. It is not clear in all of these Local Authorities how the final total is calculated.

There are some examples of allowance policies available online. In Bridgend County Borough Council, for example, there is a provision for a “When I am Ready” support allowance of £70 per week ([20.07.16 - “When I am Ready” - Appendix 2 - Financial Policy Final.pdf \(bridgend.gov.uk\)](#)) paid by the Local Authority direct to the “When I am Ready” provider, independent of rent and other costs paid by the young person or through other sources. In total therefore in 2016, a young person would be contributing £20 to household costs and £95 to rent usually via housing benefit, leading to a total of £185 paid to the carer per week.

In Conwy County Borough Council, a freedom of information request indicated that:

““When I am Ready” final payment to a Carer is £206 (equivalent of 16+ rate), but that might include the young person’s £15 or £25 contribution and £80 housing benefit.”

[\(Foster care allowances - a Freedom of Information request to Conwy County Borough Council - WhatDoTheyKnow\)](#)

This indicates inconsistency in the way that allowances are allocated, how much carers receive and how much young people are expected to contribute.

A number of Local Authorities in South Central England have a shared protocol for use with Staying Put arrangements which covers guidance for the HMRC: [“Staying Put” \(proceduresonline.com\)](#). There is no similar protocol in Wales, and Local Authorities are expected to develop their own policies. It would be helpful to have a shared protocol across Wales that could be used to calculate allowances, to inform work with the HMRC and other relevant government departments, and to ensure fairness and consistency for young people and carers.

Monitoring

There is no specific guidance on how a “When I am Ready” arrangement should be monitored in Wales. The good practice guidance states:

“Each local authority has a duty to monitor its “When I am Ready” scheme. To achieve this whole scheme monitoring, appropriate information from each individual pathway planning review should be recorded, and provided to the local authority staff member who is responsible for monitoring the scheme. What constitutes appropriate information should be set out in the local authority’s “When I am Ready” policies and procedures.” (p.25)

As such, different Local Authorities will collect data and carry out reviews at different points and for different purposes. It would be helpful to have a national approach to this. This is similar in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where there is guidance, but not specific monitoring requirements other than uptake of the schemes.

Implementation and outcomes

“When I am Ready” was implemented across all local authorities in Wales in 2016. However, each Local Authority has the flexibility to implement the policy under the guidance in a way that works best in their context.

Policies, procedures and guidance

There are two main sources of information regarding policy and guidance for the implementation and delivery of “When I am Ready” in Wales:

The Code of Practice states that

“Local authorities should develop “When I am Ready” policies and procedures that provide foster / “When I am Ready” carers and ‘looked after’ children and young people, with information and guidance relating to all aspects of the “When I am Ready” scheme.” (p.123)

The Code of Practice then includes a list of areas that should be covered in local policies. However, for this report it was not possible to access specific Local Authority policies in Wales regarding “When I am Ready”. There was only one policy from a Welsh Local Authority identified online: ([7th April 2016 - For Information “When I am Ready” Scheme.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#)). It is therefore not possible to consider to what extent the implementation of “When I am Ready” across Local Authorities aligns with good practice guidance. Some Local Authorities across Wales indicate that they are aware that so far “When I am Ready” has limited take up in their area. For example, Powys County Council latest strategic framework ([PowerPoint Presentation \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)) indicated that opportunities for young people to remain in “When I am Ready” arrangements are limited, but it is difficult to know where the barriers exist to these arrangements.

“There is no clear policy with regard to the entitlement of care leavers in Powys and recording and reporting mechanisms for care leavers needs improvement.

Transition arrangements for care leavers into adulthood needs improvement and opportunities for Care Leavers to remain in “When I am Ready” placements are limited.” (p.21)

Lincolnshire County Council Children’s services were rated outstanding by Ofsted in 2019 for their children in care and leaving care services. They have a very detailed procedure for Staying Put used within the Local Authority ([3.8.12 Staying Put Procedure \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)). This includes clear information about who is responsible for what, at which point in the process. This policy could be used as a framework for developing detailed policies in Wales.

Uptake of schemes

In Wales “When I am Ready” arrangements were introduced across the country in April 2016 and by 2021, 187 care leavers were in such an arrangement with their former foster carer (Statistics for Wales, 2021). This accounted for 11% of young people who turned 18 and left care, rising from 8% the previous year. It is not possible in this report to calculate exactly what percentage of these young people were not eligible for “When I am Ready” (i.e. in residential care). Note, the figure 20%

was reported in Grauberg (2019) but this does not seem to be accurate based on Statistics for Wales more recent reports.

In England the “Staying Put” scheme was introduced in May 2014. In 2021 (60%) of young people in England leaving care while in a foster placement were staying with their former foster carer 3 months later. It is not possible in this report to calculate exactly what percentage of these young people were not eligible for Staying Put (i.e. in residential care).

In Scotland the “Continuing Care” scheme was introduced in April 2015. In 2020, 229 young people who ceased to be classed as ‘looked after’ beyond the age of 16 entered a Continuing Care arrangement. A further 77 young people were identified as already being in such an arrangement, bringing the total number of young people were recorded as being in a Continuing care arrangement to 306 (Scottish Government, 2021). Rates of eligible young people entering a Continuing Care arrangement cannot be calculated as the rate of young people eligible and receiving aftercare is given by age, but the age of young people entering Continuing Care arrangements is not available.

In Northern Ireland the “Going the Extra Mile (GEM)” scheme was introduced in 2006. In 2018 22% of 16-18-year-olds leaving care and 29% of 19-year-olds were in a GEM placement (Department of Health, 2018). No up-to-date data about GEM uptake was located.

As has been noted elsewhere (Grauberg 2019), statistics which are collected and published in the four countries of the UK vary significantly from country to country which makes it difficult to explore how “When I am Ready” is operating in Wales compared with similar initiatives across the UK. Wales and Northern Ireland publish data relating to young people leaving care up to the young person’s 19th birthday, England up to 21 and Scotland up to 25. Some countries publish additional data relating to accommodation, others focus on educational achievement or economic activity. For more information see [Assessment Report 265 - Statistics on Looked After Children \(statisticsauthority.gov.uk\)](#) which is an audit of data reported across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. No recent audits could be identified.

Table 4: Rates of young people in post-18 accommodation

	Number of eligible young people entering an extended care scheme when ceasing to be looked after (percentages of overall eligible young people entering scheme included where available)				
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Wales*	84 (4%)	139 (8%)	127 (8%)	127 (8%)	187 (11%)
England**	1,630 (51%)	1810 (55%)	1970 (57%)	1970 (58%)	2,120 (60%)
Scotland***	123****	208****	167	229	Data not yet available
Northern Ireland*****	No data	80 (22%)	No data	No data	No data

*On 18th birthday. Source: [Experimental Statistics: Children looked after by local authorities, 2020-21 \(gov.wales\)](#)

**Data refers to aged 18 on 31st March of the year and % of care leavers eligible for Staying Put. Data also available for aged 19, and aged 20 and over. Rounded to the nearest 10.

***children ceasing to be looked after on 16th birthday and remaining in a Continuing Care arrangement, or with Continuing Care as their recorded destination. Source: [Children's social work statistics: 2019 to 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

****recorded as ceasing to be looked after and destination ‘with former foster carers’.

***** 16–18-year-olds ceasing to be looked after

As table 4 indicates, comparative data is currently not available to understand how the policies are working across the UK. As eligibility and recording is different across countries, there is no way for

example of comparing what rate of 18-year-olds who had been in a foster home prior to their 18th birthday remained there under one of the national schemes.

The issue of data has been raised in different countries of the UK (for example CELCIS in Scotland raised that data around Continuing Care is not necessarily being collected routinely [CELCIS response to Scottish Government consultation on the Continuing Care Amendment Order 2018](#))

Variation in uptake in Wales

To gather more insight into who is accessing “When I am Ready”, a member of the research team (Louise Roberts) made a request to Stats for Wales to release data regarding demographic data of young people who entered a “When I am Ready” arrangement (see Tables 5-8).

Table 5: Gender of young people in “When I am Ready”

Gender	2017	2018	2019	2020
Male	40	60	55	65
Female	45	70	60	55
Total	80	130	115	115

Table 6: Disability status of young people in “When I am Ready”

Disability status	2017	2018	2019	2020
Disabled children	*	15	10	10
Non-disabled children	80	115	110	105
Total	80	130	115	115

Table 7: Ethnicity of young people in “When I am Ready”

Ethnicity	2017	2018	2019	2020
White	70	115	105	105
Mixed ethnic groups	5	*	5	*
Asian or Asian British	*	5	*	*
Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British	*	5	*	*
Other ethnic group	*	*	*	*
Total	80	130	115	115

Table 8: Asylum-seeking children in “When I am Ready”

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC)	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of UASC children	5	10	5	5
Number of non-UASC children	75	125	110	110
Total	80	130	115	115

It would be useful to have the same data for all young people aged 18 eligible for “When I am Ready” to explore patterns in who enters the scheme and who does not – and further qualitative research to understand variations in uptake.

There is data publicly available that shows by Local Authority the number of young people who have ceased to be classed as ‘looked after’ at the age of 18 and who have entered “When I am Ready” arrangements (Table 9). It is interesting that according to this data (Table 9) there are variations across Local Authorities over time, with a big increase in Cardiff and Newport in 2021 and decreases in Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent. In two Local Authorities – Monmouthshire and Denbighshire – have never had 5 or more young people in a year entering “When I am Ready”. To an extent, this is likely reflective of the rate of young people leaving care in those areas, but research would need to be carried out to explore this in more depth.

It is important to note that there might still be a lack of promotion of “When I am Ready” across Local Authorities when thinking about their offer for young people. For example, the [Blaenau Gwent corporate parenting board action plan 2020-21](#) has an action point (Priority 7 – Our Children

Looked After live in suitable accommodation, p10-11). “When I am Ready” is not mentioned as one of the potential ways of providing suitable accommodation post 18.

Table 9: Young people in “When I am Ready” by Local Authority

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All Welsh LAs	85	140	125	125	185
Isle of Anglesey	*	*	*	5	5
Gwynedd	*	10	*	*	*
Conwy	*	5	10	*	5
Denbighshire	*	*	*	*	*
Flintshire	*	*	*	*	5
Wrexham	*	10	5	*	5
Powys	*	*	*	10	15
Ceredigion	*	*	5	*	*
Pembrokeshire	*	5	*	5	5
Carmarthenshire	5	5	15	15	10
Swansea	*	10	*	*	*
Neath Port Talbot	10	10	15	*	5
Bridgend	10	5	10	5	10
Vale of Glamorgan	*	*	*	*	*
Cardiff	10	20	15	10	45
Rhondda Cynon Taf	10	10	10	20	25
Merthyr Tydfil	*	10	*	*	*
Caerphilly	5	15	15	15	5
Blaenau Gwent	*	*	*	5	*
Torfaen	*	5	5	10	10
Monmouthshire	*	*	*	*	*
Newport	*	*	*	*	10

*indicates less than 5 including zero or missing data excluded by Stats for Wales to do concerns about reliability. The data in this table is different from tables 6-9 as it was updated in November 2021. All numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

It is unclear how many independent fostering agencies support “When I am Ready” arrangements. Only one policy was found online that noted “When I am Ready” and states:

“When I am Ready” is a governmental initiative to support young people, on reaching the age of 18, to stay with their former foster carers. Whilst not a fostering placement, FCC has a scheme which allows for the former carer to be supported whilst the arrangement is in place. This scheme benefits both the young person and the carer.”

(Foster Care Cooperative policy p.6: available here: [APPENDIX 1 \(fostercarecooperative.co.uk\)](#))

There are a number of areas not covered in the data that it would be helpful to know for example:

- What type of fostering arrangements enter into “When I am Ready” i.e. how many young people in residential care move to foster carers to enter “When I am Ready”? How many kinship carers? How many private fostering agency foster carers?
- How reflective are the variations in uptake of the patterns of young people leaving care (i.e. are certain groups / Local Authorities more or less represented)?
- What are the reasons they are not taken up (i.e. foster carer or child decision)?
- How long do “When I am Ready” arrangements last, why do they end and where do young people move to after a “When I am Ready” arrangement?

Consultation

This section summarises the themes that have been raised around the “When I am Ready” policy through the policy review and the literature review. These contextualise the findings, fill in gaps in the literature, and explore ideas and ways forward from the perspectives of young people, foster carers and practitioners.

Consultation sessions

Five consultation sessions were carried out including: two with care experienced young people, one with foster carers and two with practitioners. In each session, specific questions were asked based on the findings of the review, but there was also space for general discussion around “When I am Ready” and turning 18 as a care experienced person. In addition, an anonymous survey was circulated to practitioners for their reflections on the findings and feedback was given from an interview carried out between Voices from Care Cymru practitioner and a When I am Ready carer.

Table 10: Overview of consultation sessions carried out

Consultation session	Attendees	Areas explored
Consultation session 1	11 “When I am Ready” Practitioners	Policy gaps / uncertainties; additional support needed for practitioners; good practice examples.
Consultation session 2	5 Care Experienced young people with three having experience of being in WIR or equivalent	Experiences of leaving care; information and disinformation about “When I am Ready”; housing options available to young people when they reach 18; lack of ‘care’ for young people once they reach 18.
Consultation session 3	4 Care Experienced young people with one who had experience of being in WIR	Experiences of leaving care; information and disinformation about “When I am Ready”; needs of young people when they reach 18; housing options available to young people when they reach 18; language used around “When I am Ready”.
Consultation session 4	14 Foster Carers with c8 having some experience of WIR	Carer allowances; lack of training and information about “When I am Ready”; availability of staff and support; options for young people when ready to move out; language and DBS checks.
Consultation session 5	10 “When I am Ready” practitioners	Inconsistency across and within LAs; lack of resources dedicated to “When I am Ready” / new resources and people dedicated to “When I am Ready”; policy developments alongside practice learning; the value of the practitioner forum.
Consultation survey	5 “When I am Ready” practitioners	How the local policy is working; what support is missing; barriers to entry; encouraging uptake; Monitoring.

Consultation discussion	Between Voices worker and WIR carer	WIR Carer needs a point of contact from the LA that is consistent; need for WIR Training and preparation for PAs and carers; More support from LA for young person.
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Training and awareness

Training was discussed with foster carers. Most had not been offered training specific to “When I am Ready”, and those that had attended training had not found it very helpful. Carers raised that they felt local authority staff were often inexperienced with “When I am Ready” and unable to provide the right information, and that carers need a point of contact in LAs that is consistent. One carer noted that foster carers might be well placed to run training for social workers and PAs who might not be very experienced with supporting “When I am Ready”.

This was echoed by young people in both consultation sessions with young people talking about their workers being unaware of the right information around “When I am Ready” and being given the wrong information about whether or not they were eligible. Young people talked about how they are in a good position to be able to train practitioners about what they need when they turn 18.

Practitioners talked about how practice varied across teams and Local Authorities with individual workers having to interpret national guidance depending on the situation they were facing. In certain ways this was helpful as practitioners could interpret the guidance in the way that they felt was best for the young person. However, practitioners also discussed the need for other parts of the Local Authority to understand duties when it came to “When I am Ready”, and have a consistent approach to championing it. Some talked about how “When I am Ready” had developed positively across the Local Authority, and how practice experience was shaping policy developments.

Relationships between young people and carers

Relationships came up in different ways across all the consultation sessions. For care experienced young people, it was stressed that if they did not have a good relationship with the foster carer they were with, remaining in a “When I am Ready” arrangement might not be right for them. On the other hand, “When I am Ready” might still be what they wanted to do, so they should have the option of moving to live with another foster carer. Those that had had a good experience of “When I am Ready” usually had a good relationship with the carer already, however this did not always remain once the relationship changed from foster carer to “When I am Ready” provider’. Where the relationship broke down, young people experienced difficult situations where they were kicked out of their home or made to go back to their home even though they no longer felt welcome there.

Carers who had experience of “When I am Ready” generally had long term relationships with the young people they lived with. They found the requirement to carry out a DBS check particularly challenging and unnecessary, and that changed the dynamic in the relationship. Some carers

talked about how the barriers to “When I am Ready” left them feeling like they would have to imply that they were considering asking the young person to leave to prompt action, even though this was not something they would ever want to consider.

Practitioners also discussed how the change in language and requirements could have a negative impact on previously well-established relationships, which could lead to come practitioners avoiding mentioning “When I am Ready” until very close to the young person’s 18th birthday. Practitioners also raised that the language and requirements of “When I am Ready” did not always relate well to kinship care.

Support

Young people gave examples of areas they would want support with when they turned 18, particularly around the emotional impact of ‘independence’ and feeling lonely. Some young people were clear that at 18 what they wanted was to have their own place and the resources to make that possible, rather than support to stay with foster carers. The need for support to continue in whatever way was best for the young person was strongly expressed in the consultation sessions, with many of the young people feeling like there had been an abrupt end to support when they reached 18.

Foster carers strongly expressed a lack of support for themselves and the young people they cared for at all stages, including when making the decision to enter an arrangement, when the arrangement was in place, and when deciding it was time for the young person to move on. In particular, a number of carers raised that there was not a dedicated person within the Local Authority who solely focused on “When I am Ready”. Where there was a specific post, examples were given of workers who were off for long periods without a replacement in post or having been reassigned to work on other areas during COVID. They also felt that there needed to be clarity around the role of the PA for young people in “When I am Ready”. Carers felt the situation had not improved since their early experiences of the scheme. In some cases, carers reported that the support had been so lacking and poor that they would not consider “When I am Ready” again. Practitioners commented on the need for the whole Local Authority to support “When I am Ready” and some felt this was not always the case. Where resources were stretching in the Local Authority, some felt that guidance did not have the same impact on prioritising resources than areas covered by specific policy and statutory requirements. Others gave examples of how “When I am Ready” had been integrated across fostering teams and was felt to work well.

Finances

Young people also talked about wanting information about money. They were mixed about whether they wanted to have a discussion about the finances involved for carers in providing “When I am Ready” as this could affect their relationship and might feel uncomfortable. However, many were keen to have more information about budgeting, how much alternative options like supported lodgings, council tenancies and private renting would cost and what kind of funding is available to support them. They wanted to be able to make informed financial decisions. Carers also worried about young people having to be responsible for their own finances without the right support or advice. One gave an example of a young person having had their Child Trust Fund money put into their bank account on their 18th birthday with no prior conversation and having spent it all without the carer knowing anything about it.

In terms of carer allowances, most of the carers had experienced delays in receiving any money once the move was made to “When I am Ready”. One carer gave an example of having to support a young person financially to get them ready to start work because no funding was made available in time from the Local Authority. One carer gave an example of another carer who had said no to a young person remaining through a “When I am Ready” arrangement because they would have had to de-register as a foster carer. Carers and young people struggled with accessing universal credit payments, and one carer talked about the difficulty explaining the payments to mortgage providers.

Practitioners also discussed finances, and the difficulty of calculating how much of an allowance would be paid by the Local Authority and how much from other sources such as benefits and directly from young people. Consultation highlighted examples of different practices used across Local Authorities in calculating these, including differences between how much young people were expected to contribute when they begin working. One practitioner had a formula that they used for calculating this, which other practitioners asked to be shared with them so that they could use within their own practice.

Sharing information

Young people and carers in consultation sessions gave examples of not being given accurate information around “When I am Ready”, including being told that they were not eligible when they were. Carers discussed struggling to find out accurate information when considering options for when a young person was going to turn 18.

Practitioners within consultation sessions discussed resources and shared with each other examples of practice that they thought worked well for speaking to young people and carers about “When I am Ready”. However, they also discussed how these practices were mainly restricted to the few practitioners directly involved with “When I am Ready”, and not used more widely in conversations across the Local Authority. Some practitioners shared that they felt “When I am Ready” was not integrated in the Local Authority, and information about the scheme was not being shared with young people and carers routinely as part of care planning.

Monitoring and transition planning

All of the carers who had experience of “When I am Ready” reported reviews not taking place at all, or not taking place as regularly as they expected them to be. Lack of reviews also meant that there was a lack of planning for young people to move on from the arrangement. Carers and young people described endings of the arrangement that they had been in to be abrupt and not managed by the local authority. One carer talked about having to find alternative accommodation themselves for a young person because they had a new foster child moving in who needed the room but the Local Authority had not arranged anywhere for the young person to move to. This was mirrored by young people who talked about having to move out because their room was needed by the foster family but that they did not have anywhere to move to so ended up in a range of unsuitable situations such as hostels or friend’s sofas. This was also reflected in the consultation with practitioners, who describe scenarios of “When I am Ready” arrangements not being monitored and with no ‘move on’ plans in place. Examples were given of pressure for the young person to move out so that the foster carer could have another child or young person move in. The cost of accommodation was mentioned as a worry for the future of affordable housing for young people after “When I am Ready”. Practitioners also talked about not always exploring “When I am Ready” as an option because there was not a realistic follow-on plan. Some

discussed not feeling that “When I am Ready” was worthwhile if it only moved the ‘cliff-edge’ to 21 instead of 18, and that there needed to be support and realistic planning for when a young person was ready to move on.

Alternative options

Young people stressed that “When I am Ready” would not be appropriate for every young person, and that there needed to be an array of suitable options for young people when they reached 18. Ideas suggested for this included ‘taster flats’ so that young people had a chance to experience independent living before moving, more support in independent living and being able to register on housing waiting lists before turning 18.

Conclusion

Despite the need for the scheme, this review highlighted that there are currently many ‘unknowns’ about how “When I am Ready” is operating for young people and their carers. However, a number of concerns were raised, and a range of recommendations are made here in relation to the findings of the review and consultation with young people, carers and practitioners.

Recommendations for policy

In line with the recommendations of the Fostering Network’s State of the Nation report, this review highlights a need for a full review of the “When I am Ready” scheme and how it is operating across Wales. In addition:

- It is possible that a policy, rather than guidance, that can be used across all Local Authorities, or regional groups of Local Authorities, could help to enable consistency in the use of When I am Ready. This could be developed in partnership with practitioners who have been working closely with “When I am Ready” and young people and carers who have experience of the arrangement.
- There is a need to consider how “When I am Ready” is integrated with other departments and policies, especially with the DWP and HMRC.
- It is also important to consider how “When I am Ready” integrates with new initiatives such as the Basic Income pilot and gather data on how these complement each other.

This report has highlighted the gaps in the current data which could illuminate how When I am Ready is operating. It is therefore important that a monitoring system is developed that could enable the operation of “When I am Ready” to be evaluated including collecting:

- Data to monitor the uptake of “When I am Ready”, who is accessing it, how long the arrangement lasts.
- Data to monitor the outcomes for young people who enter “When I am Ready”, compared with other accommodation options after no longer being ‘looked after’.
 - Data to monitor whether Independent Fostering Agencies are offering When I’m Ready and mechanisms to ensure that young people whose accommodation is provided by IFAs are given the same opportunity to enter “When I am Ready”.

It would be useful if Local Authorities were provided with funding to:

- cover the fostering allowances paid and to ensure that there is no shortfall between the rate that carers receive for WIR and fostering.
- support with implementation of the scheme including training for carers, social workers and Personal Advisors.
- Create and resource a role for a “When I am Ready” practitioner in each Local Authority with responsibility for supporting the set-up of arrangements in, carrying out reviews and transition planning.
- Reflecting Barnardo’s (2016) Care leavers accommodation and support framework for Wales, it is recommended that there is more investment in accommodation options for young people leaving care including
 - allowing young people to register for council housing waiting lists before they turn 18

-
- commissioning of 'taster flats' for young people to have some experience of living alone while still in foster care.
 - support for private renting and shared ownership schemes.

As a guiding principle, transition from home on the best interests of the young person rather than eligibility criteria. However, to support this:

- Eligibility criteria should be reviewed to ensure equity for young people in care, including extending the scheme to all young people not depended on where they are living (i.e. extend to residential care) or whether they are in employment or education.
- Future guidance or policy should formalise and extend right to return for young people.

Recommendations for practice

It is possible that the culture around When I am Ready could influence whether and how it is offered to young people. It would be useful if Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Associations:

- Consider ways to develop a default of assuming When I'm Ready in conversations and planning with young people in the transition from being 'looked after'.
- Provide opportunities for practitioners working directly on When I am Ready to share good practice examples, for example by maintaining a practitioner forum.
- Change the language used around When I'm Ready to highlight benefits and loving relationships, rather than process.
- Create feedback mechanisms to hear from carers and young people about how "When I am Ready" is working for them – and address issues that arise.
- Encourage conversations about "When I am Ready" to begin 18 months before a young person turns 18 and return to the conversation consistency in any move on plan. If appropriate, begin this conversation first with the carer to ensure that any barriers to them offering this option can be overcome.

There was a need identified for training for staff and also foster carers. It is therefore important to:

- Co-develop training and resources about "When I am Ready" with practitioners, carers and care experienced young people.

Through this review, it was highlighted that data was not always accurate, and that data that was collected was not always used to reflect on how "When I am ready" was operating in Local Authorities. Therefore it is important that Local Authorities:

- Ensure regular monitoring and reviewing is built into all "When I am Ready" arrangements.

Recommendations for research

A dearth of research was identified focused specifically on "When I am Ready". In particular, it would be useful to have more research exploring:

- Young people and carers views of "When I am Ready".
- Differences and discrepancies in who is providing and accessing "When I am Ready", including accessing data around ethnicity, asylum status, gender, sexuality, disability.
- Outcomes for young people from "When I am Ready" compared with other post-18 accommodation options.

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