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## Summary of policy

Students with unpaid caring responsibilities face unique challenges in balancing these commitments with Open University study.

The Open University is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students. This policy is intended to outline the support available to students with caring responsibilities and to provide guidance to staff supporting these students.

For the purpose of this policy we use the Carers Trust definition of a carer:

*anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.*

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### Summary of significant changes since last version

- a) Replacement of reference to Togetherall to new provider Talk Campus

## Scope

### Who and which circumstances this policy covers

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

### Who and which circumstances this policy does not cover

The policy does not apply to individuals who are not yet students of The Open University (enquirers). Students studying a qualification validated by The Open University are covered by the policies of the institution with which they are studying.

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## Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Access, Participation and Success Strategy](#)
- [The Open University Equality Scheme](#)
- [Careers and Employability Service](#)
- [Special Circumstances](#)
- [Changing Your Study Plans](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)
- [Accessibility Policy](#)
- [Going Higher for Student Carers](#)
- [Student and Staff Mental Health Strategy 2020-2023](#)

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### The Open University Student Charter Principles

This policy aligns with the following [Open University Student Charter](#) Principles:

- Principle 1: We treat each other with dignity and respect
- Principle 2: We aim to inspire and enable learning
- Principle 3: We share the responsibility of learning
- Principle 4: We work together to secure the University's mission and to promote the University's values

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## Introduction

The Open University's supported distance and open learning model offers flexibility which we know to be particularly valuable to student carers. As part of our commitment to students with caring responsibilities we will improve efforts to identify and support student carers throughout their learning journey with us. This includes widening access activity, student engagement and support, and career services.

Our [Access, Participation and Success Strategy 2020 - 2025](#) 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 student carers, are identified and met. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of institutional and sector data ensures that any differences in access and outcomes can be appropriately addressed alongside the delivery of the University's overarching strategic priorities.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact your [Student Support Team](#).

## Policy

### 1. Disclosure of carer status

1.1 The Open University provides support for all students but telling us about your caring role enables us to be proactive about making you aware of the additional support available to you.

1.1.1 You can disclose that you are a carer in your profile in StudentHome. You can update this at any time if your caring role changes.

1.1.2 Student support staff can record a student's carer status if they disclose this when they contact the University and this data can also be gathered when a student registers for study.

1.2 The Open University collects and processes personal data in order to provide services to students, manage its operations effectively, and meet legal requirements. The [Student Privacy Notice](#) sets out how we use your personal data.

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## 2. Support for students who are carers

### 2.1 Tutors

If you have caring responsibilities, you are encouraged to contact your tutor to tell them about your situation and discuss how this may impact on your studies. Your tutor will then be able to take these factors into account when you request support. For example:

- When you request an extension for a Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA).
- Help to focus on study priorities if you are struggling with assignment deadlines.
- An individual student support session to focus on a particular aspect of your module.
- Referral to the [Student Support Team](#) for information, advice and guidance about reasonable adjustments, deferral or change in study intentions.

### 2.2 Tutorials and residential schools

If you are unable to attend tutorials in person due to your caring commitments, you can ask your tutor for help to catch up on what you have missed. Many modules have online tutorials, and at least one recording per learning event is available to you.

For courses with residential schools, the Residential Schools Team will endeavour to provide support for student carers to enable you to attend face to face schools if you want to do so. You should contact the Residential Schools Team at least six weeks in advance to discuss this. An Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) is offered on some modules if you are unable to attend a residential school in person. This may involve a written assignment, online project or computer conferencing.

### 2.3 Student Support Team

You can contact your [Student Support Team](#) for advice if you have concerns about your studies that haven't been resolved with your tutor. For example, you could submit a [Special Circumstances](#) form for your assignments if your caring responsibilities have impacted on your studies. This is passed to the Module Result Panel for consideration when they meet to agree final results.

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The [Student Support Team](#) can also offer information and advice on change of study intentions such as deferring, taking a study break or changing your module or qualification. They can also offer specific support and reasonable adjustments if you have a health condition or disability. You can find further information about this support in the [Changing Your Study Plans](#) policy and [Accessibility Policy](#).

## 2.4 Exams

We may be able to offer additional arrangements for exams, with advance notice, if we know you have a caring role. Arrangements can include requesting a home-based exam, taking your exam at another suitable location, or being given rest breaks during an exam for caring duties. Evidence of caring responsibilities may be required to access this support. Please see section 2.6 for further information.

If your caring responsibilities impact on you taking the exam at short notice, such as a health emergency, then you should contact your Student Support Team in the first instance who can provide appropriate advice and guidance for your circumstances.

## 2.5 Financial support

The University recognises the financial implications of studying while caring. You may be eligible to apply for discretionary funds, grants or bursaries. The eligibility criteria and availability of financial support may differ depending on where you live so you are encouraged to contact your [Student Support Team](#) for information on what is available. Evidence of caring responsibilities may be required to access this support. Please see section 2.6 for further information on what evidence may be required.

## 2.6 Evidence of caring responsibilities

Where evidence is required, a letter from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) regarding Carers Allowance, or a letter from a GP, social worker or carer support service will be accepted as evidence of caring responsibilities. Other forms of evidence may be accepted at the discretion of the University.

## 2.7 Mental health, wellbeing and welfare

The Open University is committed to supporting students' mental health, wellbeing and welfare. You can access support through the [Student Help Centre](#), your tutor, your [Student Support Team](#), via the OU Students Association's [bank of mental health resources](#) or the [Talk Campus](#) which provides 24 hour online support.

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## 2.8 Careers and Employability Service

The OU Careers and Employability Service (CES) can offer tailored support to plan your future alongside a caring role. This could include offering flexible times and lengths for individual consultations, supporting you to access our range of Employer Engagement events, or helping you to find out about flexible working. [The CES website](#) has advice and resources, careers forums and webinars.

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## 3. Equality, diversity and inclusion

Policies are inclusive of all Open University students, regardless of: race, sex, disability, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression or gender reassignment. In England, Wales and Scotland, under the Equality Act 2010, carers are also protected because of their association with someone with a protected characteristic, such as a disabled person or an older person, or a vulnerable or protected adult. In Northern Ireland, carers are protected under the Human Rights Act and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, which requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for carers.

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## **Glossary of terms**

### **Alternative Learning Experience (ALE)**

This refers to an alternative way to complete the residential school requirement for a module where a student is not able to attend a face-to-face residential school. It usually involves a written assignment, online project or computer conferencing.

### **Module**

A module is a self-contained unit of teaching, learning and assessment which may be studied as a standalone course or in combination to form qualifications. Each module, other than a Short Course, is assigned a credit value and a level of study.

### **Protected characteristics**

There are nine characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010. They are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. In Northern Ireland, carers are protected under the Human Rights Act and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

### **Student of The Open University**

For the purposes of this policy, you are a student of The Open University if you are currently registered for a qualification or a module, or if you have studied a module in either of the previous two academic years.

### **Vulnerable or Protected Adult**

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 or over (or aged 16 or over in Scotland and referred to as a “protected adult”) who is, or may be, in need of services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who is, or may be, unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm, abuse or exploitation, including being drawn into terrorism.

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## Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact your Student Support Team via StudentHome who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policy. Alternatively, you can contact your Student Support Team through the 'Contact Us' option on the [Help Centre](#) if you are a current Open University student.

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to [SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk](mailto:SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk).

## Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the Student Support Team via <http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/> (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303), or your dedicated Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student.

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