

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON THE CARE EXPERIENCED POLICY

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on the Care Experienced policy which took place between 17th June and 1st July 2021.

Background information

- Link: [Consultation on the Care Experienced Policy](#)
- Students registered: 242
- Posts by students: 67
- No. of students posting at least once: 20
- Total ratings (likes and favourites): 32
- Estimated readers (minimum): 76

The focus group questions

The following questions were posted for students to consider:

- Definition
 - To what extent do you feel the definition covers the wide range of students who have experience of care?
- Support available
 - How well does the policy describe the range of support to care experienced students?
 - Are there any other aspects of student support that you are aware of that you think should be listed in this policy?
- Clarity and helpfulness
 - If you are care experienced is there any support not currently provided by the university that would help you achieve your study
- Ideas for further development
 - If you are care experienced is there any support not currently provided by the university that would help you achieve your study

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

- Students indicated that the definition was clear, inclusive of the wide range of students that have experience of care and provided sufficient scope.
- There were some concerns raised regarding an age limit on the policy however, it was clarified that the policy considers care experience at any age.
- Most comments agreed that the policy described the range of support well
- Students commented that it would be useful to provide more detail about supporting documents and information about the bursary in the main document
- The feeling of acceptance and support for students with care experience was noted
- Students emphasised that it is important to communicate the policy in a timely manner
- More clarity for international students would be helpful
- Within the feedback, there were two suggestions that were particularly well received and supported and these were: peer mentoring and marketing Access courses

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

- The wording of the policy has been adapted and more information has been added following some of the comments relating to the interactive tools supplied by the Career's service as well as the bursary eligibility for international students
- Suggestions on peer mentoring schemes and the forum for care experienced students will be passed on to OU Students Association
- Suggestions on raising awareness of the support for care experienced students will be passed on to OU Students Association and we will discuss how future University events, such as Student Voice Week, can improve awareness of support.
- Comments regarding the visibility and awareness of Special Circumstances Form will be shared with the Student Support Team to help improve future student experiences.

FULL RESPONSE

Q1. Definition - To what extent do you feel the definition covers the wide range of students who have experience of care?		
You said	OU response	Next steps (if any)
<p>Theme: Clarity and inclusivity</p> <p>I think the definition is fairly clear and covers most situations.</p> <p>I think this highlights the inclusive of the OU. It clearly defines what care experience means to the OU</p> <p>I think the definition is clear and ties in with other institutions and scottish funding council definitions.</p> <p>I think the scope makes it pretty clear.</p> <p>I think that this is a clear definition which is to the point, covers all aspects related to the care system and written in a way that is easy to understand.</p> <p>I think the given definition is clear and understandable. It also points out described aspects of care systems experiences depending on the type of care.</p> <p>The definition is welcoming of all students from a care experienced background to study with the Open University (OU). The definition does not limit and encompasses any care experienced individual whether care leaver, estranged student, unaccompanied asylum seeker, students who experienced short periods of care, regardless of age.</p> <p>The definition is clear and provides sufficient scope.</p> <p>The 'has been in care.' provides the best clarity for 'care experienced person.' if this was not attributed to the clause, I would've come to the understanding that it is a person of a care profession. Because of this clause attribution, the definition is clear to the reader.</p>	<p>Thank you. The aim is for the definition to be inclusive to all by not using excluding terms or language</p> <p>This meets the aims of the definition</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>This was our intention, so it is positive to hear this feedback</p> <p>Good to hear that the definition is easily understood</p> <p>Our aim was to make the definition welcoming and all-encompassing, so it is positive to hear that this was noted</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>Good to hear that the definition seems clear</p> <p>Thank you.</p>	
<p>Does the draft cover situations where people may have been in care such as where they have been hospitalised for several months?</p>	<p>Hospital and/or medical care is not the subject of this policy.</p>	

<p>I would think that this exclusion should form part of the " 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 or care order. It also includes adopted children who were previously looked after.</p> <p>The statement variety of settings is ambiguous and could be misconstrued.</p>	<p>The term 'in care' has got quite specific connotation and we felt it provides a clear reference to that specific context within the definition. We also felt that it would not be helpful to include negatives, i.e. examples of exclusions.</p> <p>The aim of stating 'variety of settings' allows for a broad interpretation and hopefully is inclusive</p>	
<p>I have been looking at this definition for some time. I am a bit confused about 'we consider a care experienced person as anyone of any age, who at any stage in their life has been in care'. Does this mean any stage of their life pre adulthood? If that is the case then maybe the definition should be more specific. I only mention this because 'care experienced person' could mean different things to different people and although this definition tries to qualify this term, the words 'any stage in their life has been in care' also suggests as it states, any stage in their life, which to me means literally at any age and by inference outwith a cut off point of, for example, 18. I apologise if I am looking into this too deeply.</p> <p>Equally the question of what has to be provided to prove that a person meets this definition of 'care experienced person' is important and should be transparent.</p> <p>I was also wondering if this definitions' list of 'variety of settings' should include the phrase 'this list is not exhaustive'.</p> <p>The wording is confusing. On first reading the clause, I wondered whether 'a care experienced person' related to carers, e.g., people who are or have been carers at any stage of their life. Or, maybe it could relate to students who have been in care or cared for at any time in their life because they have a disability. If this is not the case, then maybe there is scope to include such students.</p>	<p>We did not set an upper age limit for the definition due to the differing jurisdictions for the nations in regard to an individual being deemed as having been in care. For example, in England under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 Local Authorities are required to provide a personal adviser up until the age of 25, this is to provide advice and support to the young person. In England and Scotland recent changes to the law mean that when a fostered young person reaches the age of 18 they can remain with their carer up to the age of 21</p> <p>Students can identify as being care experienced without providing any evidence. Within this policy there are links to each relevant policy where evidence is required to access assistance (such as the Care Experienced Bursary). Then, in turn, each of these policies link to the relevant Terms and Conditions which list the types of supporting evidence you can submit to access that particular support. Each signposted source of information provides sufficient guidance of documents required.</p> <p>Thank you. The inclusion of 'this list is not exhaustive' could potentially make the definition unwieldy and therefore less accessible to people</p> <p>Thank you. We feel that this is covered by the separate carers definition.</p>	
<p>I think the wording is very clear. My only issue would be with evidence needed. I realise that this would be seen as a necessity but as the wording is for Care Experience at any time in their lives. I was in care from just before I was one year old to when I turned 16 but this was 1957 onwards and I have no 'official' evidence of this any more.</p>	<p>The evidence could be any document which confirms that students have been care experienced. This could be a letter from the current Local Authority, GP, social worker or other professional person. The Care Experienced Bursary Terms & Conditions document (Appendix 1 and 2) provides examples of supporting evidence that students could supply. The link to the website is provided in the policy document.</p>	

<p>There is however no mention of what (type of) documents a student would need to show the OU in order to prove that they have been in care. I do see the benefit of not including a list, because it would probably be impossible to provide an exhaustive list, but it might be beneficial to include some examples.</p> <p>Furthermore, what if there are no more records available that a person was in care? What would happen then? Maybe a paragraph should be included in the policy about this.</p>	<p>The Care Experienced Bursary Terms & Conditions document (Appendix 1 and 2) provides examples of supporting evidence that students could supply. The link to the website is provided in the policy document.</p> <p>As the bursary rules for required documents might change more often than we would be able to update the policy document, we felt it would not be beneficial to include this in the policy. All information is included in the bursary Terms & Conditions.</p>	
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<p>Q2. Support available 2a. How well does the policy describe the range of support to care experienced students? 2b. Are there any other aspects of student support that you are aware of that you think should be listed in this policy?</p>		
You said	OU response	Next steps (if any)
<p>I couldn't access the link on the Care Experienced Bursary, but more information on this should be provided in the main document anyway, I think.</p> <p>What sort of costs is it intended to cover? Is it for living expenses, or study materials, or is it a fee waiver?</p> <p>A rough overview of eligibility criteria could also be included, eg age criteria (if any).</p> <p>Other than that, I think the range of supports available is described well and I don't think anything has been missed.</p>	<p>Thank you. It is not possible to include much more detail about the eligibility rules for discretionary funding schemes in a policy document as the policy document might not be updated as often as the details of the scheme. The detailed rules are published separately and made available to relevant students via the Help Centre.</p> <p>It is suggested that the bursary should be used to support study related costs. However, as the bursary is currently being provided in cash, it is up to the student what they wish to spend the money on.</p> <p>Please see above regarding the age limit discussion under definition.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>	
<p>Likewise I couldn't open the link on the bursary info - otherwise it seems to be offering generic student support</p>	<p>Thank you. We have now checked the link and this should be working. At the moment, support for care experienced students does not go beyond what the University currently offers to all students.</p>	
<p>I think that the information is presented well, it is informative offering clear signposting to various support.</p>	<p>Thank you.</p>	
<p>This is well laid out. Informative and to the point.</p> <p>It well covers the range of support available to students and supplies a good range of links to other services and information.</p> <p>At this point I can't think of anything missed.</p>	<p>Thank you.</p>	
<p>I think with the above explanation, it is well thought and it sounds okay. It will certainly meaningful.</p> <p>I think everything is laid out well, easy to follow and concise. Clearly outlaying all the support on offer an links for signposting.</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	

<p>I think it is excellent. I'm not sure how easy it will be to get some proof that i was in care, or whether i will have to pay for some kind of doctors letter (i was at a different surgery back then). I'm going to try and call someone to see what they say and will get back.</p>	<p>Thank you. There are also other types of documents that students could supply, and these include: a letter from your current Local Authority, GP, social worker or other professional person – details and examples of a 'professional person' can be found in the terms & conditions of the Care Experienced Bursary.</p>	
<p>I think the information is clear and well-presented.</p> <p>I noticed that under 3.4 the reference to the OU Students Association's mental health resources was hyperlinked, but that the reference to the Student Help Centre was not hyperlinked. I would hyperlink that one as well, so that students can simply click on the link instead of having to look for the information themselves (the link is: https://help.open.ac.uk/browse/mental-health-wellbeing-and-welfare).</p> <p>I would suggest to also mention the Peer Support service (link: https://www.oustudents.com/peer-support).</p> <p>Furthermore, like some of the other students, I could not access the Care Experienced Bursary website, as I do not live in the UK. I would therefore mention something about this in the policy. If some of the services or resources are not available for international students, this should be made clear in the policy in order to avoid any confusion and disappointment.</p>	<p>Thank you.</p> <p>Thank you. The Student help Centre reference has now been hyperlinked.</p> <p>Thank you. This is a good point, however, the Care Experienced policy can cover services provided by the University only. The Peer mentoring scheme is provided by OU Students Association and care experienced students are encouraged to access this support.</p> <p>Thank you for this. The policy document has been updated and the information on eligibility has been added.</p>	
<p>Careers and employability is an important one. I didn't see anything mentioned about software available for OU students to use. I know they have changed over the years, but is there any open access software that could be of benefit to care experienced students that could be mentioned in the policy.</p>	<p>Thank you. The policy document has been updated accordingly and more information on interactive tools provided by the Careers services has been added.</p>	
<p>I was just wondering whether there is scope to consider a forum specifically designated for care experienced students?</p>	<p>Thank you. This comment has been passed on to OU Students Association for consideration.</p>	<p>Refer to OU Students Association.</p>

Q3. Clarity and helpfulness To what extent do you find the information in the policy clear, relevant and/or helpful? And in what ways could it be improved?		
You said	OU response	Next steps (if any)
<p>The information is clearly written. It offers links to relevant documents and signpost to student support.</p> <p>I feel that the policy is clear and accessible. It has the correct amount of information and links for signposting where necessary.</p> <p>It is clear, informative and to the point.</p> <p>I think the policy is clearly defined, it gives useful signpost and very informative links. It comes in the right time and it will make a difference.</p>	<p>Thank you.</p>	

The policy is clear and well written to a significant extent, however it is also important to communicate the information. For example, carer's student bursary scheme may not be known to many students and when they know, it could make them ineligible as they have already undertaken a year with Open University.	The bursary is open to new and continuing students and therefore it doesn't matter when the application is made.	
The policy is really clear. I have felt like I wouldn't want to disclose that I was in care to people for a number of reasons including: shame and embarrassment, being labelled and assumed to be a 'problem child'; or having issues and being a potential threat to others- including children, trying to cloud out the past and move forward with a 'normal' life' to fit in. I think it's wonderful that there is a policy and that being in care is supported- it feels like a relief to be accepted and helped (if required). Being in care is exactly what prevented me from completing my education, due to emotional turmoil and a lack of stability and self worth, so finally completing higher education and being understood, accepted and helped feels really good- better than really good.	Thank you for this comment, and we are sorry to hear about your challenging experiences. The aim of this policy is to support care experienced students and we hope that the support will be developed further.	
I find the information in the policy clear and helpful. One thing that I would add is specify if there are things that are not applicable to international students (as I mentioned in another thread).	Thank you. Please see the comment regarding eligibility for international students above.	
I would be interested to know if the scheme is open only to students who have been in care in the UK? If a student is currently resident in the UK and entitled to other supports would they be able to get the bursary if they were in care in another country?	The scheme is also open to students who have been in care outside of the UK, but they are now residents in the UK and meet the remaining eligibility criteria.	
'from the widest possible range of backgrounds' seems quite vague, and could also be less identifiable for students outside of the UK/different cultures. Perhaps this can be expanded upon to strengthen the policy, or make it more lexically care specific.	Thank you. We have modified the wording to reflect this and this now reads: <i>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.</i>	

Ideas for further development		
If you are care experienced is there any support not currently provided by the university that would help you achieve your study goals?		
You said	OU response	Next steps (if any)
I think it would be a good idea to consider a mentoring scheme for care experienced students, who may suffer from a lack of family support. Although I have generally found tutor support excellent having another person to talk to about studies and other issues would also be useful. Care experienced students may not have had a positive experience of education in the past and may be reluctant to contact a tutor. I think that both the above comment are good. I especially think a mentoring system would be good. people would have care experience may offer a good example of what could be achieved.	Thank you. There are currently pilot programmes taking place across some faculties to identify and inform the development of this type of support for care experienced students. An example is the pilot in the Faculty of Business and Law. This involves offering contact with Care Champions who are tutors with experience of working with care experienced students. These care champions can offer support, advice and guidance.	
I think it is really important we market Access courses more ,especially if students have had a disjointed educational experience.	Thank you. The Access and Participation Team promote Access modules for target groups, for example The Open Pathways in Scotland.	

<p>CIPD run a Mentoring Scheme. Higher grade students can volunteer to provide mentoring support lower grade students. This can provide mentoring experience for those studying relevant subject matter and also provides an enriching two way experience for both the mentor and the mentee.</p>	<p>Thank you. As mentioned above, there are currently pilot projects being carried out. One example is the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences approach where students in their second year of study mentor students in the first. Also, there is a Peer-to-Peer Mentoring project in the School of Languages and Linguistics will match young students in the age group 18-21 who have enrolled on certain modules with more experienced peers to form a mentor: mentee relationship throughout their first year of study. If these pilot projects prove beneficials, these might be rolled out across the University.</p>	
<p>I definitely support the above idea pointed out by Molly Cassidy as there are some cared experienced students who low self-esteem and lack confidence, but they can do well with additional support.</p>	<p>Thank you. Please see comments regarding pilot projects above.</p>	
<p>I think the additional support that has been put into place via the CE reference group has been great. However I would like to echo the other comments regarding peer support. I am involved with the OU Elevate mentoring scheme and I think a peer version of this would be really beneficial to students. As a CE student I know that I would be more likely to discuss issues with others from a similar background than to reach out to my tutor directly or even the CE named contact</p>	<p>Thank you. This will be passed on to OU Students Association for consideration.</p>	<p>Refer to OU Students Association.</p>
<p>I agree that marketing access courses and waivers would be fantastic. It could make the world of difference to so many people; improving all aspects of their lives and ultimately their mental health. I also feel there could be more in depth feedback, including specifics such as what or how something could have been written to get a better mark. More past papers.</p>	<p>Thank you. Please see above regarding promoting Access courses.</p> <p>All students are entitled to detailed feedback from their tutors and tutors are encouraged to emphasise strengths to build on as well as areas for development. Tutors are encouraged to give all students guidance on how higher marks can be achieved.</p>	
<p>how about making sure that a slot is given at the student conference, maybe a work shop or practical examples of what could be achieved and how you go about it to catch the people already studying and unaware of this support</p>	<p>Thank you, that's a very good idea. This comment will be passed to OU Students Association and the organisers of the Student Voice week for consideration.</p>	<p>Refer to OU Students Association and Student Voice team.</p>
<p>As a philosophy student, I have a view that even the mindset of an individual in care would not have the same opportunity as those from a privileged background to assert themselves or remove themselves from the reliance of care. My example is that of someone of poverty will always be reliant on support from another, where as someone from a higher class would be encouraged to give/provide. How this is applicable to study goals, is that the higher class would be more able to apply and share their gained knowledge as opposed to the one from poverty who is less able to recognise knowledge as a useable content in life. I propose that care experienced policy highlights how applicable the content is to life, and how others from different backgrounds(socioeconomic/cultural etc) have made use of it.</p>	<p>Thank you, this is a great point and could be a subject for a very interesting discussion. However, it is not appropriate for a student facing policy as the aim of the policy is to highlight the support available and provide signposting to the range of sources of support provided by the University.</p>	

Ideas for further development

If you are care experienced is there any support not currently provided by the university that would help you achieve your study goals?		
You said	OU response	Next steps (if any)
<p>Special circumstances form I nearly failed a Cert Higher Education because I did not know that the Special Circumstances facility existed. I think that all new students should be individually advised in their early days that they can submit such a form. How can carers care if their needs aren't recognised?</p>	Thank you. This comment has been passed on to the Student support Team.	Refer to SST
I think that the special circumstances form and information needs to be promoted more and more accessible to find - many care experienced students have barriers towards their learning and access to this could be missed	Thank you. This comment has been passed on to the Student support Team.	Refer to SST
I was thinking that the form could be part of the registration process. The OU could also do an advertising campaign highlighting the support offered to care experienced students. Additionally other agencies should be encouraged to promote the support on offer	Thank you. This comment has been passed on to the Student support Team	Refer to SST.