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Alternative Format

If you require this Care Experienced Policy document in an alternative format please [Contact Us](#) (visit www.open.ac.uk/contact), telephone us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with your Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student. If you are studying an apprenticeship please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121). Welsh-speaking Students and Learners are welcome to speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. Research Degree Students can contact the Research Degrees Office via email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.

Introduction

Being in care can have a lasting impact on how someone experiences education. This policy sets out how The Open University supports care experienced students to succeed in their studies.

Information is provided about how to let us know if you are care experienced and about the support that can be offered from a variety of sources including Tutors, the Student Support Team and specialist areas such as the Careers and Employability Service. Possible sources of financial support are also signposted.

The Open University offers flexible higher education to all people regardless of their personal circumstances, and an important part of this is a commitment to providing support for students who are care experienced. At The Open University we recognise that being in care and previous experience of education can have long lasting effects on you, including when and how you have engaged with education. The University is committed to enabling you, if you are care experienced, to feel comfortable letting us know and to supporting you throughout your learning journey with us. This includes providing information, advice and guidance as well as offering [widening participation](#) activity, student engagement and support, and career services.

Our [Access, Participation and Success Strategy](#) provides the University's strategic approach to supporting students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds to access Higher Education and achieve equitable outcomes. The strategy links with funding agreements across each of the UK nations to ensure that the needs of students, including care experienced students, are identified and met. The University monitors data collected and compares this with other Higher Education Institutions to give insight into any differences in access and outcomes for care experienced students. This informs our activities to improve student success in line with our strategic priorities.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact the appropriate [student support team](#) for your qualification.

Scope

What this policy covers

At The Open University we consider a care experienced person as:

“anyone of any age, who at any stage in their life has been in care. This includes any length of time in care, in settings such as residential children’s homes, kinship care, foster care, or through living at home under a supervision order. It also includes adopted children who were previously looked after.”

The policy applies to all students registered to study with The Open University. It includes Postgraduate Research (PGR) students, Vocational Qualification Assessment Centre (VQAC) students, students on work-based placements and Apprenticeship Learners.

What this policy does not cover

The policy does not apply to:

- Learners registered on a microcredential
- Individuals who are not yet registered with The Open University (enquirers)
- Students studying a Validated Qualification. These students are covered by the policies of the institution with which they are studying.

Support and Information

How to contact us

If you have any queries about this policy please [Contact Us](#).

If you are studying an apprenticeship, please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121).

Vocational Qualification students can contact the Vocational Qualification Centre vq-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Welsh-speaking Students and Learners may speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170.

Research Degree Students can contact the Research Degrees Office via email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.

Help Centre Articles

[Support for care experienced students](#)

Reporting Bullying and Harassment

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. We encourage staff, students, learners and visitors to report incidents of assault, bullying harassment, hate crime or sexual harassment through [Report + Support](#). This platform also provides information about what you can do if you or someone you know experiences such incidents, and where you can find support.

Policy

1. Policy Purpose

The Open University recognises the impact of care experience throughout compulsory education and beyond and is committed to enabling successful outcomes for all our care experienced students.

1.1 The objectives of this policy are:

1.1.1. To ensure that care experienced students are aware of the full range of support available.

1.1.2 To ensure that as a care experienced student, you feel comfortable discussing your circumstances with members of the University to enable us to provide appropriate support.

2. Letting us know if you are care experienced

The Open University provides support for all students, and telling us that you are care experienced enables us to work with you and make you aware of any additional support that may be available.

2.2 You may be asked if you are care experienced when you register on a module. If you don't let us know at that point you can still inform us in other ways:

- You can tell us that you are care experienced in your profile in [StudentHome](#). You can update this at any time.
- Your [student support team](#) can record your care experienced status if you let us know when you contact the University.

2.3 The Open University collects and processes and stores personal data in accordance with the University's [Student Privacy Notice](#). The information will be treated in strict confidence and made available only to those who have a role in making sure your requirements are met.

3. Sources of support

3.1 Tutors and assessors

You are encouraged to discuss any study related issues with your tutor or assessor. You can request support such as:

- An extension for a Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA),
- Help to focus on study priorities if you are struggling with assignment deadlines.

- An individual study support session.

Your tutor/assessor may also signpost you to your [student support team](#) for information, advice and guidance about your options.

3.2 Student Support

You can contact your [student support team](#) for advice if you have concerns about anything connected to your studies. The student support team can provide information, advice and guidance on the support available including financial support (see also below), disability support and, if appropriate, on changing study intentions such as deferring, taking a study break or changing your module or qualification.

You can find further information about this support in the [Accessibility](#) and [Changing Your Study Plans](#) policies.

3.3 Financial support

3.3.1 Financial Support for Apprenticeship Learners

The Department for Education (DfE) may have bursaries available which care experienced learners are eligible to apply for. Contact your Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager for more information.

3.3.2 Other Financial Support

Other [financial support](#) available to students includes (but is not limited to):

- The Student Assistance Fund
- Funding for study-related costs (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- The Discretionary Fund (Scotland)
- The Open University Students' Educational Trust (Ouset)

The eligibility criteria and availability of financial support may differ depending on where you live and the qualification you are studying for, so you are encouraged to contact your [student support team](#) for information on what help is available.

3.4 Mental health, wellbeing and welfare

The Open University is committed to supporting students' mental health, wellbeing and welfare. You can find out more about the support available and how to access it on the [Student Help Centre](#), from your tutor or assessor, your [student support team](#) and via the [Open SU's wellbeing pages](#).

SHOUT offers help if you're struggling to cope, feeling anxious, stressed or overwhelmed and need to talk with someone, whether that's during the day or at night. To start a conversation, just text the word SHOUT to 85258.

3.5 Careers and Employability Service

You can access support to help you reach your career or personal development goals from the Careers and Employability Services. You can use the service from the very start of your study and up to three years from completing your final module.

The [Careers and Employability Service website](#) includes a wide range of resources such as exercises to think about jobs that might suit you, support with identifying the skills and competencies you have to offer, building confidence about talking to employers, finding contacts and exploring the labour market, and promoting yourself through CVs and interviews. Our online interactive tools are available to help generate job ideas linked to your skills and interests, and also to provide feedback on your CV and interview techniques.

The Careers and Employability Service works closely with employers to be able to advertise vacancies, arrange insight and networking events, and keep resources up to date. The [Opportunity Hub](#) highlights the employers we work with and the range of current vacancies (including volunteering, placements, and graduate roles).

You can request confidential one-to-one help on email, phone or video call.

The University understands that everyone is unique, at different stages of their lives with different needs. The Careers and Employability Service is tailored and flexible and will listen to you to understand what would be most useful to help you progress and move forward step by step.

Definitions

Widening participation

We aim to address discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different under-represented groups of students. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lower income households and other under-represented groups may face barriers to entry to higher education.

Related Policies and Legislation

- [Access, Participation and Success Strategy 2022 - 2027](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)
- [Accessibility Policy](#)
- [Changing Your Study Plans](#)
- [Special Circumstances](#)
- [Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- [Careers and Employability Statement of Service](#)
- [The Open University - Access and Participation Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29](#)

Give Us Your Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please share this with us, by emailing SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Our Student Charter Values

The [Student Charter](#) was developed jointly by The Open University and the OU Students Association. It is a declaration of our shared values and the commitments we make to each other. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

Our commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our commitment to equality and inclusion is embedded in all that we do and reflects our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, whilst challenging under-representation and differences in outcomes within our institution. We promote and manage equality and diversity to meet both our strategic goals and our statutory equality duties. We achieve this in many ways, including the development of inclusive policy.

Welsh language standards

[Safonau'r Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Standards\)](#)

The Open University is one of several universities named in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This means that any students in Wales can expect to receive certain services from the OU in Welsh. These are outlined in what's called the [OU's Welsh language standards](#).

This means that you can speak to our student recruitment and support team in Welsh or contact the university in Welsh. You can find out more about your rights as a Welsh language user on the [OU in Wales website](#).

About this Document

Summary of Significant Changes since last version

The following changes have been made

- In Section 2.3 reference to the Retention policy has been removed as the policy has been decommissioned. All relevant information is available in the Student Privacy Notice.
- In Section 3.3 Financial Support, reference to a Care Experienced Students' Bursary has been removed as the bursary is being withdrawn effective 31 July 2025.
- In Section 3.3 Financial Support, reference to the ESFA has been updated to reflect that the Department for Education has taken over this function as of March 2025.

- In Section 3.4, reference to Talk Campus has been removed as the contract between The Open University and Talk Campus ends 30 September 2025.
- In Section 3.4, the SHOUT reference has been amended to reflect that students should text 'SHOUT' rather than 'OU' to 85258 from 16 August 2025 onwards.
- The policy has been put into the latest template to improve accessibility.

Policies Superseded by this Document

This document supersedes the Care Experienced Policy effective September 2022.

Document Information

Version number 1.0

Approved by Delegate, Director of Academic Services

Effective from 1 July 2025

Date for review July 2026

Charity Statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.