Welcome to your Carer’s pack

A carer is anyone who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid.

We recognise the rewards and challenges that come with being a carer. Being a student can provide you with some space for yourself and your own personal development, but we understand that your study needs to be flexible to fit in with the other demands in your life. We want to help you get the most out of your studies with the OU and reassure you that we are here to support you and help you succeed.

We have worked with the OU Students Association, student carers, OU tutors and educational and careers advisors to develop this Carer’s Pack. We hope it will provide you with useful information, guidance and signposting to other resources that may be helpful while you are studying with us.

Open University study allows you to fit in your studies around the demands of your life. It is part-time and flexible which means it can be fitted around your caring role and other responsibilities. You can also take a break between modules if you need to and build up your qualification at a pace to suit you.

This pack will provide you with information about what it’s like to study with the OU and the flexible ways we can support you. At the end of this Carer’s Pack you’ll also find a list of contacts to signpost you to further sources of support, both inside and outside the OU.

You may not want all of the information when you first start but keep the pack handy and you can dip in and out of it as you progress through your qualification and beyond.

Always remember that staff at the OU are here to help you. We can make sure support is in place when you need it. If you haven’t already told us that you’re a carer, you can add this to your profile on StudentHome or speak to an advisor.

We will be updating the pack on a regular basis, if there’s something we’ve missed please let us know!

Talk to us

If you haven’t started your module yet, or are just thinking about studying, contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team.

CONTACT US

Email scotland@open.ac.uk
Call 0131 226 3851
Organising your time

The real joy of studying with the OU is that the time and place you study is totally your choice. You could be studying in your pyjamas at 1 am or reading your course materials whilst waiting for an appointment, bus or train. Materials can be accessed through a PC, laptop, tablet or mobile.

To give you an idea of the time involved, if you are starting with one of our Access modules you will need around 9 hours of study time each week. If you want to study part-time towards a degree, you’ll need around 18 hours study time per week. Part-time study means completing 60 credits worth of study per year and an Honours Degree would usually take 6 years to complete. If you have more time, you may wish to study more credits in some years or less in others. We’re flexible and you can ebb and flow depending on your commitments.

Finding time to study may be an issue and only you know when you are likely to have time and space. However, we have a handy online Time Planner that allows you to check how many credits you could study per year. Visit the website to work out if you have enough time.

We’ll provide you with support during your studies to help you manage your time. Each module has a detailed study calendar that highlights key dates for assignments and tutorials, breaking down what you need to study and when. Your Student Recruitment and Support Team are at the end of a telephone and your tutor will offer you guidance on how to stay on track if you need help.

As a carer your circumstances may change during your studies. If you are concerned about having time to study or want to chat about your situation, please get in touch.

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Flexible arrangements to support you during your studies

The OU offers real flexibility to help you fit your studies around your role as a carer. For example, you can study at times that suit you or download module materials in different formats, such as audio versions or e-books.

As a carer you may also be entitled to special arrangements during your studies, for example sitting an exam at home (see the What if something happens? section on the next page).

“I’m a person who can’t go out a lot. I don’t have the chance to attend colleges or universities and I don’t have a social life. I have lots of health problems... I do housework in the morning as much as I can and look after my Dad and my sister. And then after 8 o’clock I start working on my University assignments... I can do everything at home. I can use the computer, I can communicate with my tutors, I can explore things easily and things are very useful with the Open University. Very rewarding... The Open University is the best thing for me.

Hedar
OUiS Student

Talk to us

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Call 0131 226 3851
What if something happens? Dealing with the unexpected

Here at the OU we know that life happens. Most of our students combine coursework with employment and family commitments, but your responsibilities as a carer may demand much more of your time, often at very short notice.

It’s important that you tell us that you are a carer and about any other issues that may affect your studies, so we can offer any extra support you may need. You can do this by updating your profile on StudentHome or by speaking to an advisor (see contact details below).

Who to contact for support

There is a wealth of information and advice at the Help Centre which you can reach via StudentHome. You also have a support network to help you stay on track.

Your tutor

The first point of contact will be your module tutor who can:

- assist you with planning your workload and with identifying study priorities when time gets short;
- offer individual support sessions to help you catch up with your coursework;
- clarify parts of module materials you may find challenging;
- give you occasional extensions to tutor-marked assignments (TMAs).

Please be aware that extensions are not allowed for computer-marked assignments (iCMAs) and for final assignments of the module, so it is essential to plan ahead and keep in regular contact with your tutor to be informed of your options.

Your Student Recruitment and Support Team

The other most important point of contact is your Student Recruitment and Support Team. Advisers here can help you with module choice and registration or planning your qualification. They will also discuss your options, should it become difficult to keep up with your study.

Reporting special circumstances

Towards the end of each module you will be able to report any special circumstances that affected your progress throughout the year, so that the Assessment Board can take it into consideration. Your Student Recruitment and Support Team will advise you on the process.

As a tutor I really appreciate when students take the trouble to help me get a better picture of their situation, or to discuss when and if things become more difficult during their studies. Sometimes this might be something I can resolve quickly (such as organising short extensions on assignments, or advising on how best to prioritise the module workload), or I might be able to request some additional help from our Student Support and Recruitment Team. The main thing is to make contact and share what’s going on.

OU Tutor
Deferring a module
Sometimes, it may become necessary to put your study on hold until the next academic year. This process is called “deferral”. For many modules you will be allowed to “bank” assignment marks you have achieved so far. This means you can carry the marks forward, so you can pick up where you left off. Should you consider this option, it will be crucial to get in touch with your Student Recruitment and Support Team as early as possible to discuss the way forward.

Special examination arrangements
Your Student Recruitment and Support Team can also advise you about examination arrangements. As a carer you may be allowed to sit your exams at home, so please check with the Team to find out what you will need to do to apply.

Tutorials and residential schools
Some courses have residential schools and tutorials. Alternative arrangements may be available for carers, and most courses offer online or face-to-face tutorials. Please speak to your Student Recruitment and Support Team for more information.

Talk to us
If you haven’t started your module yet, or are just thinking about studying, contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team.

CONTACT US
Email scotland@open.ac.uk
Call 0131 226 3851
Is there additional support if I have a disability?

You may not think of yourself as disabled but if you have:

- a long-term health condition,
- a specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia),
- a mental health difficulty,

then the OU considers that you are entitled to reasonable adjustment to support your study. We use the terms ‘disabled’ or ‘disability’ to cover all these conditions.

It’s important that you tell us if you have a disability and about any other issues that could affect your studies, so we can offer any extra support you may need.

If you declare a disability, you will be invited to complete an online form to tell us more about your study requirements. You will then be contacted by a member of staff who will discuss the study support arrangements that can be put in place for you and write a confidential student profile that will help your tutors and your Student Recruitment and Support Team to make the right adjustments for you.

Adjustments the OU can make for you include:

- Accessible study materials,
- tailored assessment,
- specialist equipment,
- residential school support,
- and access or alternatives to tutorials and day schools.

You may also be entitled to financial support - including Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) - and help with the cost of diagnostic assessment for a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia.

It may take some time to put these supports in place so please tell us about your disability as soon as possible. Speak to your Student Recruitment and Support Team for more information.

Talk to us

If you haven’t started your module yet, or are just thinking about studying, contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team.

CONTACT US

Email scotland@open.ac.uk
Call 0131 226 3851
Looking after your mental health and wellbeing - free, confidential online support 24/7

If you’re struggling to sleep, feeling low, stressed or not coping, current OU students can access free mental health and wellbeing support through our partnership with Big White Wall.

The Big White Wall website provides a safe, totally anonymous online space to air concerns, explore your feelings and learn how to self-manage your mental health and wellbeing. It’s available to you 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

How can the Big White Wall support you

Big White Wall is a safe online community helping people look after themselves with the support of trained professionals and clinicians. 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year. We don’t use real names and we take anonymity seriously. There are online courses or your can chat with other members. And if you need to talk to professional, our ‘wall guides’ are just a click away.

How to register

• To join Big White Wall’s supportive online community, you’ll need to follow these steps to register:
  • Go to Big White Wall www.bigwhitewall.com/
  • Select ‘Register’ or ‘Join Us’.
  • Click on the box headed ‘I’m from a university or college’.
  • Enter your OU email address (provided with Microsoft Office365). This will be OUCU@ou.ac.uk (OUCU is your OU computer username, for example abc123@ou.ac.uk).
  • Enter your details and click ‘Sign up’.
  • You’ll be sent an email to verify your email address. Click on the link to activate your account.
  • You can then choose an anonymous username for your time on the site.

If you’re in crisis, feeling desperate or have thoughts of suicide you should contact your doctor or mental health professional.

If you have queries about your study, please contact your student support team. The staff at the Big White Wall are there to help you with wellbeing but can’t answer specific questions about The Open University or your studies with us.

Talk to us

If you haven’t started your module yet, or are just thinking about studying, contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team.

CONTACT US

Email scotland@open.ac.uk
Call 0131 226 3851
The Open University Students Association

The Open University Students Association has a range of support services. Their services and groups are run by students and it’s a great way of linking with the OU student community. You can find out more about OU Students Association here.

Listed below are some specific groups that may be of interest to you as a carer.

**OU Students Association Caring & Dependency Group**

This closed Facebook group is for Open University students who either are carers or have carers. Its purpose is to provide support and a safe place to share the day to day experiences of being or having a carer. The group is administrated by some members of the OU Students Association Disabled Students Group (DSG) and members of the Association’s Central Executive Committee (CEC).

**Disabled Students Group**

The Disabled Students’ Group is run by, and consists of, a group of students from all faculties: some undergraduate, some post-graduate. They are all students either with disabilities or other long-term physical or mental health problems.

**Nightline**

Nightline is an emotional support overnight service run by students for students, available from 6pm to 8am during term time. A limited service over summer and Christmas periods.

**PLEXUS**

PLEXUS is a group open to all students and is designed to provide specific support and comfort for LGBT+ students.
The Open University Students Educational Trust (OUSET) is the student charity where funds raised by students are used to benefit students in financial hardship. It is a separate registered charity operated by the OU Students Association.

For more information, please contact your Students Association.

Contact us: Email ousa@open.ac.uk

Top study/survival tips from our students who are carers

Please see below some tips from other OU student carers.

**Motivation and perseverance**

"I would imagine my graduation, that’s what got me through it. When I got to my last course, I could taste it."

OU Graduate

**Organising your study**

"I used the study calendar and always tried to stay two weeks ahead, so I could give myself a bit of leeway if anything cropped up."

OU Student

**Looking after yourself**

"I also would say that you need to ensure you make time for yourself. Being a carer and an OU student is overwhelming, scary and stressful. It can feel like you don’t have enough time for yourself. While your responsibilities are important, make sure you take time to do something for you."

OU Student
Contact your tutor

"My son is very unpredictable, and it was difficult to plan ahead. I’d have a week scheduled to do my assignment and then something would happen with him and I’d be tied up with appointments all week and wouldn’t get my assignment done on time. My tutor was brilliant; he knew my situation and was able to give me extensions on my assignments."

OU Student

Tell the OU that you are a carer and also if you have a disability or additional needs

"My advice to anyone about to start with the OU would be to tell your tutor(s) about your situation. Being an OU student in general is difficult, but being one with extra responsibilities can sometimes feel impossible. Don’t make the experience harder than it needs to be by not telling the OU about your situation. I was too embarrassed to open up and ended up regretting it, when really it would have made my experience even better. There is a lot of support available and the experience doesn’t have to feel scary."

OU Student
Help with the costs of your study

You will only ever have to pay fees for the module you are currently studying. There is the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) Part-time Fee Grant and other funding available.

The Part-time Fee Grant (SAAS)

If your personal income is £25,000 or less or you’re on certain benefits you could qualify for the Part-time Fee Grant. This funding covers 100% of your course fees for all undergraduate module fees between 30 and 120 credits. You apply for this once per academic year. See also the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS)

Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA)

Available if you have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. To find out what may be available for you visit our website or give us a call to talk through the various options.

Discretionary Fund

If you’re in financial hardship you may be eligible to apply for help with your study expenses, such as internet or costs of travel to tutorials.

The Open University Students Educational Trust (OUSET) is the student charity where funds raised by students are used to benefit students in financial hardship. It is a separate registered charity operated by the OU Students Association.

Talk to us

If you haven’t started your module yet, or are just thinking about studying, contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team.

CONTACT US

Email scotland@open.ac.uk
Call 0131 226 3851

Building your qualification

With the OU, you choose the starting point that suits you best: whether that is one of our Access modules right up to Postgraduate level study.

Wherever you start, the next stage is to pick a module that will gain you credits that can be used to build a qualification. If you have already chosen the qualification you want to work towards then the choice will be available through StudentHome.
Undergraduate Study

At the OU, Undergraduate qualifications include Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education, and Honours degrees (Bachelors of Science, Arts, Law, or Engineering). To build these qualifications you study modules at undergraduate levels 1, 2 and 3. Most of these modules carry either 30 or 60 credit points each.

- You need 120 credits for a Certificate of Higher Education,
- 240 for a Diploma,
- and 360 for a full Honours Degree.

We also offer more flexible qualifications through our Open Programme, which allows you to build a qualification by studying modules from a variety of subject areas. This means you could study subjects that interest you purely for pleasure and use them to build a qualification later if you wish.

You can read about our range of undergraduate courses here.

Postgraduate Study

Once you have a degree or equivalent qualification, you might be interested in studying one of our Postgraduate Certificates, Diplomas, or Taught Master’s degrees. Again, these are made up of individual postgraduate level modules with allotted credit points and we offer programmes in a wide range of subject areas. You can find out more here.

What if I change my mind and want to change my course?

If you are working towards one qualification but change your mind, it’s often possible (depending on the modules you’ve taken) to change to something else. Our Open Degrees in particular give you a lot of flexibility in what you study.

“After I completed AA100, I realised that I also had an interest in philosophy. Instead of just focusing on a purely history degree, I thought I would try and combine the two subjects. While I had considered an Open Degree, I opted for a joint humanities degree in philosophy and history. I think that’s one of the reasons why the OU is exceptional, it doesn’t just restrict you to one subject, but allows you to study whatever you desire.”

OU Student
Free informal courses and resources

The OU websites OpenLearn and FutureLearn have a wealth of free courses and resources. These informal courses can give you a taster of subject areas or modules before you start your formal studies. They can also be useful preparation between modules. There are some specific vocational courses that could help you think about careers and employment beyond your OU studies.

You might be interested in our self-reflection and planning course for carers – Caring Counts.

Exploring career prospects

Some OU students combine their studies with caring responsibilities for their own personal development. However, many will also want to explore future career opportunities either alongside caring, or on a full-time basis if there is a change to your caring role.

If your caring role has necessitated a long break from paid employment the thought of returning to work can feel daunting. The OU Careers and Employability Service are there to support you and offer the following resources to help you explore your options and progress towards your goals.

One to one discussion with a Careers Consultant

If you feel you need personal support to explore your career plans it’s easy to arrange a one-to-one discussion with an OU careers consultant by email, phone or Skype. Just send us a few details and we’ll get in touch to make arrangements.

Webinar recordings

As a first step it’s a good idea to reflect on your skills and interests. Take a look at the webinar Developing Your Career Alongside Caring for an overview of issues you’ll need to consider when beginning your career planning.

Career planning tips

Section 1 of the OU career planning and job seeking workbook also has a wealth of information and interactive activities to help with this process.

Which career sector?

The next stage is to begin exploring potential career sectors and roles which match well to your skills and interests. Try to keep an open mind until you’ve thoroughly researched different options – it’s easy to rule things out simply due to lack of confidence. The following resources will help you narrow your choices and also explore alternative and more flexible types of employment, such as home working.

Jobs and careers information

Home-working
Volunteering opportunities

Volunteering can provide a flexible and supportive return to the workplace, providing opportunities to develop new skills, test out different types of work or simply build confidence through a phased return to an external working environment. The OU Students Association also have a range of volunteering opportunities.

Voluntary work

Students Association volunteering

Webinar: Finding flexible work experience

Building your CV

When you are ready to start making applications you might be concerned about employment gaps on your CV or application forms, but there are steps you can take to emphasise skills developed through care, study and unpaid activity. Tips and examples can be found on the careers website and look out for our careers webinars on CV’s and other career related topics.

CV applications and interviews

Webinar: Mind the gap - planning a return to work after an employment break

OU OpportunityHub

Don’t forget to register for the OU OpportunityHub vacancy service to monitor both paid and voluntary opportunities and access a range of useful resources.

Informal learning

The websites OpenLearn and FutureLearn have a wealth of free courses and resources. There are also some specific vocational courses that could help you think about careers and employment beyond your OU studies.

Caring Counts – is a free online course developed with and for carers. It’s based on the experiences of carers like you and can help you reflect on your caring role, the skills and experiences you’ve gained, and how transferable they are. It will also help you start thinking about what you’d like to do next

Returnships

If you have a professional background and are worried about how to get back into employment you might want to consider a returnship – a paid internship aimed at professional returners. Take a look at the Women Returners website for more information.
Up to date benefits information

If you’re concerned about how a return to work might impact on any benefits you’re claiming, it’s a good idea to get a benefit check before making further decisions – the Carers UK advice line can carry out a free benefit check for you.

Useful Contacts for Support and Information

This section has useful contact details and signposting information including important OU contacts, and external organisations that support carers.

The Open University

This is the main Open University website. Explore our courses and qualifications.

Email scotland@open.ac.uk

Once you are registered, you can access contacts for your module through your StudentHome.

OU Help Centre

Full range of help topics at https://help.open.ac.uk/ or via StudentHome.

OU Library services

Get started with our guide to using and getting the most out of library resources.

www.open.ac.uk/library or via StudentHome.

Skills for OU study

Tips and guidance on effective study, from preparing assignments to revising for exams - simply choose the links that interest you.

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy or via StudentHome.

OU Careers Advisory Service

This is a useful website to explore potential career options linked to OU courses and qualifications. There is a wealth of materials and information here, please also see direct links in the Careers section of this pack.

www.open.ac.uk/careers or via StudentHome.
Open University Student Association

OU Students Association

Led by OU students, the association has a range of services and peer support including:

OU Students Association Caring & Dependency Group

Disabled Students Group

Nightline

PLEXUS - specific support and comfort for LGBT+ students.

Big White Wall - 24/7 support with mental health and wellbeing

www.oustudents.com

Careers advice support

My World of Work

A comprehensive careers website for people living in Scotland. It’s for all ages and abilities and has information on jobs, courses, volunteering and apprenticeships. It’s an interactive site with specific information relevant to careers and opportunities in Scotland.

www.myworldofwork.co.uk/

Planit

A Scottish specific interactive careers planning website which covers information and advice on careers, courses, apprenticeships and jobsearch.

www.planitplus.net/
Skills Development Scotland

If you want a careers appointment you can contact your local SDS Centre for an Adult appointment

www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/contact-us/

Other education and training opportunities

There are lots of opportunities to develop your learning with free online resources or through local courses and tasters, which may be run through your local carers’ centre or adult education provider. Local colleges also offer a programme of adult education classes.

OpenLearn (Open University)

The OU’s free learning website with 10,000 hours of free learning content including video, audio and short courses.

www.open.edu/openlearn

FutureLearn has a range of courses offered by the OU and other universities. Free to join but there may be a cost for certificates and assessments.

www.futurelearn.com

Khan Academy

Free learning resources and online video tutorials mostly on maths, science and IT.

www.khanacademy.org
Local further education colleges

Many local further education colleges offer community learning courses.

This website lists all the colleges in Scotland and through this you can link to their websites.

Support organisations for carers in Scotland

Carers Trust Scotland

Where to find your local carers’ services; help and advice including benefit entitlements, where to get support, carers’ needs assessments; respite breaks and much more.

www.carers.org

carers.org/our-work-in-scotland/our-work-in-scotland

Carers UK and Carers Scotland

Provide expert advice, information and support across the UK including Scotland. They also have supportive forums.

www.carersuk.org/

www.carersuk.org/scotland

Local Carers Centres and services

Carers’ centres are independent charities that deliver a wide range of local support services to meet the needs of carers in their own communities, including specialist support for young adult carers. All carers’ centres provide, either by telephone, drop-in or outreach surgeries, the following core services:

- emotional support,
- information and advice,
- carers’ voice.

To find your local carers’ centre:

carers.org/help-and-info/carer-services-near-you?

Samaritans

Whatever you’re going through, call us free any time, from any phone on 116 123, (Free number).

www.samaritans.org
SAMH for Scotland’s Mental Health

Mental health charity with a specific website section for carers and how to cope when you’re supporting someone else.

www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/being-there-for-someone/as-a-carer

Local Authority information for carers

Scottish Government Carers Charter

Your rights under the Carers (Scotland) Act (2016). This includes an Adult Carer Support Plan, responsibilities of the local authority, involvement in services and hospital discharge.


Support provided by your Local Authority

Your Local Authority will also have details on carer support and what they provide.

You can find a list of them all on the link below. Just click on your region and type ‘carers’ in the search engine.

www.mygov.scot/find-your-local-council/

Citizens Advice Scotland

Free advice on a wide range of issues – open to everyone in Scotland.

www.cas.org.uk/