

Student Consultation Panel

CONSULTATION ON THE CARE EXPERIENCED POLICY

17 June – 1 July 2021

The complete record of the discussion can be viewed on the forum: <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=24531>

Record of contributions

In total there were **67** posts by **20** students out of the **242** registered, with **32** like/favourite ratings. There were at least **76** independent readers of the forum. Below are extracts from most 'liked' posts.

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, I think its wonderful that there is a policy and that being in care is supported – it feels like a relief to be accepted.

I think it would be a good idea to consider a mentoring scheme for care experienced students, who suffer from lack of family support. Although I have generally found tutor support excellent having another person to talk to about my studies and other issues would 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 the definition is clear and covers the wide range of students who have experience of care.

There is, however, no mention of what (type of) documents a student would need to show the OU to prove that they have been in care. I do see the benefit of not including a list because it would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list, but it might be beneficial to include some examples.

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.

1. Definition

To what extent do you feel the definition covers the wide range of students who have experience of care?

Summary: The majority of the feedback was positive and indicated that the definition was found to be clear and inclusive of the wide range of students that have experience of care, providing sufficient scope.

There were some concerns raised regarding an age limit on the policy however, this was clarified within the consultation period and it was confirmed that the policy considers care experience, *at any age*.

Other specific suggestions and comments included.

- To be explicit within the policy that it does not cover hospital / medical care, including extended period of treatment.
- To note that individual policies will list requirements for evidence (where required).
- To note that the list of care situations is not exhaustive
- To include a reference on what to do if you do not have the required supporting evidence.

2. Support available

2a. How well does the policy describe the range of support to care experienced students?

Summary: Most comments agreed that the policy described the range of support well. The layout/presentation, ease of use and concise information was appreciated by several students. It was noted by one student that the support available appeared to be generic student support.

Not all students could access the Care Experience Bursary and we advised that not all web pages linked to in the policy will be accessible/visible to students outside of the UK. This was supported by comments from University staff. This includes the Care Experienced Bursary page in the Help Centre.

2b. Are there any other aspects of student support that you are aware of that you think should be listed in this policy?

Suggestions for inclusion:

- Students commented that it would be useful to provide information about the bursary in the main document and explain that international students would not have access, to avoid confusion.
- Careers and employability
- Open access software that might be useful/beneficial
- To hyperlink the Student Help Centre as well as the OU Students Association mental health resources: <https://help.open.ac.uk/browse/mental-health-wellbeing-and-welfare>
- Suggestion to mention the Peer Support services: <https://www.oustudents.com/peer-support>

3. 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?

Summary: Overall the feedback was positive, with the vast majority confirming they found it clear and/or helpful. The policy was well received by students, noting the useful links and the feeling of acceptance and support for students with care experience. Despite this, it was acknowledged in the thread that unless students know about it, its usefulness is limited. Communicating the policy in a timely manner is important.

Other comments and suggestions for improvement included:

- To provide clarity on what is available to international students and whether this differs.
- To advise whether the scheme is only open to students who have been in care in the UK and whether a student currently living in the UK would be eligible if their care experienced was in another country.
- '*from the widest possible range of backgrounds*' seemed vague, suggestion to expand upon to strengthen.
- A query on whether the bursary could be administered by student finance England, Scotland, Wales, so when you apply for either a grant or DSA, you are also asked if you are a care leaver.

4. 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?

Summary: Within the feedback, there were two suggestions that were particularly well received and supported. These were:

- Peer mentoring
- Marketing access course

Other comments and suggestions included:

- To improve the depth of feedback given by tutors including specific examples that will improve your marks and more access to past papers.
- Care experienced students should be given a place to attend the student conference where there could be a workshop or similar that shows students what support is available and how they can access it throughout their journey.

Other comments:

- It would be good to see a signposting to a forum, designated for care experienced students.

Date: 15/07/2021