

# Learning Example: Providing Information and Guidance to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People in Supported Accommodation

*This learning example was developed through the National Children Bureau's Sector Awareness and Provider Preparedness programme in relation to the mandatory quality standards and inspection and regulatory regime for providers of supported accommodation. Interviews took place before the end of the initial registration window with existing providers of supported accommodation. Every effort has been made to ensure this learning example represents excellent practice across the sector and we have developed this resource with extensive reference to the regulations and quality standards. It is highly recommended that you refer to [Department of Education](#) and [Ofsted's](#) most up-to-date guidance to support the application and registration process. Any placement of a young person in care whose needs can be met in supported accommodation should only be met with a provider who is registered with Ofsted.*

*With thanks to:*

- 123 Supported Accommodation
- 1625 Independent People
- Avensis Support
- Places for People
- Salvation Army Housing Association (SAHA)

## Introduction

### The Sector Awareness and Provider Preparedness programme

This learning example is based on analysis of interviews with supported accommodation providers conducted by NCB, as well as sector intelligence gathered through the programme. It explores the different perspectives and practical examples of what good practice looks like when providing information and guidance to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in supported accommodation settings.

Providers were asked a range of questions to understand how UAS young people are supported to access information when living in supported accommodation, focusing on information regarding asylum and immigration, and about their rights and entitlements as a looked after child or care leaver. Providers spoke about how to approach these topics with UAS young people and the potential impact on their mental health.

## The Legal Framework for Local Authorities Accommodating UAS Young People

### Local Authorities

Local authorities have legal duties to make sure that unaccompanied 16- or 17-year-olds seeking asylum are provided with accommodation which is safe, nurturing and meets their needs. In doing so, local authorities must act in the young person's best interests, consider their feelings and views, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.

### Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation was previously a type of accommodation outside of regulated children's homes, kinship care and foster care, providing supported, semi-independent living for 16 and 17-year-olds. From 28 October 2023, to operate legally, all providers of supported accommodation for looked after children and young people aged 16 and 17 must either be registered or have had an application accepted as 'complete' by Ofsted by this date.

Providers must also meet mandatory quality standards as part of the Ofsted-led registration and inspection regime, which apply to all types of supported accommodation, including providers supporting UAS young people.

### Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People

In March 2023, there were 83,840 children looked after in England, with 7,290 of these being unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. Over half of these UAS children and young people (61%) were placed in supported accommodation ([Children looked after in England statistics – Gov.uk](#), 2023).

Supported accommodation is not automatically the right setting for UAS young people, especially if they are not yet ready for greater levels of independence and preparation for adult living. There are other types of accommodation, such as foster care or residential care (children's homes), that may be more appropriate. Local authorities must always consider the individual needs of each young person, ensuring their varying circumstances and histories are recognised and met by their care plan.

### Providing Information and Guidance and the relevant Quality Standards

While supported accommodation providers are accountable to all Quality Standards, the importance of providing accurate information and guidance is particularly relevant to the Support Standard and Leadership & Management Standard.

- The **Support Standard** outlines that each young person should "receive individual and tailored support that meets their needs."
- The **Leadership & Management Standard** outlines that staff should "clearly communicate to young people their rights, what they are entitled to from the service." This includes their rights in education and as a looked after child.

## Approach

During the interviews, supported accommodation providers discussed the importance of taking an inclusive and sensitive approach when offering information and guidance to UAS young people. UAS young people will have a range of different experiences and needs, including language and communication, and will require a tailored approach.

## Settling in to Supported Accommodation

- When young people arrive in supported accommodation, it is important to provide information and guidance to help them settle in. It may be helpful to include a 'Life in the UK' section to a Young Person's Guide or welcome pack.
- This can include guidance on cultural differences, laws, and customs that UAS young people should be aware of, e.g., attitudes to women and relationships. The information should be accessible and available in different languages.
- For more information on supporting UAS young people to settle into supported accommodation, see our learning example, **Settling into a New Placement**.

## Ensuring Accurate Information

- Although UAS young people may appear to be resilient and independent, many are extremely vulnerable due to prior experiences of trauma.
- Misinformation and poorly managed expectations about the asylum, housing or welfare systems may leave UAS young people vulnerable to exploitation.
- UAS young people can be at risk of going missing and there may be concerns about trafficking and criminal gangs. Some young people may need additional advice and guidance in this area, or referral to specialist services.
- UAS young people's expectations of life in the UK may have been shaped through information shared with them by their friends and peers. They might make assumptions and have misunderstandings based on this information.
- Staff have a key role in challenging assumptions and enabling young people to access accurate, up-to-date, and relevant information.
- For information about immigration and asylum, staff working in supported accommodation should be careful to only give general information and support, and to not offer legal advice. The young person's accommodating local authority can support them to access specific guidance from a solicitor as appropriate.

- It is also important that UAS young people are given accurate information about housing and benefits systems where appropriate, including likely timescales.

## Rights and Entitlements

- UAS young people are required to navigate complex legal systems, often without prior knowledge and understanding of their rights and entitlements. Supporting this group of young people to understand their rights and entitlements fosters independence and supports them to advocate for themselves in future.
- It can be helpful for supported accommodation providers to develop creative ways of sharing information with UAS young people. For example, through hosting information sessions on relevant areas such as rights for looked-after children and care-leavers, life in the UK, British law, the asylum process, housing, education, sleep and mental health and health/dental care.
- If there are other local supported accommodation providers who work with UAS young people, it may be useful to work together to provide training or information sessions and make use of expertise from other sources. This enables young people to have more in-depth discussions and ask specific questions.
- Other support is available from sources such as the local authority, or local and national charities. UAS young people should be made aware of local services specifically for looked-after children and care-leavers including the [Children in Care Council](#), children's rights services, and complaints departments.
- There are also voluntary organisations that centre on children in care and care leavers such as '[A National Voice](#)' and '[Become](#).' For more information on services, please refer to our learning example, **Multiagency Working**.

## Immigration and Asylum

- Although supported accommodation providers are not expected to have a professional knowledge of immigration systems, a working knowledge allows them to offer support to UAS young people and understand their situation.
- UAS young people may need practical and emotional support if there is uncertainty around their immigration status, particularly around planning for what will happen as part of their transition to adulthood after the age of 18. It is important for supported accommodation providers to work closely with their local authority to ensure the needs of UAS young people are consistently met.
- Waiting for a decision about their asylum claim or potential removal from the UK can have a profound impact on the mental health of UAS young people. Staff in

supported accommodation settings play a key role in helping them to cope with uncertainty regarding immigration status, and the impact this may have on their ongoing mental health and emotional wellbeing.

- UAS young people should be aware of all potential outcomes of their asylum claim, including that their claim may be refused. Staff can support young people by ensuring that they have open and realistic conversations, which also acknowledge the intense pressure and stress they are under.
- Providers should use age-appropriate and sensitive language to help UAS young people manage immigration and future planning, while being mindful of overwhelming young people who may have experienced trauma.
- For further information on this topic, please see the NCB report, [Healthy Child Programme for Refugee and Migrant Children](#), which describes how "Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children... are especially vulnerable to experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, low level and severe depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, self-harming behaviour, and loneliness."

## Key Learning

Providers of supported accommodation and local authorities may want to consider the following points as key learning to ensure that providing information and guidance is prioritised by those working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people:

1. Providers can support UAS young people when they are **settling in** and throughout their placement by providing guidance, support and information.
2. Staff have a key role in ensuring UAS young people access **accurate information** and that their expectations are managed appropriately.
3. UAS young people have **additional needs** arising from their lives and experiences in their country of origin, their journey to the UK, their unaccompanied status, and the impact of immigration on their current and future stability.

We have additional information and resources about supported accommodation and support for UAS young people and professionals who work with them [on our website](#).

If you are a supported accommodation provider, our online Community of Practice offers an online space to share ideas and support – email [ncbsocialcare@NCB.org.uk](mailto:ncbsocialcare@NCB.org.uk)