

UCAS FAIR ACCESS SNAPSHOT:

# STUDENTS WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

UCAS





## INTRODUCTION

In 2023, UCAS introduced seven new questions into the application enabling students to flag a wider range of circumstances and support needs, including: students estranged from their parents, those with parenting or caring responsibilities, students from UK Armed Forces families, UK Armed Forces Service leavers and veterans, refugees and asylum seekers, and students in receipt of free school meals. This new data not only helps higher education (HE) providers connect students to the right support, but also provides the sector with valuable insight into groups of students about whom we have previously had minimal information.

These Fair Access Snapshots offer an at-a-glance overview of this new data. This fifth Snapshot [in the series](#) focuses on applicants who shared a caring responsibility in the 2023 cycle, and supplements our [Next Steps report focusing on the experience of young adult carers in education](#). (Note: this data does not include parenting responsibilities for which there is [a separate Snapshot](#).)





## OVERALL 2023 UCAS APPLICANT DATA

**599,930**

UK applicants

**482,895**

UK accepted  
applicants

**35.8%**

of UK 18  
year olds  
accepted

## APPLICANTS WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

**31,815**

UK applicants

**22,600**

UK accepted  
applicants

**4.7%**

of UK accepted  
applicants

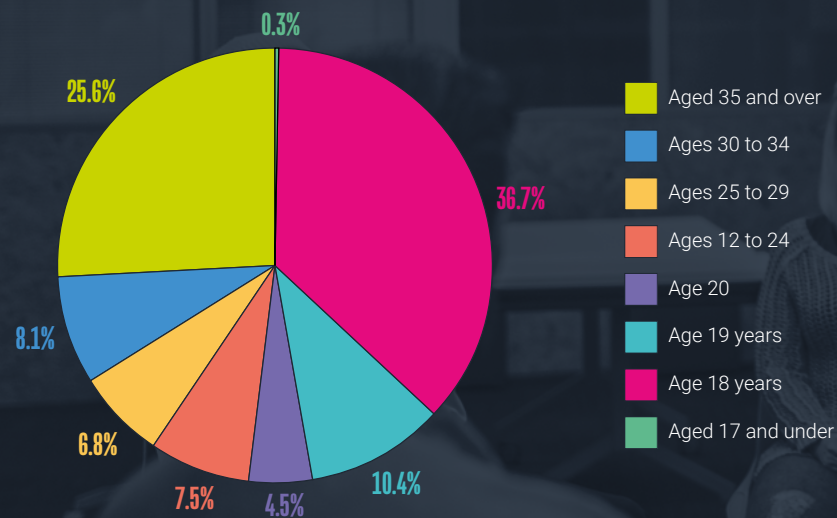




## BREAKDOWN BY UK DOMICILE

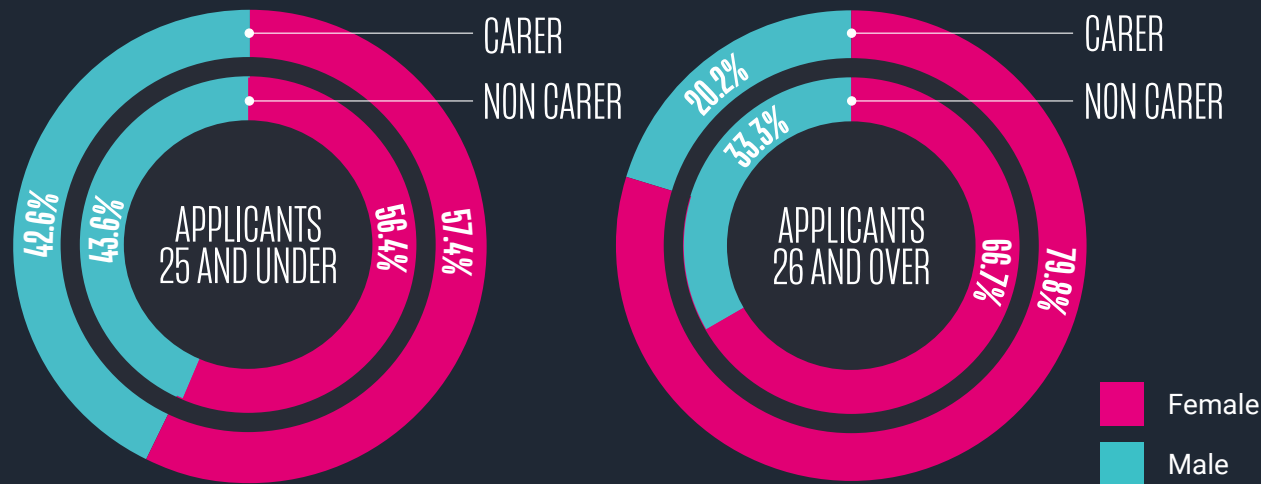
| Caring responsibility | Applicants | Accepted applicants |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------------|
| England               | 26,095     | 18,650              |
| Northern Ireland      | 1,045      | 665                 |
| Scotland              | 3,430      | 2,370               |
| Wales                 | 1,240      | 920                 |

## INTERSECTIONALITY: AGE



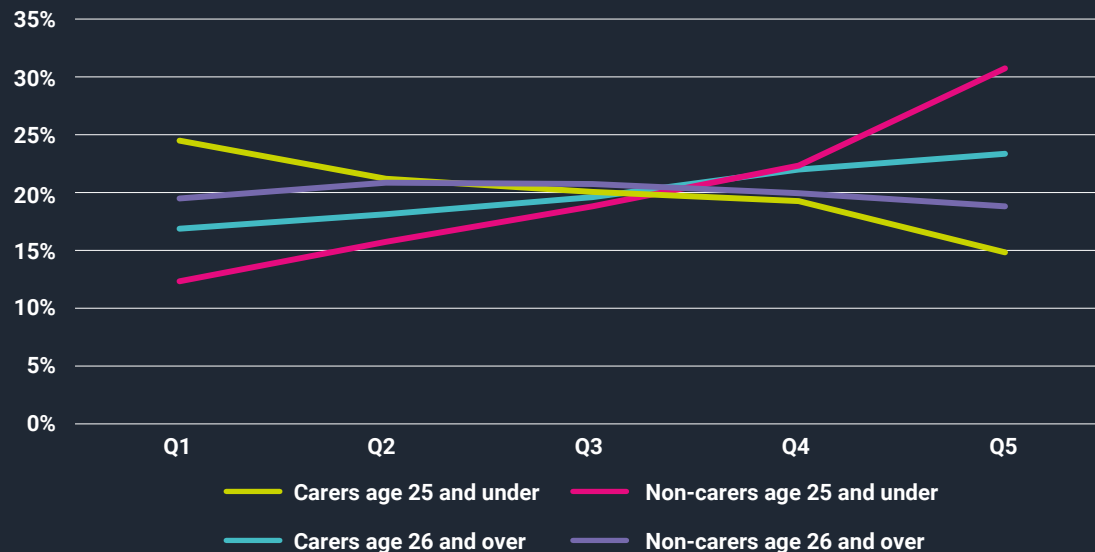
Carers make up 5.3% of UK applicants overall but, with an **estimated** 20% of people providing unpaid care in the UK, this is a clear under-representation. The majority of carers applying to HE via UCAS are young adult carers (59% apply at age 24 or under), reflecting the higher number of younger applicants to UK HE overall. However, **new UCAS research** found young adult carers were 38% more likely to apply to HE as mature students (age 21+) than those without caring responsibilities – underlining the impact of caring on educational progression. This may also account for over one third of carers applying at age 30 and above.

## INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER



More than two thirds of applicants with caring responsibilities are women. This gender gap is particularly pronounced in the older age group, where only one in five applicants is a man. While the younger group shows only one percentage point difference in the gender gap to those without caring responsibilities, national datasets show a higher number of young women carers in the population - indicating an under-representation of young women progressing to HE. Expectations on women and girls to provide unpaid care start at an earlier age so they may need additional support to see HE as a viable option, and to make a successful transition.

## INTERSECTIONALITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

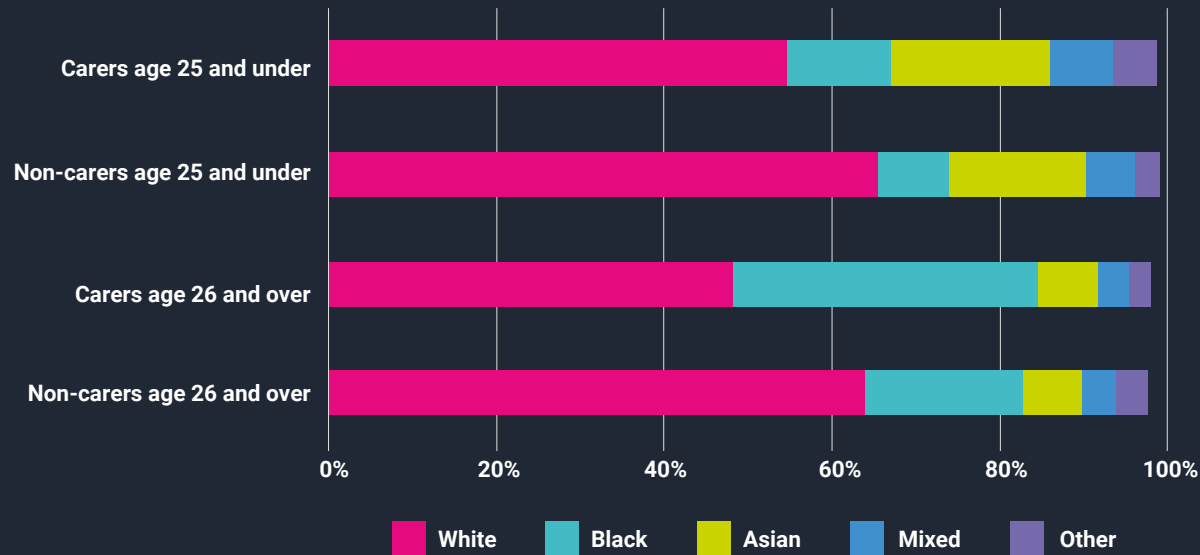


Applicants sharing a caring responsibility are evenly spread across the five POLAR4<sup>1</sup> quintiles. However, when compared to those without caring responsibilities, they are more likely to come from the least advantaged areas (Q1-Q2) – and less likely to come from the most advantaged areas (Q4-Q5).

<sup>1</sup> POLAR is a measurement which classifies areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of 18 year old participation in HE. Each group represents around 20% of young people and is ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest participation rates, considered the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest participation rates, most advantaged).



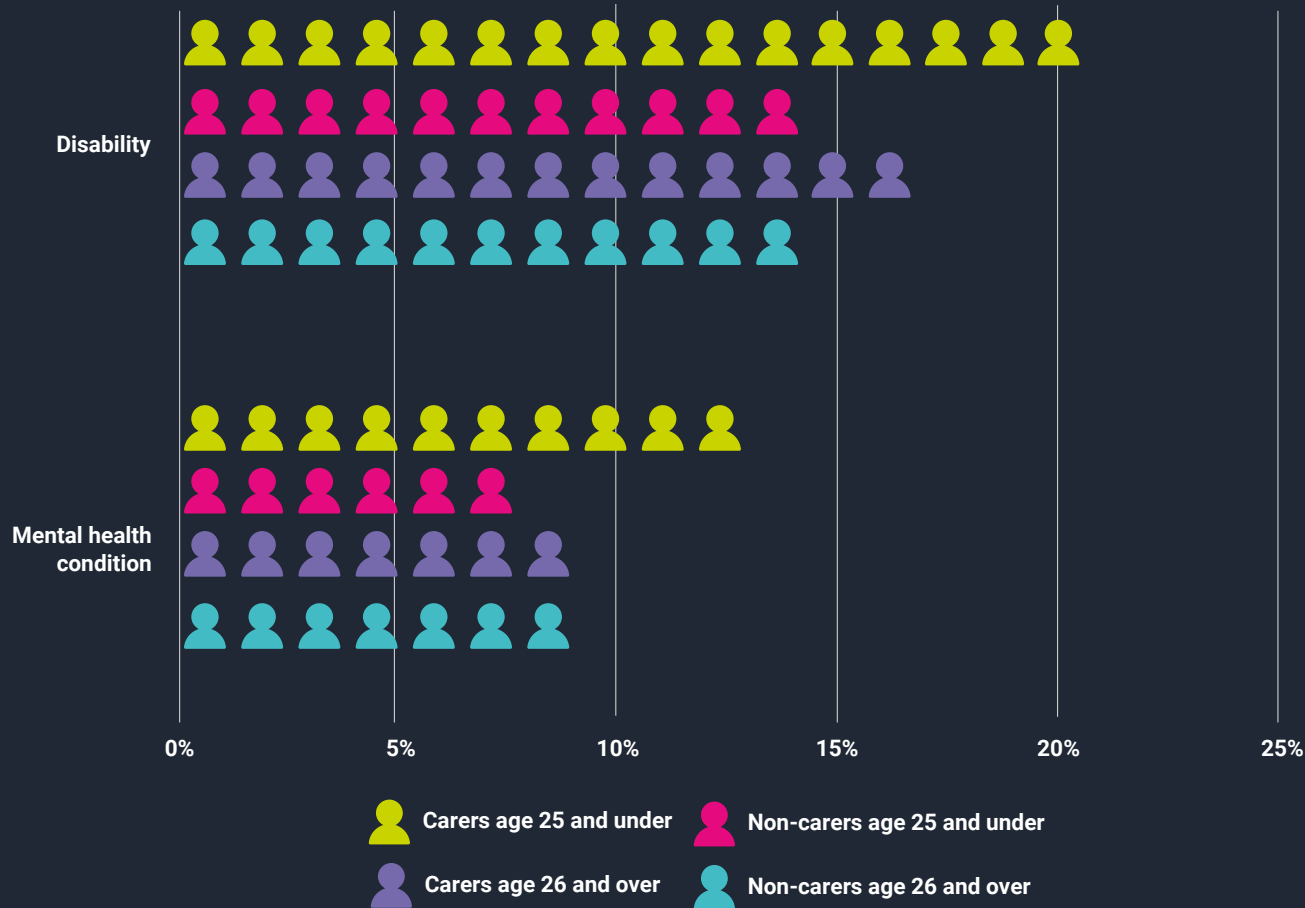
## INTERSECTIONALITY: ETHNICITY



Overall, applicants from the Black ethnic group are much more likely to share a caring responsibility – and this is particularly pronounced for those aged 26 and over. Applicants from the White ethnic group are much less likely to share a caring responsibility across both age categories.

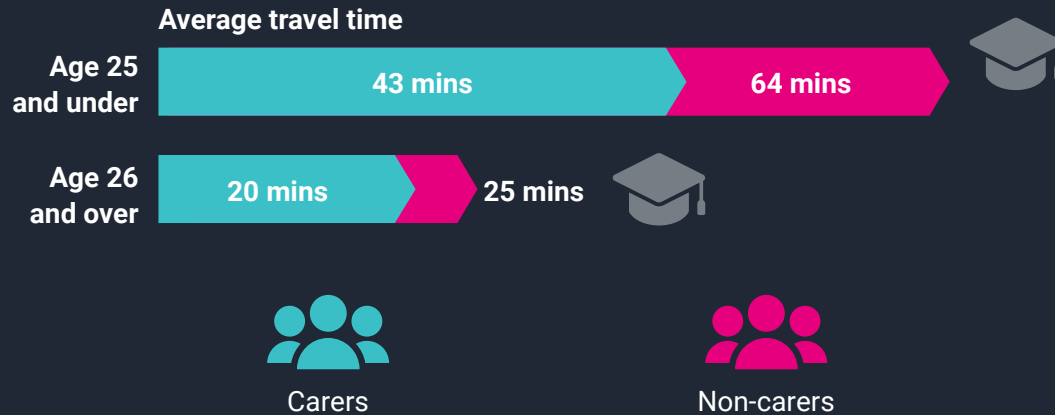


# INTERSECTIONALITY: DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS



Applicants with caring responsibilities are also more likely to share a disability and/or mental health condition. It is essential that support about disability and mental health is woven into the information, advice and guidance given to carers when they are making their decisions – particularly the Disabled Students' Allowance.

# APPLICANTS WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO APPLY CLOSER TO HOME



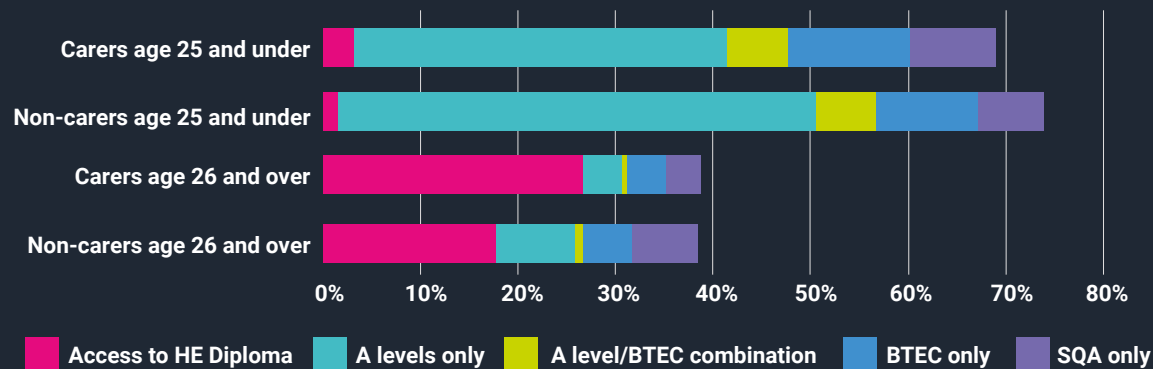
This behaviour holds true across both age groups, although the impact of caring on the choices of younger applicants is much clearer. Mature students are much more likely to apply closer to home overall, but we still see a slightly lower travel time for the older age group. Our [research](#) finds 41% of young adult carers apply to universities within 30 minutes' drive from home, making them 29% more likely than non-carers in the same age group to stay within this radius to study.





## ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS

Overall, carers are far more likely to enter HE with the Access to HE Diploma – and this holds true across both age groups. This reflects behaviours reported [in other Snapshots](#) – and the need for ongoing progression support. Applicants with caring responsibilities are also less likely to apply with A levels, BTECs and SQA Highers, which reinforces the importance of enabling adult learners to return to education through routes such as the Access to HE Diploma.



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES



**Nursing & Midwifery**

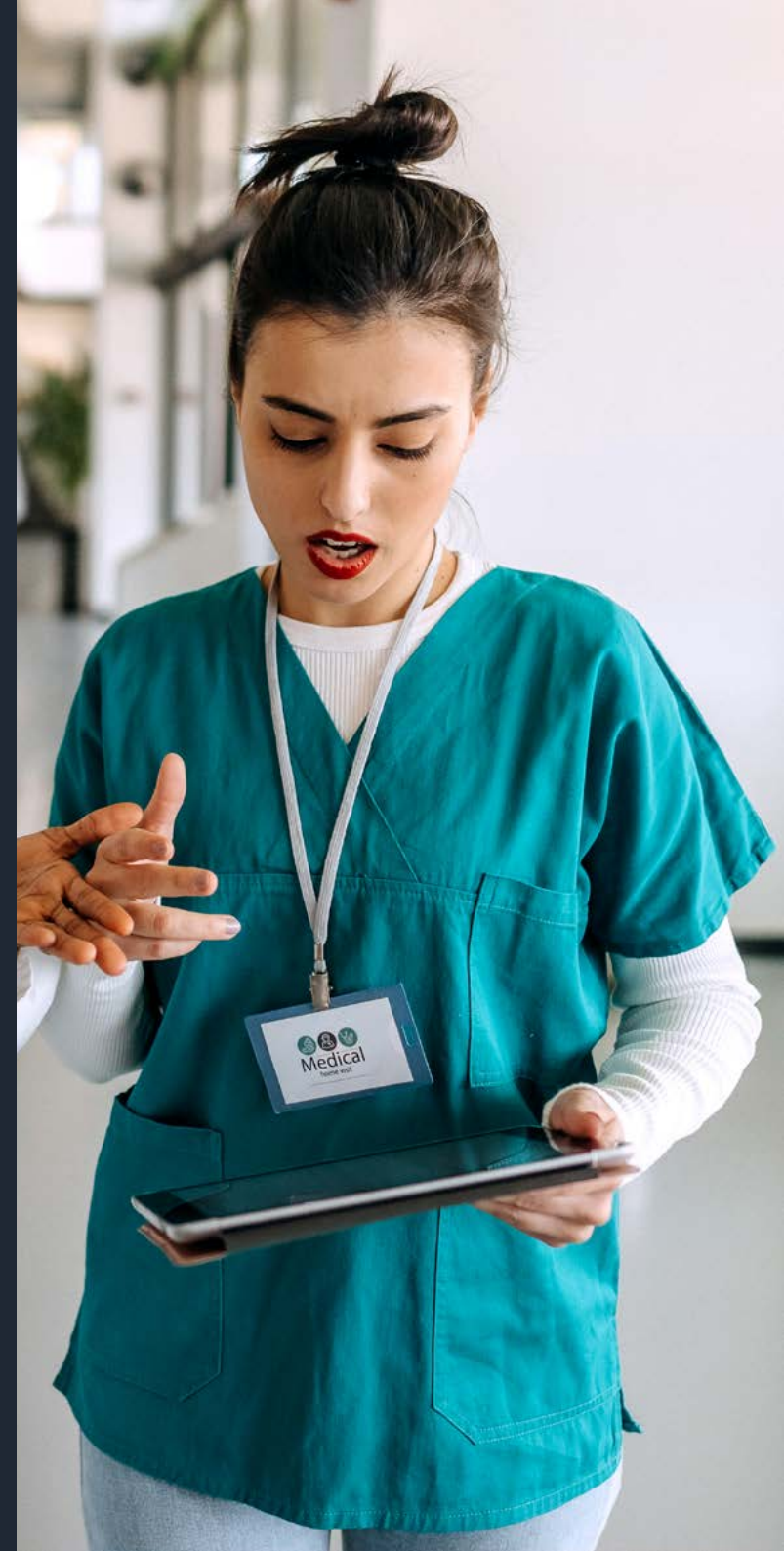


**Health & Social Care**



**Allied Health**

Carers have a clear preference for subjects related to health and social care, and this is likely to be influenced by their personal experiences and skills, or familiarity with these careers. We are pleased applicants feel inspired by their own experiences, but mindful that younger carers may miss out on careers opportunities, such as work experience. As such, we hope new resources in the UCAS Hub, such as [subject tasters](#) and [virtual work experiences](#), will prove valuable to applicants who would benefit from additional help to access such opportunities in a flexible way.



## A COMMENT FROM **CARERS TRUST**

Thanks to the data included in this Snapshot and UCAS' recent Next Steps report we have, for the first time, extensive insights into the decisions, experiences and support needs of applicants who are caring for someone because of illness, disability or addiction.

The latest evidence suggests that around 10 per cent of young adults have caring responsibilities – and UCAS's data suggests that young adult carers are currently significantly under-represented within HE. Universities should ensure that they are providing clear information about the support available to student carers and work with their local carer service to try and remove some of the barriers they face. It is also important to take into account the much more diverse pathways student carers are taking and reflect this in any information and advice.

But most of all, it is vital that universities and colleges now use these findings, along with their individual UCAS application declarations, to review their provision for student carers and ensure all can access the support they need to thrive in HE.

**Andy McGowan**, Policy and Practice Manager  
Carers Trust  
August 2024





## CONCLUDING COMMENT FROM UCAS

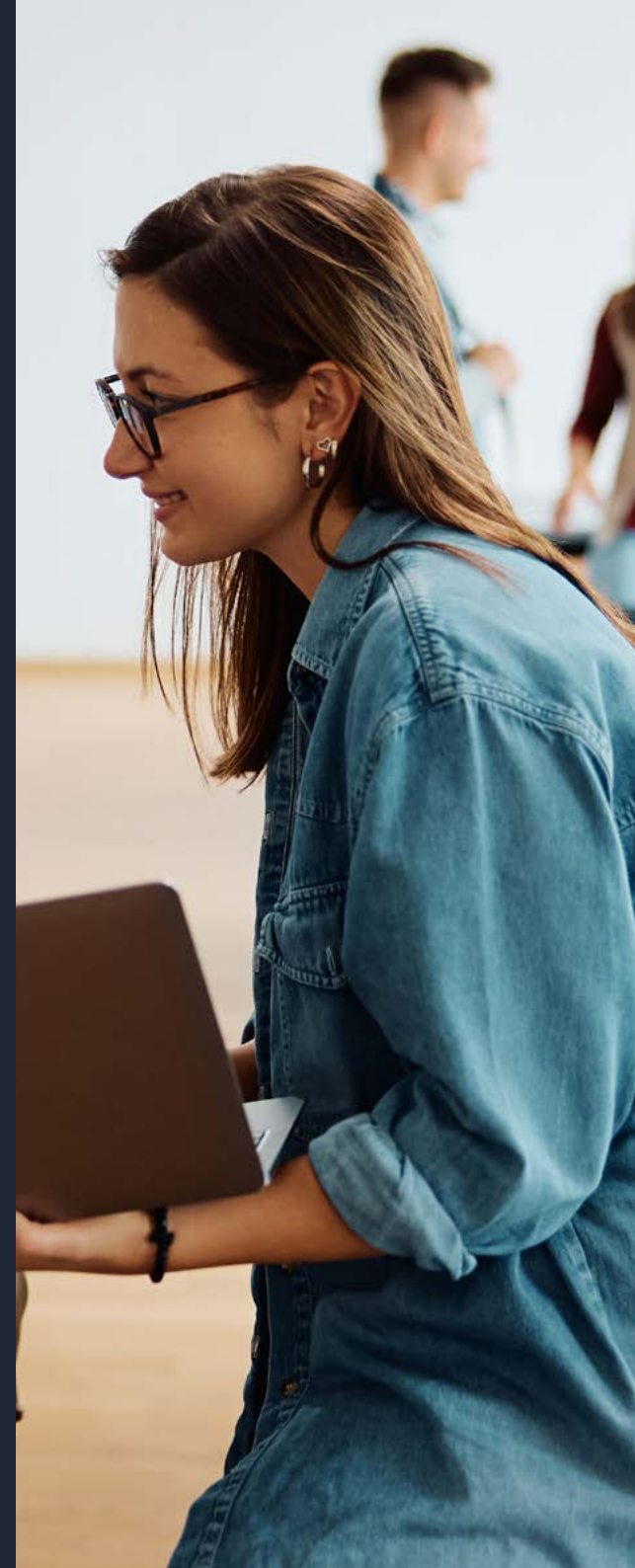
In this first cycle, almost 32,000 applicants felt comfortable to share a caring responsibility on the UCAS application – a strong indication that the messages around sharing individual needs are reaching students as we continue to work towards a culture of positive disclosure. We want all applicants to holistically research the right options for them, understand the benefits of sharing their individual circumstances, and feel confident they will get the support they need to succeed in their application and on their course – and beyond.

**Our new report** exploring the experience of young adult carers certainly goes some way towards better understanding the behaviours of these applicants, and what drives their decisions – and we are delighted to add to the growing evidence base. However, more research is needed to understand the behaviours and motivations of adult carers, the specific challenges they may encounter, and the support they would find useful.

## THE UCAS FAIR ACCESS PROGRAMME

The **Fair Access Programme** aims to add further value to the sector's efforts to widen access and participation. UCAS' data and insights are central to our understanding of how different under-represented and disadvantaged groups progress to HE – and the barriers and challenges they face along the way. This new data will help us to extend our understanding of these groups, identify hidden challenges, and work with the sector to improve their experiences and outcomes.

We recently launched the Outreach Connection Service which will help link students to the diversity of outreach opportunities offered by HE providers and third-sector organisations. Initially, this will be available via the Adviser Hub where teachers can filter the opportunities to find what is best for their students. However, we are already working on making the service available directly to students for a future cycle. Outreach providers can **register their interest** in the OCS now.



# UCAS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Find targeted information and advice for under-represented students on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com):

- ▶ **Student-facing information and advice** – for students with caring responsibilities, including information about finance and funding, other support in HE, and making a UCAS application – including a personal statement guide for carers
- ▶ **Applying to HE with individual needs** – information and advice for a range of circumstances and support needs
- ▶ **Mental health and wellbeing support** – information and advice for all students
- ▶ **Teacher and adviser toolkit** – how to support students with caring responsibilities, from research through to transition
- ▶ **All teacher and adviser toolkits** – for supporting under-represented students from a variety of backgrounds
- ▶ **Good practice briefing for HE providers** – implementing support for students with caring responsibilities following the introduction of the new caring question

