

Care Experienced Students Policy

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Summary of policy

The experience of being in care can have a long-lasting impact on an individual's experience of 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.

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

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 can be for any length of time and includes a variety of settings, such as in residential children's home, 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.

Who and which circumstances 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.

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Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Access, Participation and Success Strategy 2020 - 2025](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)
- [Accessibility Policy](#)
- [Changing Your Study Plans](#)
- [Special Circumstances](#)
- [Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2023](#)
- [Careers and Employability Service](#)
- [Open University in Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan](#)
- [The Open University - Access and Participation Plan 2020-2025](#)

The Open University Student Charter Values

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

- 2 We value diversity and challenge inequalities, and we are stronger for doing so.
- 9 As students, we share the responsibility for learning and make a commitment to study and research using the resources and support services available, upholding the highest standards of academic integrity.
- 10 As staff, we each play our role in enabling high quality learning and advancing knowledge and understanding through research and scholarly activity, ensuring every student is supported.

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Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at The Open University

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.

Safe Space Reporting

The University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across our University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through [an online tool](#) through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or to someone you know, and where you can find support.

Introduction

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.

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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.

Policy

1. 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.

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2. Letting us know if you are care experienced

2.1 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 personal data in accordance with the University's [Policy on the Retention of Student Data and Records](#). This information will also be stored in line with the [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.

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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 Care Experienced Student Bursary

The University recognises the financial implications of studying and if you are Care Experienced, you may be eligible for a Care Experienced Bursary. This is a non-repayable bursary for UK fee eligible students with care experience. The eligibility criteria can be found on the [Care Experienced Bursary](#) website.

Evidence of care experienced status (e.g. a letter from a GP, social worker or professional person from a Local Authority) is required to access this support.

3.3.2 Financial Support for Apprenticeship Learners

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) may have bursaries available which care experienced learners are eligible to apply for. Contact your Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager for more information.

3.3.3 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.

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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 [OU Students Association's bank of mental health resources](#).

You can also access [Talk Campus](#) which provides 24-hour online support. Talk Campus is a 24/7, safe online community for people who are stressed, anxious or feeling low, with self-guided courses and resources. Open University students can register with Talk Campus and use the services free of charge via the link in the HelpCentre.

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 OU 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 understand that everyone is an individual 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.

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Glossary of terms

Widening participation

Widening participation aims 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.

Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this Care Experienced Policy and how to interpret it, please contact the appropriate student support team for your qualification:

Apprenticeships: your Apprenticeship Programme Qualification Manager or Apprenticeship Enrolment Support Team

Vocational Qualification: the Vocational Qualification Centre - vq-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Research Degree: the Research Degrees Team in the Graduate School – research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk

Corporate and Professional

Development Course: Executive Education Team, cpd-support@open.ac.uk

Other Qualifications: Your Student Support Team – they can be contacted via the 'Contact Us' section on the [Help Centre](#)

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.

Alternative format of the Care Experienced Policy

If you require this Care Experienced Policy 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 student of The Open University.

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