



Coronavirus and Route Map out of Lockdown: Support to raise awareness of student carers in further and higher education

Carers Trust Scotland acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic means that the Scottish Government must take measures to deal with the pandemic and the implementation of measures to gradually ease lockdown.

We appreciate that these are unprecedented times and that circumstances around COVID-19 can change and in turn affect the measures implemented to tackle the virus, particularly as new scientific knowledge comes to light, and as the rate of infection and prevalence of the virus shifts.

However, we are concerned about the impact on unpaid carers including students at college or university who balance their studies along with their unpaid caring responsibilities. We have worries about unpaid carers who are seeking to enter further or higher education in the upcoming academic year. We would ask that where possible consideration be given to prospective and existing student carers and their caring role.

Scottish Funding Council data (2018-2019) demonstrates that there were 11, 965 student carer enrolments across all 14 of Scotland's college regions, which is significant progress from 2013-14 levels of 3,413 student carer college enrolments. We also note that many students with unpaid caring responsibilities study part-time and enrol on to further education courses.

The data also tells us that student carers at college in Scotland are mostly female, over the age of 25 and more likely to come from an area of multiple deprivation, have a disability and proportionally higher percentage come from a Black, Asian



or Minority Ethnic background compared to their peers who do not have unpaid caring responsibilities.

Student carers continue to tell us that they face particular challenges accessing further and higher education, obtaining the necessary practical, emotional and financial support they need to stay at college or university, and successfully complete their studies. Such challenges impact the opportunities available to student carers to fulfil their potential and to go on to a positive destination either within further or higher education or the labour market. Ultimately, unpaid caring responsibilities can be a barrier to education attainment and accessing further and higher education.

As part of phase three of the route map out of lockdown, we welcome that from 22 July 2020 universities and colleges can commence a phased return to on campus learning as part of a blended model with remote teaching and public health measures in place. We do however have four main concerns relating to student carers.

- 1) **Intensification of unpaid caring role during COVID-19 pandemic:** Student carers will have found their caring responsibilities intensify over the last four months as some social care provision for their cared-for person has been reduced and the need for social isolation as a priority to protect the cared-for person. The impact of such is that students at college or university will have taken on more caring responsibilities, reducing the time they can dedicate to their studies at home and therefore putting them at a disadvantage to their peers. As one student carer has expressed it in recent research carried out by Carers Trust Scotland:

“I moved away for university and had to move back due to lockdown. Trying to finish assignments and do the caring role that was usually



done by carers that came in is very difficult" Young adult carer, Aged 22¹

We therefore want colleges and universities to recognise the added responsibilities that some students may have been taking on or continue to take on at this difficult time, and the impact this may have on their ability to stay on top of their course work or achieve their envisaged grades or qualifications as a result. We therefore ask for colleges and universities to provide flexibility to students with unpaid caring responsibilities and to provide additional resource to support student carers during this difficult time.

- 2) **Student Carer Identification and Support:** Student support services and lecturers are key in identifying student carers, so that they can receive support early to mitigate them withdrawing from their course and ensure student carers have the appropriate measures in place that take into account their caring responsibilities while studying. Being an unpaid carer can be a lonely and isolating experience in normal times but with social distancing and intensified caring responsibilities such loneliness and isolation can be exacerbated. This could have a detrimental impact on their mental health and wellbeing, which is significant as previous research shows that 45% of student carers within the resultant sample identified as have a mental health problem².

"I don't currently have the face-to-face support I had from professionals previously. I don't get the chance to take a few hours out to go to university or see friends once I've done my caring duties for the day, and the normality of seeing friends is gone. My sister who also cares for my dad is isolating elsewhere and so I'm doing double the caring, while my dad worsens and can do less and less for himself. I am feeling a lot more overwhelmed and it's detrimental to my

¹ Carers Trust Scotland (2020), '2020 Vision: Hear Me, See Me, Support Me and Don't Forget Me' Carers Trust Scotland: Glasgow.

² Sempik, J and Becker, S (2014) 'Young Adult Carers at College and University'; Carers Trust: London.



relationship with my dad, which is really sad. My placements for university have also been postponed and so my future (graduation as well as keeping my current job/financial income for the next year)"

Young Adult Carer, Aged 22³

"It has made my caring role more pronounced/taken away other outlets of my life such as study. It has made me feel more isolated from my friends who don't have caring responsibilities".

Young Adult Carer⁴, Aged 24

We would therefore ask that all 27 colleges and 19 universities in Scotland put steps in place at registration/enrolment/matriculation to identify their student carers leading up to and at the start of the new academic year. Doing so will assist in preventative and early intervention work to support the health and wellbeing of their student carers and their educational attainment; and where possible linking students to local carer centres/services for specialist support. Moreover, we would welcome the support of the Scottish Government in encouraging colleges and universities across Scotland to implement the Going Higher/Further for Student Carers Recognition Award⁵, which is currently funded by the Scottish Funding Council.

- 3) **Cancellation of 2020 school exam diet and online university/college exams:** many young carers in S5 and S6 have reported that they are worried or anxious around obtaining their exam awards due to a variety of issues such as poor prelim results, not being able to hand in coursework on time or poor attendance at school as a consequence of their caring role at home. Due to their caring responsibilities some young carers have reported that their performance during prelims was negatively impacted; including having lack of study time or poor concentration during the exam, resulting

³ Carers Trust Scotland (2020), '2020 Vision: Hear Me, See Me, Support Me and Don't Forget Me' Carers Trust Scotland: Glasgow.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid



in a lower grade being awarded than they predicted. As one student carer noted in recent research conducted by Carers Trust Scotland on the impact of COVID-19 on young carers and young adult carers:

“My work from college isn’t getting finished so I hope I still get my next course” Young Carer, Aged 16

We would therefore ask that universities, and colleges take such circumstances into consideration when awarding course places for the new academic year. The impact of secondary school closure from late March 2020, poor prelim performance and school absenteeism due to caring responsibilities may affect young carers opportunities to access further and higher education in the new academic year. We would also encourage all colleges and universities to work with UCAS to identify student carers through the application process to identify student carers at the earliest possible point. Furthermore, we would ask that universities take similar considerations as above for student carers sitting exams as part of their degree course or submitting their dissertation work.

4) Student Carer financial support: Most students at college or university with unpaid caring responsibilities do not meet the eligibility criteria for Carer’s Allowance and Carer’s Allowance Supplement because they study for more than 21 hours per week. However, as outlined above, many student carers have found their caring responsibilities intensify over the last four months while the challenges of their further and higher education have amplified. This all impacts negatively on student carers as they require finance to meet their intensified caring responsibilities, overcome the barriers to continuing education by digital means and limited access to work as lockdown has caused furlough and closed those parts of the economy that are prevalent for students to work within while they study such as retail and hospitality. As one student carer has expressed:

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“I am incredibly concerned for the person I care for and I feel incredibly overwhelmed with everything. I now face more pressure with greater care commitments, difficulty in getting food, fears I could make the person I care for very unwell, fearing for my own health and theirs, lacking food, lacking money (reduced hours due to Covid) and I’m also not eligible for any benefits due to being in full time education. My mental health is suffering greatly, and I have no support, alongside no escape” Young adult carer, Aged 22⁶

All the aforementioned affects the financial hardship that student carers continue to face. While we support and welcome the Scottish Government’s additional Carer’s Allowance COVID-19 Supplement Payment, we would urge the Scottish Government to assess the merit of providing some additional financial support to student carers for the new academic year to help with access to further and higher education and contribute to the financial hardship caused to student carers because of COVID-19.

Paper produced by Carers Trust Scotland, 15th July 2020.

⁶ Ibid