

UCAS

NEXT STEPS:

WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE
OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS
IN EDUCATION?



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FOREWORD



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Quite simply, this landmark report could not be more timely.

We are almost one month into a new UK Government whose aim is to “Break down barriers to opportunity for all.” The findings in this report make it clear that supporting young carers to thrive educationally is a must, if we are to achieve that ambition.

Young carers are finally beginning to receive the attention they deserve, fuelled by new evidence about attendance from the school census in England, plus research into the long-term impacts of caring on the life opportunities of young carers across the UK.

Carers Trust is proud to have supported UCAS with this report, one which helps us to understand both the choices and the support needs of young adult carers applying to university. Its findings reinforce the messages that we have heard from our UK-wide network of local carer organisations for years – that being a young carer has a huge impact on the choices being made. We are part of a research collaboration which has found that young carers are 38% less likely to obtain a university degree than their peers, with those caring for over 35 hours per week a shocking 86% less likely to gain a degree.

This report contains many stark findings, each of which should be a wake-up call to all of us – whether that be young adult carers being 25% less likely to achieve AAB or above at A Level (and 37% less likely to achieve A*AA), or 70% of young carers having concerns about money, or the reality that young adult carers (particularly females), are significantly under-represented in higher education applications – 4% compared with an estimated 10%. These findings together present a clear need to enhance the experience of young adult carers progressing to higher education, with stakeholders ranging from universities, colleges, schools, government and local authorities all having a role to play.

Far too many young adult carers are trying to balance their studies with their caring role without having access to the support that could make a real difference.

To mark Young Carers Action Day 2024, we launched the Young Carers Covenant – a UK-wide commitment to taking action to support a fair future for young carers and young adult carers. Hundreds of individuals, organisations and politicians from across the country have already signed up, pledging their support to bring about change. The findings in this report underline the need for action. So, I call on all colleges, universities and organisations with an interest in higher education and social mobility – will you show your support for young carers by signing and acting on the Young Carers Covenant today?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023 cycle marked a significant change in UCAS' understanding of the way in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds progress to higher education. For the first time, UCAS applicants were able to highlight whether they had caring responsibilities, as part of a new set of widening participation questions where applicants can draw attention to circumstances that they might need support with during their studies. This intervention has the potential not only to transform the experience of young adult carers as they progress to their next steps, but also to radically improve the education and skills sector's insight into the experiences of this cohort.

The 2021 UK-wide data collections across the four nations revealed the significant proportion of young adult carers in each nation – 4.6% in England (aged 18-24), 5.5% in Wales (18-24), and 9% in Scotland (16-24), and 7% in Northern Ireland (16-24)¹. However, the **latest figures** from the Carers Trust suggest official numbers collected in national data sets are an under-representation, and estimate that there at least 376,000 young adult carers in the UK.

Recent research looking at the prevalence of adolescent young carers in the UK after COVID-19 has also indicated that around 10% of 16–18-year-olds have caring responsibilities, equating to two young carers in every classroom. When comparing the statistics around the number of young adult carers in wider society above with the 3.9% of applicants sharing their status in the UCAS application, there is an under-representation of young adult carers progressing to higher education.



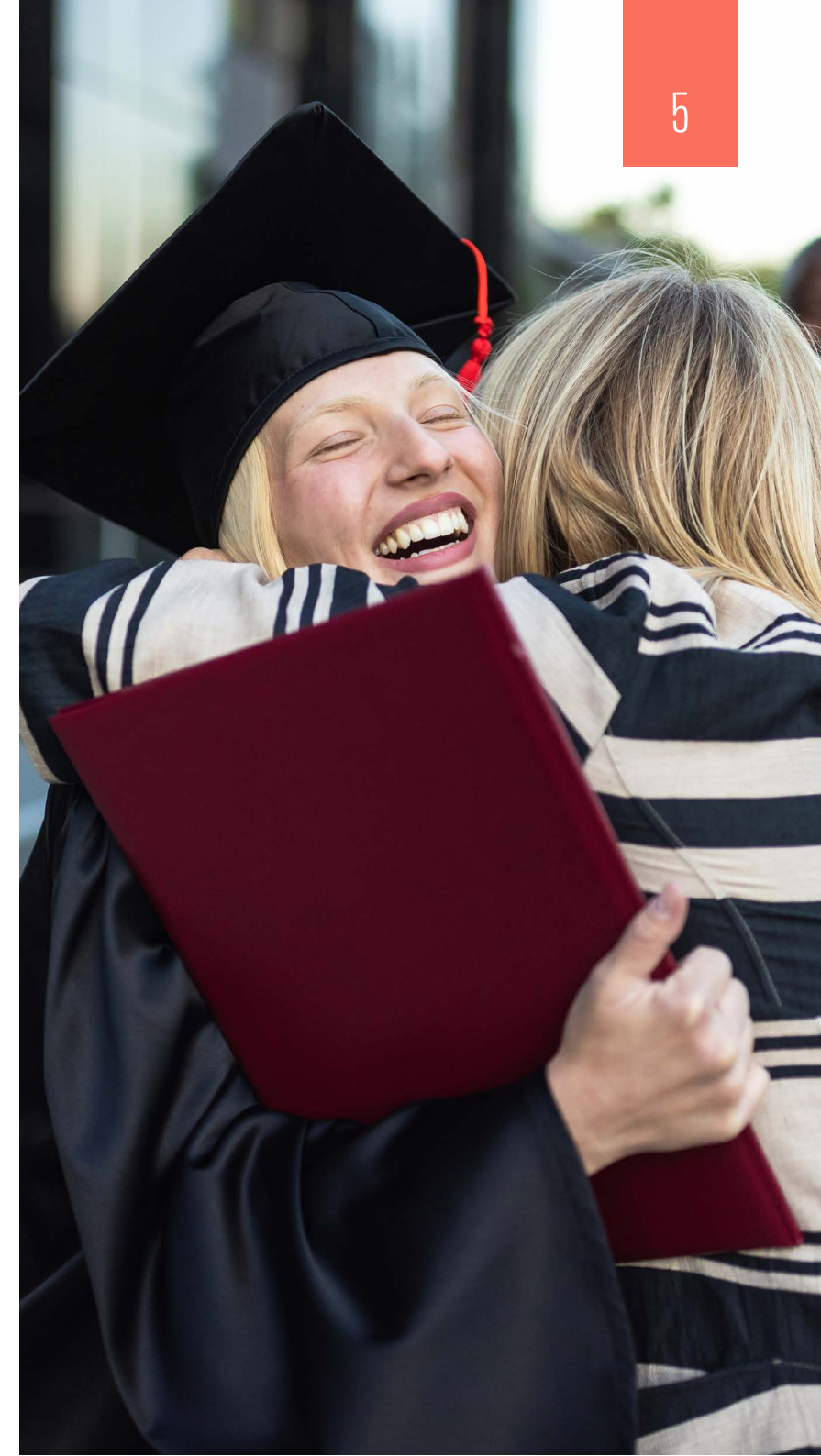
¹ [Unpaid care, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#), [Scottish Health Survey \(shinyapps.io\)](#), [Build or find Census 2021 tables | NISRA Flexible Table Builder](#).

As young adult carers often need additional assistance in accessing and thriving at higher education, the new question can support in identifying young adult carers at an earlier point in their higher education journey, and to support them to make a successful transition. Information gathered from the new question has allowed UCAS to pull key insights from the data collected from the almost 19,000 undergraduate applications received from young adult carers across the UK last year. UCAS finds:

- ▶ **18,915 young adult carers applied to higher education in the 2023 cycle:** representing 3.9% of all applicants. 14,615 were then accepted onto courses at higher education institutions (3.5% of all accepted applicants). 82% of applicants aged under 25 were accepted to higher education providers in 2023, in comparison to 77% of young adult carers.
- ▶ **Female young adult carers are under-represented when applying to higher education:** the proportion of male and female applicant cohorts that have caring responsibilities are similar (4.0% vs 3.9%), challenging a UK-wide trend whereby more female applicants apply to UK higher education (HE).
- ▶ **Young adult carers are more likely than their peers to choose courses which have a caring component:** they are 59% more likely to apply to health and social care courses, and 57% more likely to apply to nursing and midwifery courses

than applicants without caring responsibilities.

- ▶ **Young adult carers prefer to stay closer to home for higher education:** young adult carers are 39% more likely to choose to live at home while they study. 41% choose to study within 30 minutes' drive from home – 25% more likely than those without caring responsibilities.
- ▶ **Challenges faced throughout the educational journey of young adult carers may present additional barriers to access higher tariff institutions:** 24% of young adult carers were placed at higher tariff institutions in 2023, in comparison to 31% of their peers. There is also an attainment gap between young adult carers and their counterparts. Applicants with caring responsibilities are 37% less likely than those without caring responsibilities to achieve A*AA or above, and 25% less likely to achieve AAB or above at A level.
- ▶ **Caring responsibilities start young for many:** a third (32%) of young adult carers assume caring in primary school, with an additional third (29%) beginning in secondary school, providing significant time for this cohort to be identified and supported. However, young adult carers are more likely to apply to higher education as a mature student, meaning that tailored information and support needs to be available once this cohort has left formal education.





UCAS also conducted a survey of 1,155 of the young adult carers from across the UK that made an application, giving unparalleled insight into their educational experiences to date. UCAS finds:

- ▶ **Young adult carers' experiences of support in school or college have been variable:** they feel most supported academically (24%), but least supported with work-related provision.
- ▶ **Young adult carers who apply to higher education care for fewer hours than those who choose not to apply:** the cohort surveyed are most likely to be providing care for 10 to 19 hours per week (28%), closely followed by nine hours or fewer (26%). These students are on average caring fewer hours than other young adult carers when compared with **national datasets**, with 32% of young adult carers in the population caring for 35 hours or more per week, compared to 19% of the respondent cohort. This suggests that those caring for more significant periods per week may need additional support to apply.
- ▶ **Young adult carers are hesitant to share their caring responsibilities with school staff, creating an information gap for this cohort when applying to higher education:** 72% of young adult carers state that they never or rarely spoke to teaching staff about their caring responsibilities, with 71% also never or rarely communicating with support staff, often due to a lack of recognition of their status as a young adult carer or because they do not realise that there is support available in higher education. 63% of young adult carers did not obtain support tailored to their circumstances for applying to HE, rising to 65% for those interested in an apprenticeship. Young adult carers receive information about their next steps from a variety of sources, including family members and local authority advisers, who may not have the most up-to-date information about how to apply to undergraduate HE via UCAS, or what assistance is available to young adult carers.
- ▶ **A substantial majority of young adult carers did not know that support was available when starting their research:** 69% were unaware of the specific support available to young adult carers, and of those that did look to see what support was available, 21% said that it was difficult or extremely difficult to find.
- ▶ **Financial considerations and flexibility in attendance at university or college are key factors in the decision-making of young adult carers:** 70% of young adult carers have concerns about finances, and 63% said that they took being able to balance their studies with part-time work into account when researching their options.
- ▶ **This cohort has high expectations of the student experience overall:** 57% expect to receive good or very good academic support, and 53% expect to receive good or very good health and wellbeing support.

HOW CAN THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS BE IMPROVED?

FIVE WAYS THAT UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES CAN ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS

1. CREATE A CULTURE OF POSITIVE DISCLOSURE AROUND CARING RESPONSIBILITIES TO SUPPORT IDENTIFICATION

Young adult carers are more reluctant to share their status than other widening access groups as they transition to higher education. Universities and colleges should consider:

- ▶ Consistently identifying young adult carers through the UCAS application, and reaching out ahead of enrolment with specific offers of support.
- ▶ Offering **formal procedures** so that young adult carers can inform academic and support staff of their caring role when they arrive.
- ▶ Providing training for all relevant academic and support staff on the challenges faced by young adult carers.
- ▶ Highlighting the intersectionality of young adult carers' identities, as there is a strong overlap between caring and other widening access groups.
- ▶ Calling attention to young adult carers in their outreach materials and open days ahead of application, particularly in student and alumni success stories.
- ▶ Assigning members of staff in university or college who are responsible for raising awareness of, identifying, and supporting young adult carers.
- ▶ Setting up events at induction targeted towards young adult carers which outline support available.
- ▶ Signing up to the **Carers Trust' Young Carers Covenant** to commit to sustained development in this area.
- ▶ For providers in Scotland, signing up to the **Going Further** and **Going Higher** for Student Carers Recognition schemes.





2. UNDERSTAND INTERSECTION BETWEEN FINANCIAL CONCERN AND CARERS, AND OFFER FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Financial considerations ranked highest in terms of concerns that young adult carers had about going to university or college, reflecting the **additional costs** that this cohort frequently face.

Universities and colleges should consider offering and clearly communicating specific packages of financial support for young adult carers, including bursaries and grants to ensure the successful completion of higher education. Young adult carers should be included as a priority group for financial support to attend open days and interviews prior to admission, so that they can be supported equitably to make informed decisions about their future.

3. INCLUDE THE COMPONENTS BELOW AS PART OF ANY YOUNG ADULT CARERS POLICY

Universities and colleges should develop a young adult carers policy which should be communicated to prospective and current students, mindful of the specific risks associated with progression to and successful completion of HE in the Office for Students' **Equality of Risk Register** in England, and the inclusion of young adult carers as priority groups in guidance produced by the **Scottish Funding Council** and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' **Reaching Wider programme**. Up-to-date information about support — including contact details of the support teams, and local external support for carers — should be immediately accessible on university and college websites, and reflected across each institution's communication channels and outreach activities.

They should consider highlighting:

- ▶ Mental health support, mindful of the higher prevalence of mental health conditions amongst this cohort; provision should include initiatives such as access to counselling.
- ▶ Academic support, flexibility with deadlines and extended library or equipment loans.
- ▶ Financial support, including access to bursaries, grants, and hardship funds.
- ▶ Local external support for young adult carers, including links with local carers services.

4. REFINE RECRUITMENT AND ACCESS STRATEGIES TO INCLUDE YOUNG ADULT CARERS, PARTICULARLY THOSE FOCUSED ON LOCAL OUTREACH

With young adult carers 39% more likely to stay at home than their peers without caring responsibilities, the specific needs of young adult carers should be considered by universities and colleges when putting together their plans for recruitment.

Universities and colleges should consider highlighting young adult carers in institutions' widening access and participation plans (Access and Participation Plans in England, Outcomes Agreements in Scotland, Fee and Access Plans in Wales, Widening Access and Participation Plans in Northern Ireland) and incorporating young adult carers and their families into specific outreach activities, particularly those that are targeting prospective students locally. Linking to local carers services and local authorities will help make sure that universities and colleges are aware of the support available.

5. PROVIDE FLEXIBLE TIMETABLING

UCAS' [good practice briefing](#) points to how small accommodations in how provision is delivered, such as supplying a guaranteed window when courses hold their sessions and providing access to online materials and support, have the capacity to transform the university or college experience for young adult carers.



FIVE WAYS THAT SCHOOLS CAN ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS

1. CREATE A CULTURE OF POSITIVE DISCLOSURE AROUND CARING RESPONSIBILITIES TO SUPPORT IDENTIFICATION

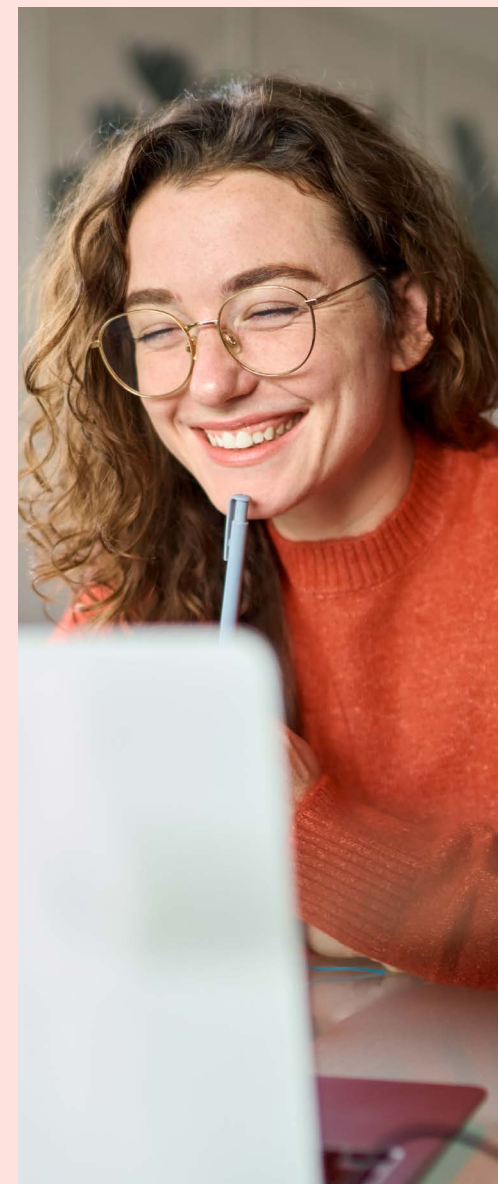
72% of young adult carers surveyed state that they never or rarely spoke to teaching staff about their caring responsibilities. Schools and colleges should consider:

- ▶ Assigning specific members of staff in schools who are responsible for raising awareness of young adult carers and ensuring they are identified and supported across the school.
- ▶ Presenting positive images of young carers and young adult carers and those they care for, particularly in whole school settings.
- ▶ Provide awareness training to staff to identify young carers and young adult carers, particularly the UCAS lead, careers advisers, and those involved with transition to HE to ensure they are aware of the challenges this cohort faces as they progress.
- ▶ Schools in England can undertake the [Young Carers Challenge](#) and engage with the Young Carers in Schools initiative, which provides schools with tailored guidance and the opportunity to achieve accreditation. Schools in Scotland can undertake the [Scotland Young Carers Challenge](#). Schools in Wales can make use of the [free bilingual resources](#) on the Carers Trust website.

2. EARLY ENGAGEMENT CAN AID EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS

Many young adult carers start their caring responsibilities in primary school, when [1 in 3 students](#) start to think about HE.

Effective and early intervention with young adult carers before the age of 16 is needed so that this cohort are aware of all of the options available to them ahead of choosing their Level 3/Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6 options. Several initiatives at UCAS can help with this. [The Outreach Connection Service](#) provides young adult carers and their advisers with access to outreach opportunities tailored to young adult carers and their needs, while [UCAS' partnership with Springpod](#) allows potential applicants to virtually sample university subjects, courses, modules and work experience before they apply. The inclusion of Unibuddy, a newly enhanced and personalised peer-to-peer chat service on the UCAS platform, gives young adult carers the opportunity to be matched with student ambassadors already at a university, and to hear about their experience.



3. GIVE BROAD-BASED INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT YOUNG ADULT CARERS TO THINK EXPANSIVELY ABOUT THEIR FUTURE

Our findings indicate that young adult carers are drawn to courses which have a caring component.

While recognising the value of their experiences to date, teaching, support, and careers staff should ensure that young people have the information and guidance they need to explore all their options. Staff should also not be afraid to challenge assumptions that young adult carers have about their own suitability for roles and pathways which do not involve caring. Alongside relevant widening access resources on the UCAS Hub, such as the [adviser toolkit](#), including UCAS and careers advisers in training about young adult carers will aid understanding.

4. RECORD YOUNG ADULT CARERS THROUGH OFFICIAL MECHANISMS, SUCH AS THE SCHOOLS CENSUSES

The low numbers of young carers and young adult carers recorded in the schools censuses in both [England](#) and [Scotland](#) indicate that there have been barriers to accurate recording which prevents the oversight of young carers and young adult carers and their educational journeys as a whole.

Staff members responsible for young carers and young adult carers should have [strategic responsibility](#) for ensuring that young carers and young adult carers are properly recorded and that key educational metrics such as attendance and attainment/progression are being regularly reviewed alongside other potentially vulnerable groups of pupils.

5. SIGNPOST THE FAMILIES OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS TO RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRESSION TO HE

With 72% of young adult carers indicating that family members have provided information, advice, and guidance to them about applying to higher education, more than any other source, schools need to take a holistic approach to ensure that families are well-equipped to support young people in their next steps.

Directing families to UCAS' [parent, guardian, and carer guide](#), and involving them in discussions about next steps can support the families of young adult carers to give supported guidance about the next steps of young adult carers.



FIVE WAYS THAT UCAS IS ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS

1. CREATING A CULTURE OF POSITIVE DISCLOSURE AROUND CARING RESPONSIBILITIES TO SUPPORT IDENTIFICATION

UCAS recognises how advisers, students, and staff at HE providers involved with supporting students to access higher education should be provided with information on the specific context of young adult carers.

UCAS is committed to doing this through:

- ▶ UCAS' outreach channels, such as the adviser network, and **content** on how to support students applying to university with individual needs.
- ▶ Amplifying messaging to students to further highlight how sharing their caring status in the application can aid universities and colleges to provide them with the support that they need to make a successful transition.
- ▶ Highlighting the experiences of young adult carers applying to higher education through UCAS, particularly around key decision-making points such as the January deadline.
- ▶ Promoting UCAS' **toolkits** which can be used to support advisers, parents and carers to identify whether a student is a young adult carer, and to support them on their journey to higher education, and expert-led student-facing **information, advice and guidance** for those with caring responsibilities.

2. DELIVERING MORE NUANCED CONTENT FROM THE INSIGHTS PROVIDED FROM OUR DATA

UCAS is committed to using the findings from this report and ongoing research to update the content on UCAS.com, sharing its insight widely with its student, provider, and adviser networks, as well as with stakeholders more broadly in the education and skills sector.

3. UTILISING THE OUTREACH CONNECTION SERVICE TO BROADEN THE ASPIRATIONS OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS

Alongside the careers information provided in the **UCAS Hub**, UCAS' information, advice and guidance dashboard, UCAS can direct young adult carers to the **Outreach Connection Service (OCS)** which allows universities, colleges, and third-party providers to display their outreach opportunities. Through its targeting around student characteristics, the OCS offers a less resource-intensive process to locate relevant and inspiring initiatives for young adult carers.

4. PROVIDING 'AT A GLANCE SUPPORT' ON UCAS.COM

UCAS will support the visibility of the support available to young adult carers by editing its provider pages to include an 'at-a-glance' indication of support available for this cohort, which in turn is linked to each provider's own guidance.

5. DEVELOPING UCAS' ONGOING COMMITMENT TO YOUNG ADULT CARERS THROUGH THE YOUNG CARERS COVENANT

The **Young Carers Covenant** is a UK-wide commitment to young carers and young adult carers that sets out key outcomes which young carers and young adult carers have identified as being crucial to improving their lives. In pledging its support, UCAS will demonstrate its responsibility to improving the educational experience of young adult carers, and will use its networks to highlight opportunities for higher education providers to support this group further.

BACKGROUND

This report is published at an important moment in the education and skills sector's understanding of young adult carers and their needs. The status of young carers has been protected by law since the **The Children and Families Act 2014**. The Children and Families Act 2014 defines a young carer as "a person under 18 (5–17) who provides or intends to provide care for another person."² While there is no legal definition, young adult carers are defined in the Working Together to safeguard children statutory guidance as those "aged 16 to 25" who "may have different support needs as they transition to adulthood."³ Variable age ranges have been used within studies to conceptualise young adult carers, but they all recognise the profound effects that having caring responsibilities has for this group as they make key transitions into post-16 education, training and employment.⁴ UCAS acknowledges that for applicants of all ages, being a carer will affect their journey of applying to higher education and/or an apprenticeship. However, for this report, UCAS has chosen to limit its investigation to the age range stipulated above, to appreciate and probe into the specific circumstances of young adult carers.

Providing care for a loved one gives young people important skills, but often places conflicting and unsustainable demands on them if the appropriate support is not in place.⁵ Young adult carers often take on a range of responsibilities, including personal care (washing, dressing, nursing), emotional support (supervising, attending to the recipient's mental health), and instrumental care (housework, administrative tasks).⁶ Critically for this age group, having caring responsibilities can reduce the amount of time that young people have to attend to their studies at this stage in their academic journey.⁷ A recent **report** by the Carers Trust also identifies additional challenges, with 56% of young carers and young adult carers saying that the time they spend caring has increased in the last year, and 40% either 'never' or 'not often' getting help in education to help balance caring and school, college, or university work. The latest **data** from the Department for Education in England indicates that 39% of young carers in 2022-23 were persistent absentees, in comparison to 21% for those who had no young carer status declared.

While few studies have been conducted on the effects of caring on educational achievement for young adult carers, existing evidence demonstrates the notable impact of these responsibilities on their achievement and progression. Young adult carers have been found to have **significantly lower attainment at GCSE level** than their peers. In one nationally representative household panel study conducted over 10 years with more than 27,000 adults, young adult carers (in this study aged 16-29) have also been found to be 36% less likely to gain a university degree in comparison to individuals who did not provide care. It also found that spending more hours caring made it less likely to gain a degree, with those who cared for 35 hours or more per week 86% less likely to achieve the qualification. However, the same study found that having a degree buffered the negative impact of intensive caring on transitioning into employment.⁸ Young adult carers are also at a greater risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET), with the 2023 **Youth Voice Census Report** indicating 23.1% of registered carers and 9.8% of unregistered carers were NEET, compared to 5.3% who were not carers.

² Young carers are also protected in legislation across the UK, including in the **Carers (Scotland) Act 2016**, and the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**.

³ Term originally conceived by Becker and Becker (2008) "Young adult carers in the UK: Experiences, needs and services for carers aged 16-24", [young-carer-transition-report.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#), **Working together to safeguard children**.

⁴ Becker and Sempik (2018) "Young adult carers: the impact of caring on health and education", Dellmann-Jenkins et al. (2000) "Young adult children and grandchildren in primary caregiver roles to older relatives and their service needs", Baowen et al. (2022) "Does providing informal care in young adulthood impact educational attainment and employment? Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study".

⁵ Statutory guidance articulates that "children should not undertake inappropriate or excessive caring roles that may have an impact on their development. A young carer becomes vulnerable when their caring role risks impacting upon their emotional or physical wellbeing and their prospects in education and life": [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ Warren (2007) "Young carers: conventional or exaggerated levels of involvement in domestic and caring tasks?".

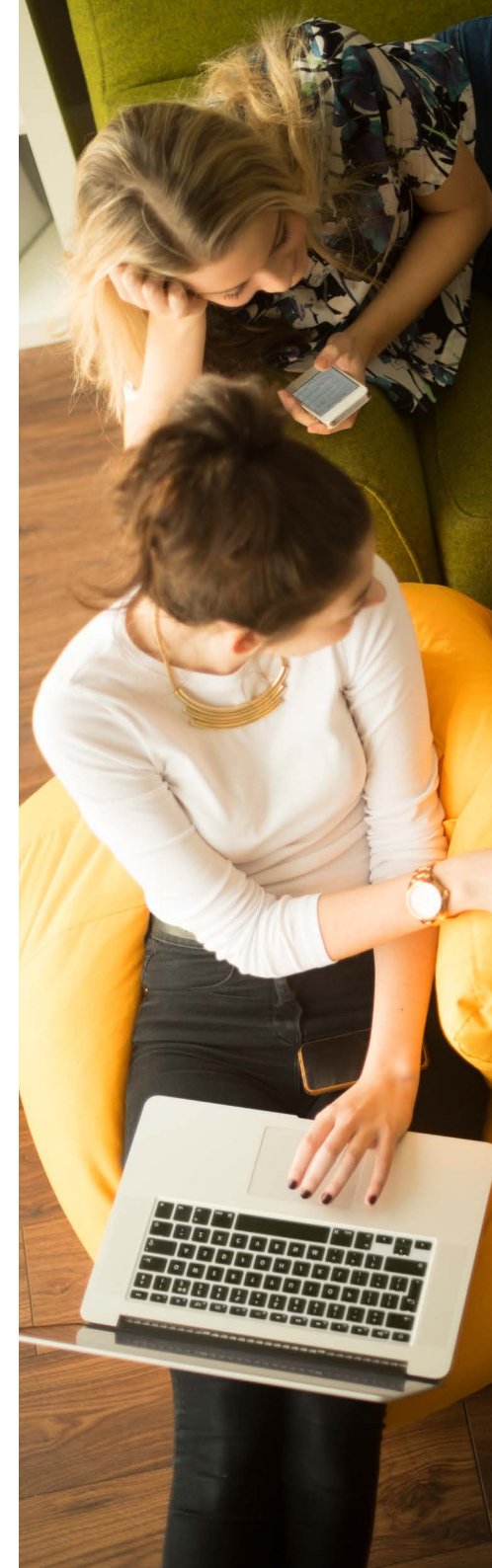
⁷ Day (2015) "Young adult carers: a literature review informing the re-conceptualisation of young adult caregiving in Australia".

⁸ Baowen et al. (2022).

Recent research looking at the prevalence of adolescent young carers in the UK after COVID-19 has revealed that around 10% of 16–18-year-olds have caring responsibilities, equating to 3 young carers in every classroom. However, identifying young adult carers represents a challenge. Any young person can become a carer at any time, but also there is a problem of perception – individuals often do not have the understanding to recognise their status as a carer or to know that support is out there. The absence of large-scale survey data, or administrative data on young adult carers has wide-reaching consequences when considering which student cohorts are recognised as needing support within the higher education landscape. UCAS recognises its role, alongside third-party organisations and academic researchers, in providing an evidence base that illuminates the experiences of young adult carers. However, given the scale of the challenge that young adult carers face, time is of the essence in supporting this group. Young adult carers are highlighted as a priority group in guidance produced by the **Scottish Funding Council**, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' **Reaching Wider programme**, and UCAS welcomes the recent inclusion of young carers in the Office for Students' (OfS) **Equality of Opportunity Risk Register**. However, UCAS also recognises the ongoing awareness raising that needs to be done to raise the profile of this cohort to guarantee that they are included in universities' and colleges' activities. UCAS recommends that young adult carers are included in institutions' widening access and participation plans, incorporated into outreach activities, and that universities and colleges should include questions about caring in enrolment processes.

Recently, steps have been taken to improve the visibility of young adult carers. Alongside the addition of a new question on caring responsibilities to the UCAS application form, 2023 saw the inclusion of young carers in the **schools census** in England. This addition came from a recommendation from **People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform**, the UK government's white paper on the reform of social care, which also promoted the Department of Education's guidance to schools encouraging young carers' access to recovery premium and pupil premium. While this data set has the potential to analyse long-term trends and give much-needed information on educational progression, the data showed that there was significant under-reporting of the number of young carers in schools in the first year. Across England, 53,976 pupils were **recorded** as young carers, representing only 0.6% of the pupil population, and these students were recorded in just 28% of schools. **The Carers Trust report** that if the numbers from those schools were replicated equally across the remaining 72% of schools, then the number of identified young carers would be 192,771 in England. Similarly, the latest number of young carers **recorded** in schools across Scotland is just over 5000, significantly lower than the 30,000 that the Scottish Government recognises.

In June 2023, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Young Carers and Young Adult Carers launched the first ever **inquiry** into life opportunities for young carers. The inquiry collected evidence from over 70 stakeholders and more than 400 young carers and young adult carers, and **found** that on average the waiting time to be identified for support was three years. The APPG denotes a leap forward in terms of the recognition of the needs of young adult carers in UK Government.





SECTION ONE :

HOW DO YOUNG ADULT CARERS PROGRESS TO THEIR NEXT STEP IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SECTION:

- ▶ The proportion of male and female applicant cohorts that have caring responsibilities are similar, challenging a UK-wide trend whereby more female applicants apply to UK HE.
- ▶ Young adult carers are 48% more likely to be Black, 16% more likely to be Asian, and 32% more likely to share an LGBT+ identity than those without caring responsibilities.
- ▶ They are more likely to be from the least advantaged areas (17% vs 12% from POLAR4 quintile 1), and less likely to be from the most advantaged areas (24% vs 31% from POLAR4 quintile 5).
- ▶ Young adult carers are 38% more likely to be mature (over 21) when they apply for higher education, with the number of hours they spend caring increasing as they get older.
- ▶ They are more likely to share a mental health condition in comparison to applicants without caring responsibilities (13% vs 8%), and 47% more likely to share a long-term illness or health condition (3.2% vs 2.2%).
- ▶ The choices that young adult carers make are frequently influenced by their caring status— young adult carers are 59% more likely to apply to health and social care courses, 29% more likely to stay within 30 minutes of home, and 20% more likely to place at a lower tariff provider.

In 2023, the first year where applicants could share if they had caring responsibilities in their UCAS application, 31,815 people with caring responsibilities applied to higher education, representing 5.9% of all UK applicants. Of these, 18,915 were aged under 25, making up 3.9% of UK applicants in this age category. There was some variation between the four nations, with Northern Ireland and Scotland reporting higher proportions of young adult carer applicants (4.1% and 5.1% respectively), than England and Wales (3.8% and 3.6% respectively). As discussed, national datasets indicate a higher proportion of young adult carers in the general population with 4.6% of those aged 18-24 in **England** recorded as having caring responsibilities, 5.5% of those in **Wales**, 9% of those aged 16-24 in **Scotland**, and 7% of 16-24 year olds in **Northern Ireland**. Therefore, UCAS' figures indicate an under-representation of young adult carers applying to higher education across the four nations.

Who are the young adult carers that apply to HE?

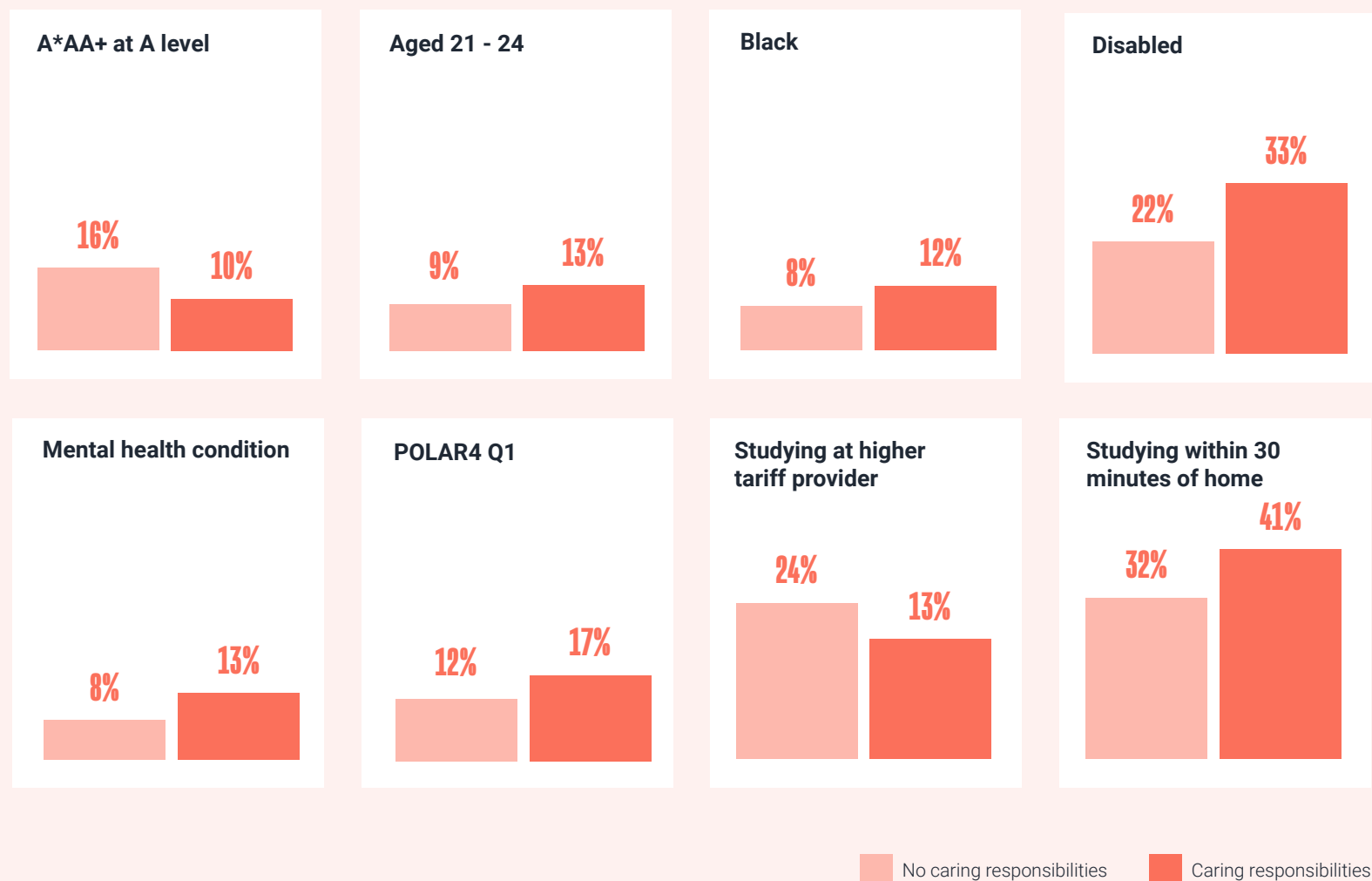


Figure 1: Key differences between young adult carer applicants and their counterparts with no caring responsibilities

STUDENT CASE STUDY: HOLLY, FRENCH AND LINGUISTICS STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



I wanted to go to university for several reasons. At this point, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do after I left school or as a job, so it seemed like a good way to buy me some more time and spend 3/4 years doing something I enjoyed! I knew I really enjoyed French, and had just come across Linguistics, so I really wanted to do further study without committing to a certain career path.

I was applying to university in 2020, and had an online interview. It was hard to juggle everything, particularly as my sister had been quite ill that year and in hospital at various points. I also felt a lot of guilt about applying and moving away - although I'm not the primary carer, I felt a lot of guilt as I was putting more pressure on my Mum by not being around all the time. When I started, I still felt quite conflicted as I was having a really nice time but knew there were still ongoing issues at home, and my sister was also quite ill in my first term. It was hard to get deadlines done on time that particular week!

I was also used to having regular support from a local young carers/young person's charity, but there was no established young carers support at my university. I'm at the end of my second year and a lot more settled now. I find the adjustment between term time and the holidays a bit stressful sometimes - as I am often set a lot of holiday work and find it harder to concentrate at home.

Overall I have loved my time at university. From an academic perspective I will never get over the fact that we regularly get to have our essays read by and talk with world leading experts and people whose names are on our reading lists! Outside of studying, the amount of opportunities I've had has been incredible - I've got to meet some of my heroes, including Billie Jean King, and my friends and I always try a new hobby every term, ranging from yoga to swing dancing to wild swimming! I feel very lucky to have such an enriched life here.

FEMALE YOUNG ADULT CARERS MAY NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

UCAS' findings uncover the intersectionality of young adult carers' identities, indicating the multiple barriers that this cohort faces as they progress to their next steps. Young adult carers are more likely to be women, as reflected in national data sets.⁹ However, UCAS' data indicates that the gender gap in the applicant population is minimal, with 4.0% of female applicants aged under 25 having caring responsibilities, compared to 3.9% of male applicants. With the **application rate** at 48.2% for all female applicants in 2023, 1.3 times higher than for men, these figures further demonstrate the gap that occurs among female carers in higher education. Reflecting other studies which have proposed that greater expectations of care are placed on women from a younger age, UCAS' findings indicate that female young adult carers should be encouraged to see higher education and apprenticeships as a viable option, supported to make aspirational decisions, and helped to make successful transitions.¹⁰ As demonstrated at Figure 2, the gap is particularly pronounced for female applicants from Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, the higher proportion of young adult carers being identified through surveys in these nations also indicates that there could be a greater level of awareness of caring responsibilities and their effects, which could alter these findings.

⁹ **Unpaid care, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)**
Build or find Census 2021 tables | NISRA Flexible Table Builder,
Scottish Health Survey (shinyapps.io).

¹⁰ Baowen et al. (2022).

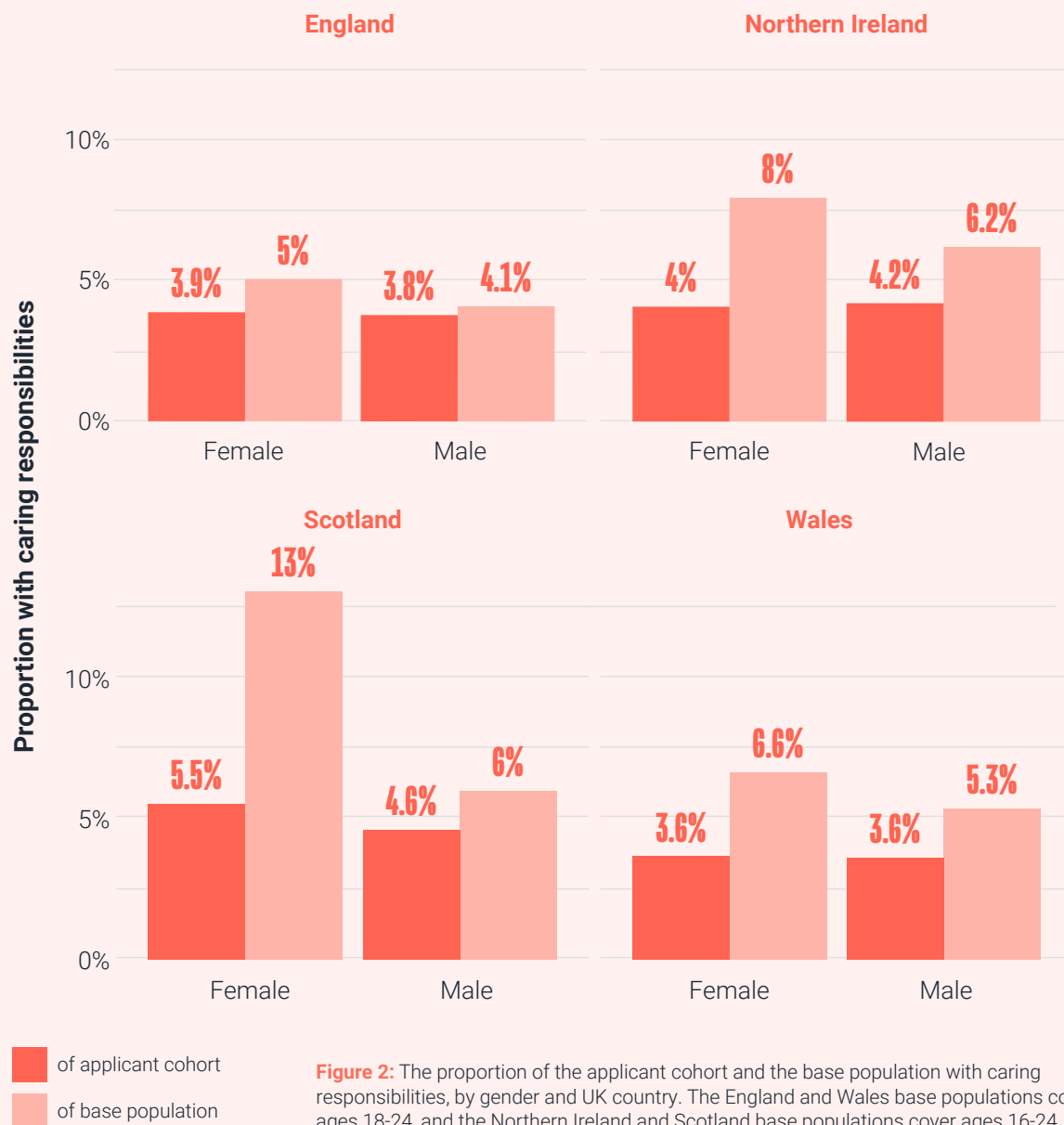
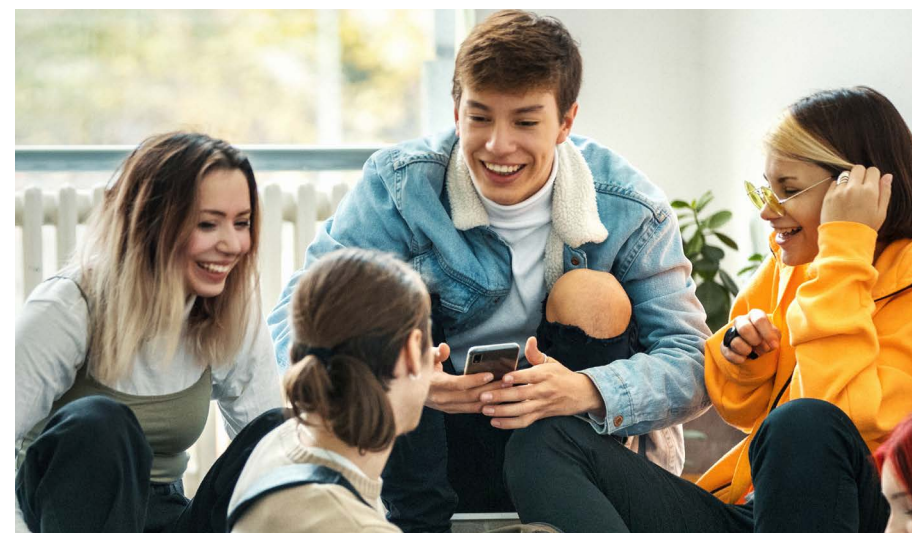


Figure 2: The proportion of the applicant cohort and the base population with caring responsibilities, by gender and UK country. The England and Wales base populations cover ages 18-24, and the Northern Ireland and Scotland base populations cover ages 16-24.

Young adult carers are 48% more likely to be Black than those without caring responsibilities, and 16% more likely to be Asian, echoing previous [research](#) from the Children's Society that young people from these communities are significantly more likely to have caring responsibilities. Young adult carers are also more likely to share an LGBT+ identity than those without caring responsibilities (19% vs 15%).

Young adult carers come from all socioeconomic backgrounds. However, young adult carers were also more likely to be from the least advantaged areas than those without caring responsibilities (17% vs 12% from POLAR4 quintile 1), and less likely to be from the most advantaged backgrounds (24% vs 31% from POLAR4 quintile 5). This resonates with other research which indicates that young adult carers are more likely to come from households where formal or paid-for caring services are not available or accessible to them.¹¹



¹¹ Baowen et al. (2022).

A NON-LINEAR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY MEANS INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE NEEDS TO COME FROM A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT SOURCES AND SERVICES

Young adult carers are 38% more likely to be a mature applicant (aged 21 or over) when they apply to university or college, when comparing to their peers without caring responsibilities. This could be attributed to the levels of caring carried out by different age groups; one third of 18-year-old respondents to the survey were caring for 20 hours or more per week, with this increasing by age until 58% of those aged 21-24 were doing 20 or more hours per week.

Although very little research has been done on the protracted educational journey of young adult carers to date, [research](#) by the Carers Trust highlights the barriers that young adult carers experience once at university or college, with over half of those surveyed experiencing difficulties and 16% concerned that they will have to drop out because of their caring responsibilities. As discussed in Section 2, responses to the survey highlight the conflicting emotions and practical challenges of entering higher education or an apprenticeship as a young adult carer, which may lead to this cohort having a non-linear journey to higher education, mirroring other cohorts examined in UCAS' Next Steps series including those from a [care-experienced background](#). Furthermore, applicants with caring responsibilities are twice as likely to apply with an Access to HE Diploma, and those aged between 21 and 24 are 59% more likely to apply with this qualification, indicating the less traditional routes through education that are taken by this cohort. The education sector therefore needs to consider how support to enter higher education can be extended to this cohort after the age of 18, when many students are out of a school or college setting.

Local authorities and young carers services are potential useful resources to give young adult carers information, advice, and guidance once they are out of a school or college setting. UCAS is currently committed to working collaboratively with these agencies to provide training and direction in order to improve the experience of care-experienced students, and could look to extend this work to young adult carers. The education sector should also reflect on how those with caring responsibilities can be encouraged to access higher education through more flexible routes such as the Access to HE Diploma, and in the future, lifelong learning pathways.

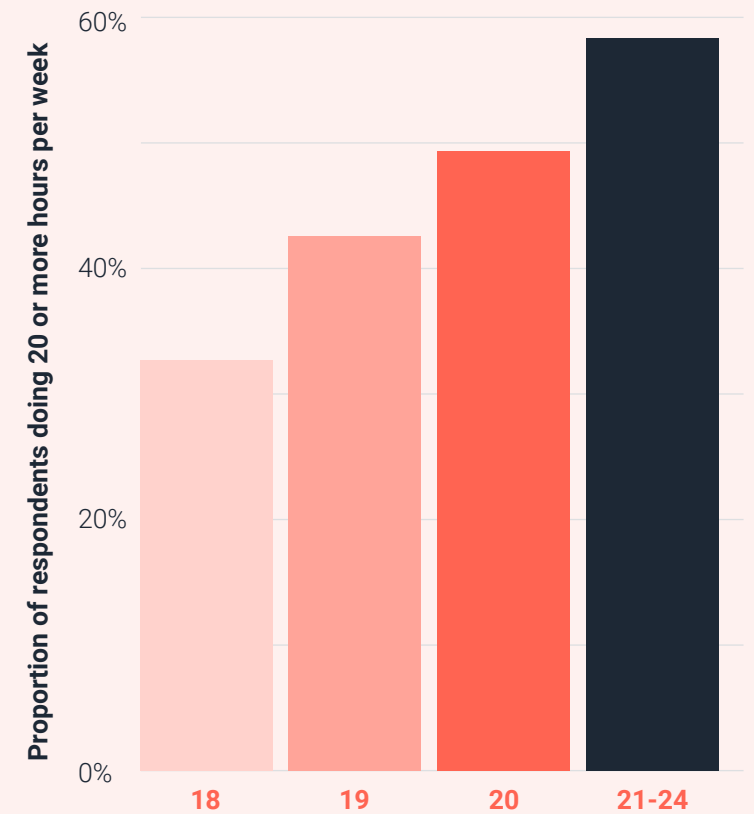


Figure 3: The proportion of survey respondents who have caring responsibilities for 20 or more hours per week, by age group

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IS CRITICAL FOR THIS COHORT

Students with caring responsibilities are much more likely than their peers to share information about a disability and/or mental health condition. Specifically, they are 71% more likely than those without caring responsibilities to share a mental health condition, challenge or disorder (13% vs 8%), and 47% more likely to share a long-term illness or health condition (3.2% vs 2.2%).

While many young adult carers highlighted the rewarding nature of their caring role, these findings echo those from the latest [survey](#) from the Carers Trust: 44% of respondents said that they 'always' or 'usually' feel stressed due to being a young carer or young adult carer, and the organisation has recently called for the mental health and wellbeing needs of young carers and young adult carers to be put at the forefront of local and national planning, so that young adult carers can receive the help and support they need in a timely fashion. In the COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) [study](#), the largest study of its kind into the effects

of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 16/17 year olds surveyed found that those with caring responsibilities were significantly more likely to report psychological distress (50% vs 43%), and more likely to have self-harmed than non-carers (25% vs 17%). The over-representation of young adult carers sharing a mental health condition via UCAS may indicate that these students are experiencing pressures that impact their wellbeing and would therefore benefit from additional support which takes this into account.

Universities, colleges, and apprenticeship providers should therefore be mindful of the high incidence of mental health conditions when communicating with prospective and current students. As articulated in UCAS' [2021 report on student mental health](#), information on how to access mental health support in HE should feature prominently alongside details of financial and accommodation support for prospective students.

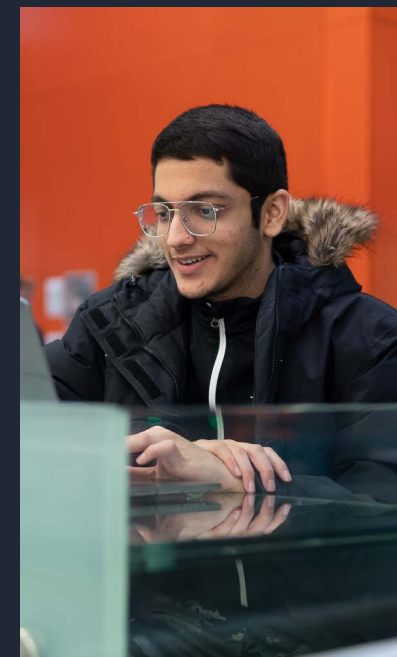
CHARITY CASE STUDY: MYTIME YOUNG CARERS EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME

The [MYTIME Young Carers Employability Programme](#) empowers young adult carers aged 14-25 with essential tools for education, training, and employment. Operating both online and in-person, collaborating extensively with local schools, participants engage in interactive sessions over eight weeks, guided by career advisors, mapping futures and setting achievable goals.

The nurturing environment fosters self-recognition of unique skills and provides sustained support, including annual check-ins and assistance with applications and interviews until age 26.

A compelling example demonstrating the programme's power involves a young adult on the verge of abandoning university due to caregiving responsibilities. MYTIME intervened, liaising with the university and providing unwavering guidance to the young carer throughout his first year. This intervention transformed his journey – and he has just successfully completed his second year at university. Without MYTIME's support, his path would have diverged significantly.

Young carers that have received support via the Employability Programme have said they feel more empowered to follow their goals and are now able to articulate how their caregiving skills can be valuable assets.



CARING TENDENCIES COME OUT STRONGLY IN COURSE CHOICES

As explored in the other reports in UCAS' Next Steps series, past experiences play a significant role when it comes to deciding what course to pursue.¹² Young adult carers are 59% more likely to apply to health and social care courses (2.3% vs 1.5%) and 57% more likely to apply to nursing and midwifery courses (6.9% vs 4.4%) than applicants without caring responsibilities. Pharmacology, toxicology and pharmacy, medicine and dentistry and medical sciences are also top subjects for these students in comparison to their peers.

While appreciating that the transferable skills that young adult carers gain as part of their caring role can be put to productive use in their higher education pathway, UCAS is mindful that this may suggest these students have lower access to a wide variety of career paths and subject choices. This situation is compounded by the ability of young adult carers to take up work experience or internships given the restrictions on their time and availability, and in some cases, not having access to networks who can offer a broader introduction to different careers and subject areas. The Carers Trust **recommends** that schools and colleges should provide a balanced perspective of courses and subjects, and inspire young adult carers to think broadly about their next steps. This requires those that may be offering additional support on next steps to higher education, such as UCAS or careers advisers, to be aware of their individual circumstances. This is

particularly challenging given the hesitancy of many young adult carers to share their caring responsibilities with those in the broader school community, as indicated in the survey results and which will be discussed in the following section. A wider recognition of young adult carers in each school and college setting, as developed by organisations such as **MYTIME Young Carers** (see **case study**), is vital for ensuring that each individual is receiving appropriate information, advice and guidance, tailored to their needs. Once a young adult carer feels comfortable sharing their circumstances with an adviser, UCAS' **Outreach Connection Service** (OCS) can also play a critical role. The OCS provides an opportunity for universities, colleges, and third-party providers to showcase their outreach opportunities, which can allow young adult carers to engage with relevant activities that can increase their understanding of available trajectories. Currently available via the UCAS Adviser Hub, the OCS will be available directly to students in a future cycle.

Having had or continuing to have caring responsibilities at home while studying in higher education can impact the choices that young adult carers make. Young adult carers are 33% more likely to choose to live at home while they study. When looking at the distance from home of young adult carers' accepted university or college choices, 41% are within 30 minutes' drive from

home, making them 29% more likely than applicants without caring responsibilities to stay within this radius to study. As supported by findings from the survey, proximity to home is an important factor in the decision-making process for young adult carers as they choose their higher education provider.

There was limited evidence on a structural level, however, that young adult carers were applying to universities and colleges below their attainment profile due to their proximity to home. Overall, there is an attainment gap between young adult carers and their counterparts, with applicants with caring responsibilities being 37% less likely than those without caring responsibilities to achieve A*AA or above, and 25% less likely to achieve AAB or above at A level.¹³ While the motivations for young adult carers to study at specific institutions will be, as with all student cohorts, varied, there is a gap in terms of placement at higher tariff providers which suggests that some young adult carers are limited in their choices by their attainment profiles — only 24% are placed at higher tariff providers, compared to 31% of students without caring responsibilities. 42% of young adult carers are placed at lower tariff providers, in comparison to the 35% of their peers without caring responsibilities. Universities and colleges may want to consider contextual admissions when considering the progression of this cohort.

¹² **Next Steps: Who are the 'future nurses'?**
Next Steps: What is the experience of disabled students in education?
Next Steps: What is the experience of students from a care background in education?

¹³ 18-year-old applicants with at least three A levels.



SECTION TWO:

WHAT EXPERIENCES DO YOUNG ADULT CARERS HAVE IN SCHOOL OR COLLEGE?

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SECTION:

- ▶ 32% of young adult carers assume their caring responsibilities in primary school, with 29% starting to care in secondary school.
- ▶ Young adult carers feel relatively well supported academically (24% felt supported, 28% neutral), and with regards to health and wellbeing (21% felt supported, 29% neutral).
- ▶ They are reluctant to share their caring responsibilities with staff at school, with 72% stating they never or rarely spoke to teaching staff about this.
- ▶ 63% received no guidance relating to their status as a young adult carer when making their application to higher education, rising to 65% for those who were interested in an apprenticeship.
- ▶ 16% of young adult carers receive information, advice and guidance about their next steps from local authority advisers or other support workers, and 15% from their local young carers service.
- ▶ Just under two thirds (69%) of young adult carers were unaware of the support available to them at university or college. 21% of those that were aware said that this information was difficult or extremely difficult to find.
- ▶ A majority of young adult carers (63%) plan to work alongside studying, with flexible timetabling a significant issue for them.
- ▶ 57% expect to receive good or very good academic support while at university or college, and 53% expecting to receive good or very good health and wellbeing support.

CARING RESPONSIBILITIES BEGIN FROM AN EARLY AGE, PROVIDING AMPLE TIME FOR INTERVENTION

Students identify that the academic support they received at school or college was strongest (24% felt supported, 28% neutral and 39% unsupported), closely followed by health and wellbeing support (21% felt supported, 29% neutral, and 41% unsupported). The area where young adult carers felt that they received the least support was work-related (support to find paid work or work experience which fits around their circumstances) with 45% feeling unsupported.

Around a third (32%) of young adult carers first assume their caring responsibilities in primary school, with a further third assuming these in secondary school (29%). There is substantial **evidence** to suggest that young adult carers often face multiple challenges at school, as they struggle to balance their education with their caring responsibilities — affecting educational attainment due to missing classes, or having less time to study whilst at home. Students are most likely to be providing care for 10 to 19 hours per week (28%), closely followed by nine hours or fewer (26%). In comparison to the England and Wales **census**, these students are on average caring fewer hours than other young adult carers, with 32% of young adult carers in the population caring for 35 hours or more per week, compared to 19% of the respondent cohort, suggesting that those who choose to apply to higher education are enacting less care than those who choose not to.

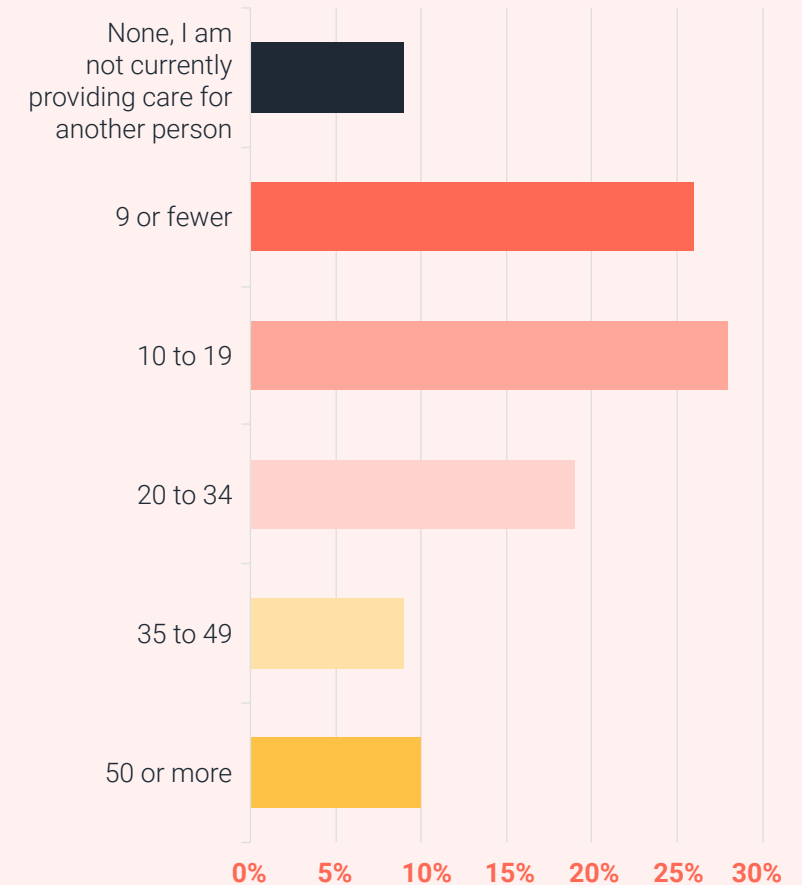
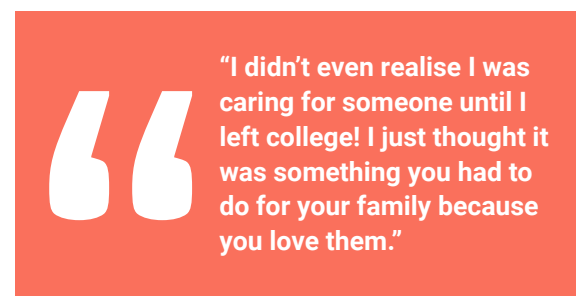


Figure 4: Responses to the question "On average, how many hours per week do you currently provide care for another person?"

This means that young adult carers both spend a significant amount of time caring per week, but also have their educational journey affected for a number of years. In fact, as demonstrated in Figure 5, those who have been caring for the longest have built up more hours of responsibility per week, so the effects on their education have increased as time goes on. This is evidenced by the A level attainment of the 18-year-old respondents to this question; those not currently caring have an average attainment of 12 points (equivalent to BBB). This attainment profile decreases as time caring increases, down to 10 points (equivalent to CCC) for those doing 50 hours or more.

There are some disparities in the number of hours spent caring per week among different demographics, for example, 38% of respondents from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR4 quintile 1) spend at least 20 hours per week caring, compared to 27% of those from the least disadvantaged areas (quintile 5). As mentioned previously, there is a significant gender gap among young adult carers, which is further demonstrated by the fact that 43% of women spend at least 20 hours per week caring, compared to 32% of men.

In addition to this, some young adult carers discussed how they failed to identify their own responsibilities as carers:



Many young adult carers face significant disruption even before their application to higher education. However, the prolonged amount of time that individuals have already been caring offers several points along the journey for them to be formally identified as young adult carers, which has been highlighted as good practice in the Carers Trust's practical **guidance** to help young adult carers access and succeed in higher education.

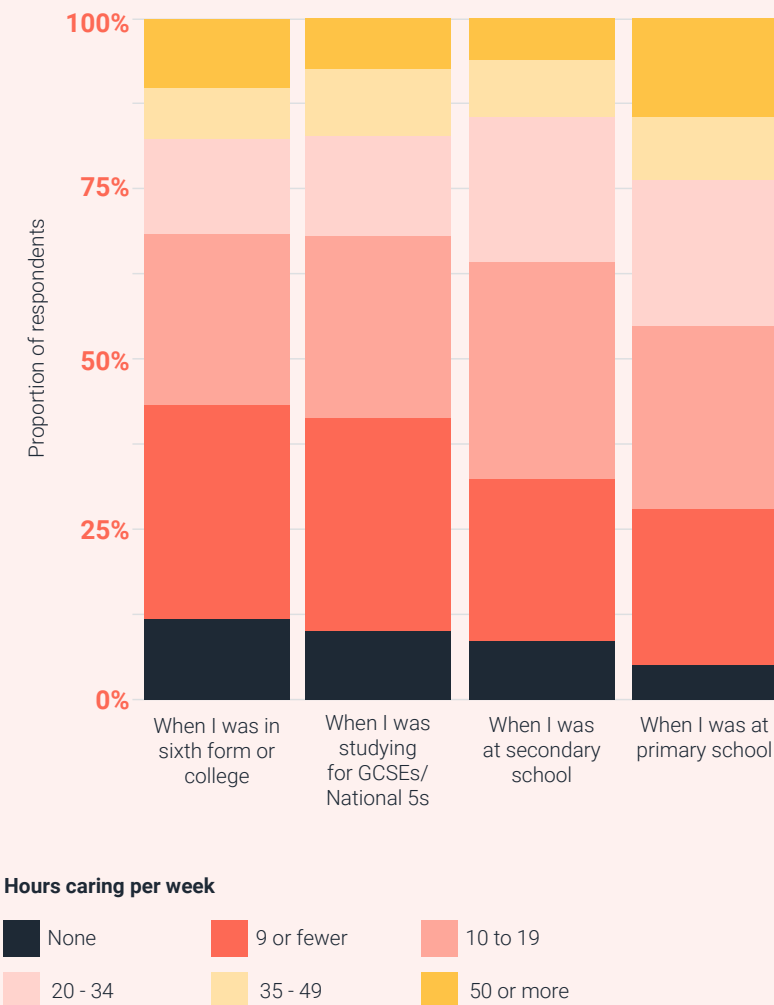


Figure 5: Split of number of hours caring per week by the age at which they started caring, excluding those who started caring after sixth form or college.

WHO SUPPORTS YOUNG ADULT CARERS SEEKING INFORMATION ON PROGRESSION TO HE?

FORMAL IDENTIFICATION CAN HELP YOUNG ADULT CARERS TO GET THE RIGHT SUPPORT IN PLACE, BUT THERE ARE BARRIERS TO SHARING

One of the central themes of the survey was a reticence by many young adult carers to share their experience with those at school. 72% of respondents state that they “never” or “rarely” spoke to teaching staff about their caring responsibilities, with 71% also “never” or “rarely” communicating with support staff.

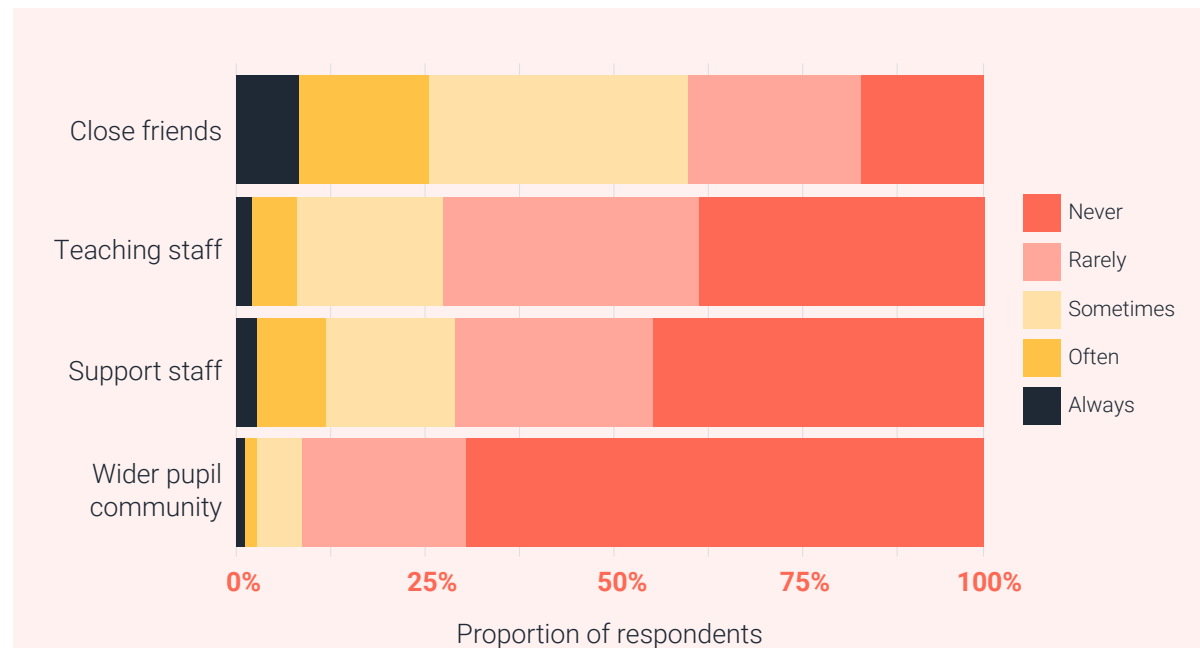


Figure 6: Responses to the question “Thinking about your time at school or college, how often have you talked about your experience of being a young adult carer with the following groups?”





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SOME RESPONDENTS ELABORATED ON THEIR REASONS FOR RELUCTANCE:

“People didn’t understand it, so it was hard to talk about. Tutors or employers wouldn’t understand it if I was late or had to leave the room to make a call to the doctors on behalf of my parent.”

“I have felt in the past that schools that don’t acknowledge this kind of responsibility don’t realise how it can affect a student and their learning. Sometimes it is more difficult to find the time to do very simple tasks due to not only the time it takes to be a young adult carer, but also the mental energy as it’s not always easy.”

HOWEVER, SOME YOUNG ADULT CARERS POINTED TO HOW OPENING UP HAS HELPED THEM:

“I published a blog about being a young carer with the centre for mental health and shared it on social media so had some conversations with people at school about this. It was also sent to some of my teachers which prompted further discussions.”

“I had weekly counselling and a member of a young carers organisation would come in to speak to me once a month giving me access to groups to meet other young carers.”

Young adult carers face significant barriers when accessing specialist support to transition into higher education and apprenticeships. A reluctance to share their status as a young adult carer can prevent students from accessing the support they need. To help students with caring responsibilities to make informed decisions which account for their responsibilities, UCAS – working alongside those more broadly within the sector – must work in highlighting how creating a culture of ‘positive disclosure’ can create better outcomes for young adult carers. The Carers Trust **recommends** that all schools, colleges, and universities appoint a Young Carers Lead/Student Carers Lead who has strategic responsibility and oversight for identifying and implementing appropriate support for young carers and young adult carers. In an initiative rolled out by the Welsh Government, local authorities in Wales, and Carers Trust Wales, all young carers under the age of 18 can access a **Young Carers ID card**. This helps young carers to be properly identified and receive appropriate support from the professionals they may come across in their caring role, including teachers, pharmacists, and doctors. UCAS recognises the need for all staff who are involved with supporting students to access higher education to understand about the specific context of young adult carers, and are committed to doing this both through its adviser network, and through resources such as the **UCAS Hub**, and **content** on how to support students applying to university with individual needs.

SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON APPLYING TO HE AS A YOUNG ADULT CARER COULD BE IMPROVED

As indicated in Figure 7, young adult carers seek advice from a range of in-school professionals when applying to university or college.

However, almost two thirds (63%) of young adult carers did not receive any guidance at school or college about applying to HE specific to their status as a student with caring responsibilities. This challenge is exacerbated by the reluctance, articulated above, of many young adult carers to share their status as a carer. In addition to this, for the 13% of students that were planning to apply for an apprenticeship alongside their undergraduate degree, only 20% had been offered any specific support around applying to an apprenticeship as a young adult carer. Young adult carers expressed the same level of interest in apprenticeships as those without caring responsibilities. With 1 in 3 young people not receiving any **information** about apprenticeships in school, young adult carers may face significant obstacles in receiving the support they need in this area.

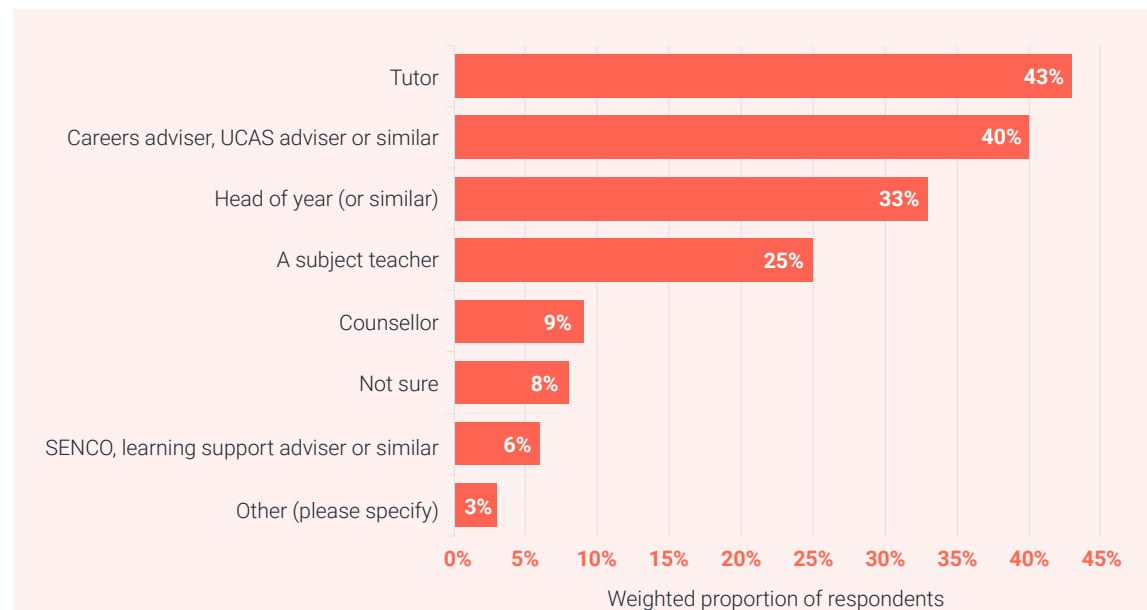


Figure 7: Responses to the question “Who at school or college helped you apply to university or college as a young adult carer? Tick all that apply.”

STUDENT CASE STUDY: AYMEN, APPRENTICE AT UCL EMPLOYER MULTIVERSE APPRENTICESHIP PROVIDER

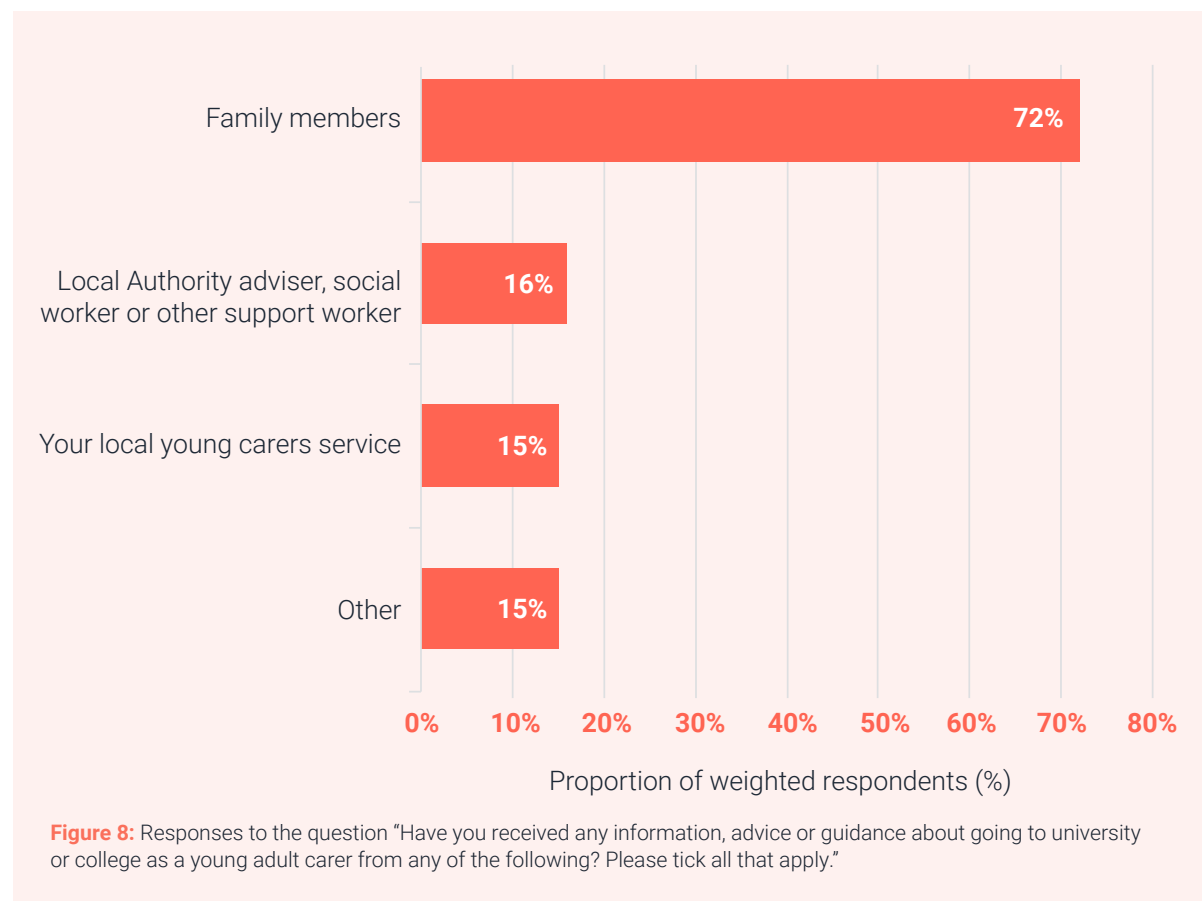


I’ve always wanted to embark upon the apprenticeship route. As someone with ADHD, doing something practical suits me. I wanted to learn and earn, gain valuable experience, and a credible qualification. I found that as a young adult unpaid carer, an apprenticeship works for you and around you, rather than say a university degree, where you can end up working around the university’s timetable.

Being a young carer for my dad, who suffers from poor mental health, has been challenging. Disclosing this information at interviews before my current employer, seemed to have put employers off, as they thought I was not 100% invested in terms of career, and things might come up that may divert my attention. However, my current employer showed admiration towards my status as a carer, as they appreciate the responsibility for me caring for my dad. I really appreciated the flexibility of the apprenticeship – throughout my placement I have been able to work from home for specific periods. My employer also offers 5 paid caring days a year off, and are understanding. They have also given me the opportunity to attend a few in person meetings a year, as a result of my role as co-chair of the youth advisory panel at the Carers Trust.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE: HOW DO YOUNG ADULT CARERS RESEARCH THEIR CHOICES, AND WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM?

YOUNG ADULTS RECEIVE INFORMATION FROM A MULTITUDE OF SOURCES, ALL OF WHICH NEED TO BE WELL INFORMED



As indicated in Figure 8, young adult carers seek advice and guidance from multiple sources when considering their options for HE, including family members. Throughout the survey, many young adult carers expressed the feelings of conflict and guilt that they had between pursuing their higher education pathway, and their caring responsibilities. Given that family members are a key source of support for young adult carers as they make their next steps, it is critical that young adult carers can access informed and neutral sources of support. Each local authority in England should carry out a **transition assessment**, which allows young adult carers to seek support from the local authority about their steps into adulthood. These meetings, alongside similar touchpoints such as the **carer's needs assessment** in Wales, the **young carer's needs assessment** in Northern Ireland and the **young carer statement** and **adult carer support plan** in Scotland, represent a chance for young carers and young adult carers to receive rigorous, well-informed information and guidance. For UCAS and the wider sector, it is necessary to think broadly about the category of 'adviser' when planning how to support young adult carers to make the right decision for them.

As articulated in UCAS' **report** on care-experienced students, there is value in extending the range of 'advisers' that the charity works with, including personal advisers at the local authority, and virtual schools. To support young adult carers, UCAS intends to extend its work in this space to include the needs of young adult carers when developing new resources and training opportunities, including those in local carer services.

YOUNG ADULT CARERS ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE AT UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE WHEN RESEARCHING THEIR OPTIONS

Reflecting a general absence of recognition surrounding young adult carers and their needs, 69% of applicants were unaware that there was any support in higher education available for them before they started their research. Of those that did know there was support available, just under half (49%) found out from a teacher or member of staff in school or college, 42% found information on UCAS' website/social media channels, and 42% on university or college websites. Just under a quarter of those (24%) said they did not research the support offered to young adult carers by universities and colleges, with 21% saying that it was difficult or extremely difficult to find. UCAS is also mindful that the survey has been responded to by applicants who ultimately chose to apply to higher education or an apprenticeship, and does not cover those who chose not to apply because they were not aware of the support available. In the free text responses, applicants point to the variability between different educational institutions, and a lack of specific support available:

“

“It was easy to find info about student services and wellbeing but anything specific to young adult carers was quite difficult and was often not on the universities’ websites (that I could find).”

“More information was available on the UCAS website than at specific uni websites. On contact each uni stated they would consider specifics and needs on a case-by-case basis but had no specific guidelines or approaches.”

“The level of information available differs based on the university.”

The survey was run in February 2023, a relatively early point in the UCAS cycle when universities and colleges are still responding to offers, as most students complete their applications in January. Even so, only 33% of applicants had been contacted by any of their chosen universities or colleges about their support and policies for carers. More needs to be done to highlight the provision that is available for young carers prior to and during the application process, to guarantee that students are aware of the initiatives available to support them.

There was a variation between different nations about the level of awareness of the support available to young carers, with 18% of English respondents reporting they knew about specific support before they started their application or research, compared to 26% of Scottish respondents. The level of awareness in Scotland may be driven by the specific initiatives currently in operation to raise visibility of young adult carers.



INITIATIVE CASE STUDY: GOING HIGHER AND GOING FURTHER FOR STUDENT CARERS RECOGNITION SCHEMES

In Scotland, the **Going Higher** award, aimed at universities, and **Going Further** award, aimed at further education (FE) colleges, were established in March 2019 to create a framework of support across FE and HE in Scotland to increase opportunities for student carers to enter and sustain education on the same basis as their peers. It was intended not only to elevate the level of support for student carers in specific institutions, but to create a recognised standard of good practice across the sector. Alongside this, the Scottish sector also developed an online model for academic and support staff called **Carer Aware at University**, hosted by Open University Scotland, and **Supporting Student Carers at College**, hosted and co-produced by the College Development Network. This awareness raising has led to an improvement of the support offered to young adult carers, for example in the contextual admissions policy of some Scottish universities and colleges.



On a UK-wide level, UCAS can play a strategic role in providing tailored information, advice and guidance to young carers and those that support them, particularly through the **UCAS Hub**, which is being developed to personalise to different student contexts.

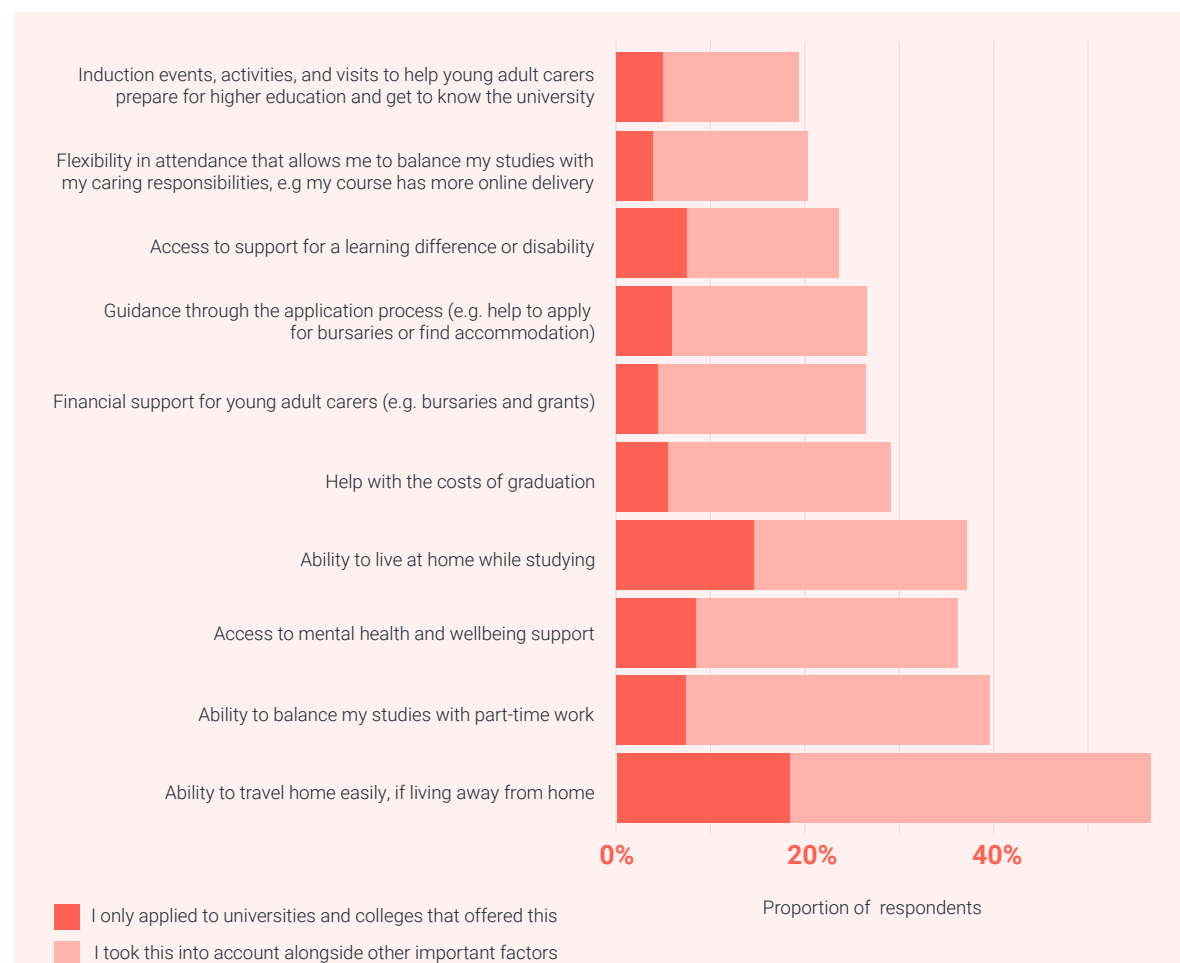


Figure 9: Top 10 most influential factors in decision making. Responses of "I only applied to universities and colleges that offered this" and "I took this into account alongside other important factors" to the question "As a young adult carer, how much did the following factors influence your decisions when you were researching your options?"

8% of young adult carers indicate that their caring responsibilities are the most important factor in their decision making about their next steps, with 29% saying that it had a large influence on their decision, and 46% saying that while it had some influence, there were other more important factors. These results are promising, given the disruption to education that young adult carers face. When asked about which factors influenced their decision of university or college when researching their options, a significant proportion of students who gave additional information reveal that they were not aware that support was available for young adult carers at university. One response recaps:

“

“Honestly, I didn't even realise most of those factors were a thing! I wish I had researched them now before applying, could've made things much less stressful.”



YOUNG ADULT CARERS WANT THEIR CONTEXT TO BE UNDERSTOOD

Flexibility in attendance, the ability to travel home easily, or to live at home whilst studying rank as some of the most important issues for young adult carers when considering their future. Even for those whose caring role may change or diminish as they move away for university or college, young adult carers still value the option to be able to respond to situations at home quickly. As discussed in Section 1, access to mental health support was also noteworthy, with young adult carers 76% more likely than those without caring responsibilities to share a mental health condition.

PROVIDER CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND

The UWS WeCare Team support students who are young adult carers, from pre-entry through to graduation. The team work to identify students pre-entry, and to notify them of the support available. Students declare their status through their application or self-declare to the team who then make students aware of the support available and offer transition support and events, as well as one-to-one appointments. This is also promoted clearly on the [UWS website](#) and by all student recruitment staff and academic staff who are meeting potential applicants.

The UWS WeCare Team liaises closely with the Student Services teams including Academic Skills, Disability Services, Counselling and Health and Well Being, Accommodation and Funding and Advice teams to ensure that young adult carers get the right support and advice that they require to help them to achieve their studies. The UWS WeCare Team also works closely with local carers organisations within local communities to support young adult carers and provides links to these organisations for students as well as working with them pre-entry to support students coming into the university. UWS also works closely with Carers Trust Scotland and was proud to be awarded the Going Higher for Student Carers in Scotland Award for Higher Education Institutions in March 2021. This involved a comprehensive review of processes that the university had in place and submitting documentation and evidence of the work that UWS was doing to support young adult carers across the university.



Financial considerations are also significant, with 44% of students saying that financial support (for example, bursaries and grants) for young adult carers are influential in their decision-making, and 63% disclosing that they took being able to balance their studies with part-time work into account when researching their options. In a survey to 2023 cycle applicants, 56% of applicants reported that they were considering getting a part-time job whilst at university.¹⁴ In their latest [survey](#) of young carers and young adult carers, the Carers Trust highlight the additional costs that young people with caring responsibilities often face, for example, to pay for medical equipment or because of the inability of adults in the house to work, with 56% stating that the cost-of-living crisis is either 'always' or 'usually' affecting them and their family.

UCAS recognises the need to level the playing field so that a young person's financial circumstances do not prevent them from accessing their future. In the case of young adult carers, there is a divergence between the four nations around what financial support young adult carers can receive whilst studying full time. This is particularly critical at the 16-18 stage, when young adult carers make the transition into higher education.

Young adult carers in Scotland aged 16-18 can also access the [Young Carer Grant](#), a yearly payment available to those who care for an average of 16 hours a week. The Scottish government has recently launched the [Carers Support Payment](#), which will extend financial assistance to those aged 16 to 19 and studying in full-time advanced education, and those 20 or over and studying full-time at any level of education. Across the border in Northern Ireland, once aged over 18 and in higher education students can access the [Adults Dependant Grant](#) in addition to their student loan which can provide up to £2,695 a year. In England and Wales, young adult carers are [ineligible](#) for any kind of financial support, notably Carer's Allowance, if they are in full time education (over 21 hours per week). Young adult carers are also not [defined](#) as a vulnerable group in the 16 to 19 bursary scheme, and therefore cannot receive support unless individual colleges decide to extend their existing funding to include young adult carers.

PROVIDER CASE STUDY: THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

[Carers scholarships](#) have been specially created to offer carers a chance to study, develop their sense of identity outside of caring and retrain towards seeking new employment.

Young adult carers are twice as likely to not be in education in the UK, and The Open University (OU) offers scholarships in higher education to young carers as part of their Carers scholarships. The OU's open access entry policy means that prior educational attainment will not be a barrier to prevent them studying with the OU.

Distance learning and flexible study means that students can fit their study around their caring responsibilities, work or other commitments. The students have access to a wraparound support service which includes access to specialist champions who are trained to help this community and are available throughout the learning journey, and access to advice from the Careers Service and Employability Team.



¹⁴UCAS Admissions Survey 2023 to offer-holders, May 2023, question: "Thinking about the increased cost of living, which of the following, if any, are you now considering?"

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE HE EXPERIENCE – EXPECTATIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND CONCERNS

VALUING THE CHANCE FOR INDEPENDENCE IN THEIR NEXT STEPS

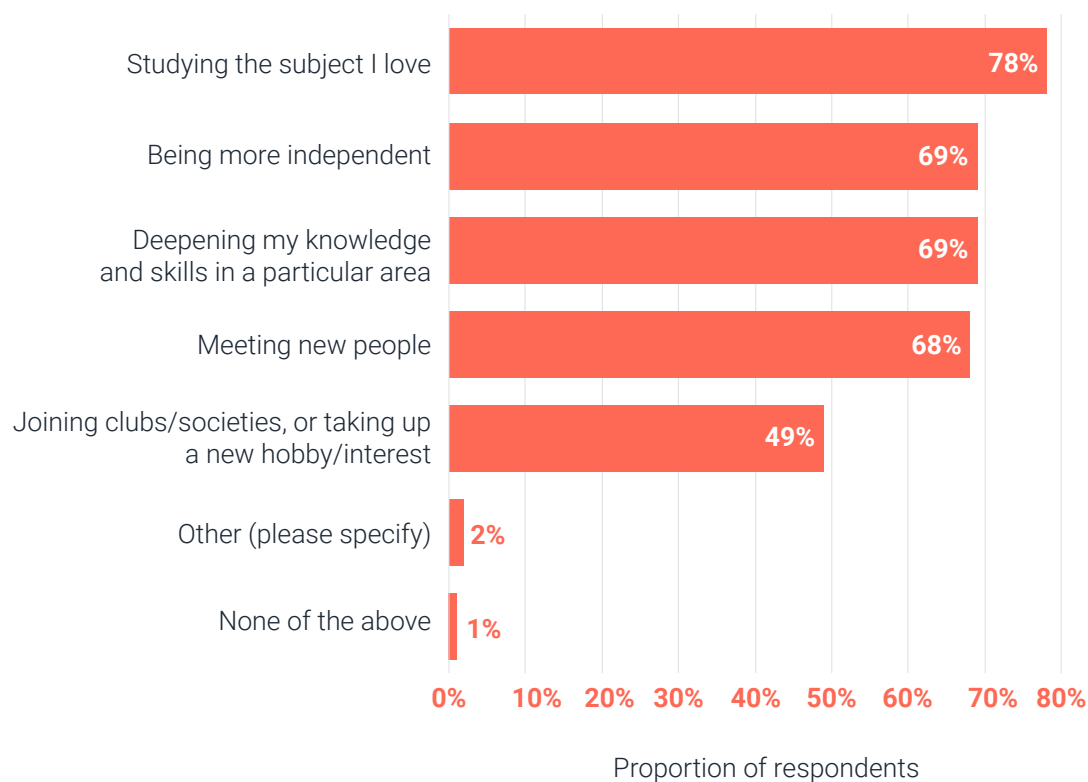


Figure 10: Responses to the question "Is there anything you are particularly looking forward to about starting university or college? Please tick all that apply."

Young adult carers are looking forward to a range of elements about starting university or college, particularly studying the subject they love, deepening their knowledge and skills in a particular area, and meeting new people. These preferences were broadly consistent with other cohorts looked at in UCAS' Next Steps series, with **care-experienced students** also placing their desire to meet new people, and studying the subject they love at the top of their choices. The free text responses reinforced the importance of developing autonomy in their new context for young adult carers

“

“Gaining some independence away from my caring responsibilities and finally being able to focus on something for myself (my degree). I love being a young carer but it will be nice to regain some of my independence.”

“

“Taking a step out and away, focusing on myself and my future whilst still being able to care for my mum every now and then as she won't be far away.”

YOUNG ADULT CARERS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT THEY WILL RECEIVE

Young adult carers feel positive about the support they will go onto receive at university or college, particularly regarding academic, social and extra-curricular, and health and wellbeing support

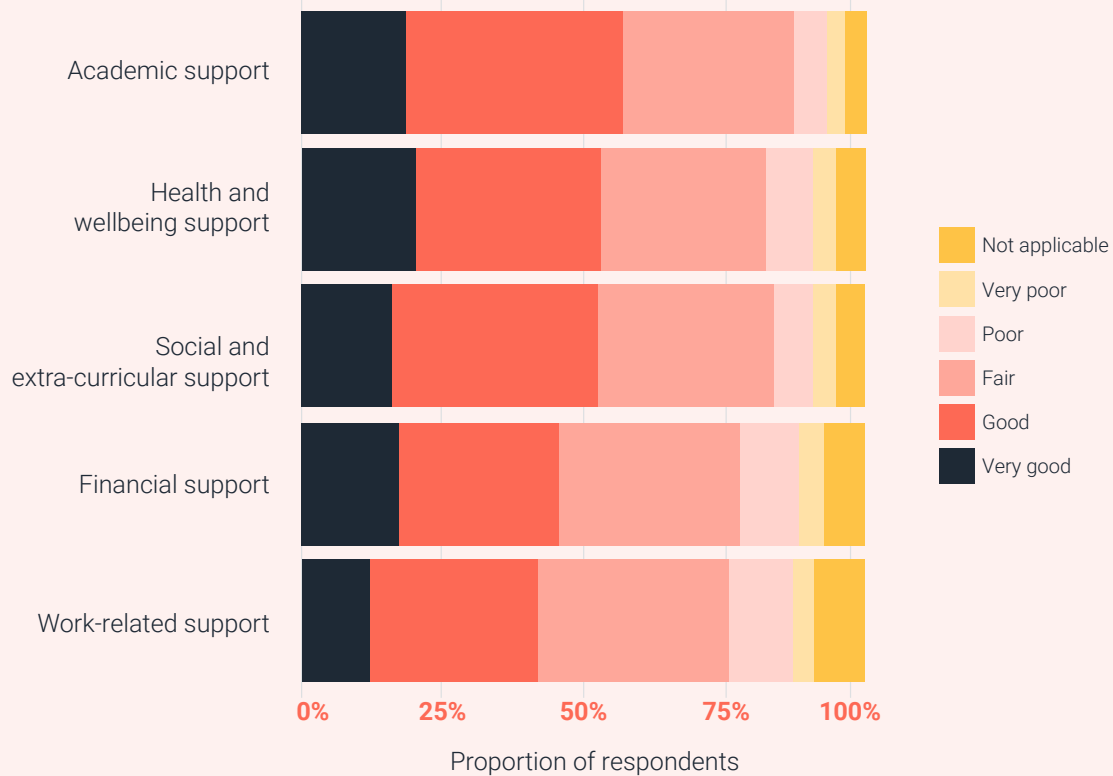


Figure 11: Responses to the question "As a young adult carer, how do you generally expect your student experience of the following factors to be at university or college?"

PROVIDER CASE STUDY: SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

Sheffield Hallam University provides pre-entry and on-course support to Young Adult Carers along with other underrepresented groups or those who may face additional barriers in progressing to HE. The **SHU Progress Programme** provides a key point of contact for advice throughout the year of applying, referrals to specialist teams, practical aid in application stages, exclusive campus visits, interview preparation workshops, and access to the SHU Progress Members' Area. Eligible students may also receive a personalised contextual offer based on their circumstances and qualifications. The support has been running and evolving for 15 years at Hallam and is often reported as very informative and helpful in preparing applicants to come to university and 94% of respondents would recommend SHU Progress to others. Once enrolled, students have access to a named member of staff, and can access a Carer's Support Plan to support them to manage their teaching and assessments alongside their caring responsibilities.



WITH AMBITIONS TO BENEFIT SOCIETY, YOUNG ADULT CARERS NEED TO BE GIVEN BROAD CAREERS INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Young adult carers are particularly motivated to go onto higher education to pursue a particular career, particularly those in health and social care and nursing, and passion for the subject they're studying.

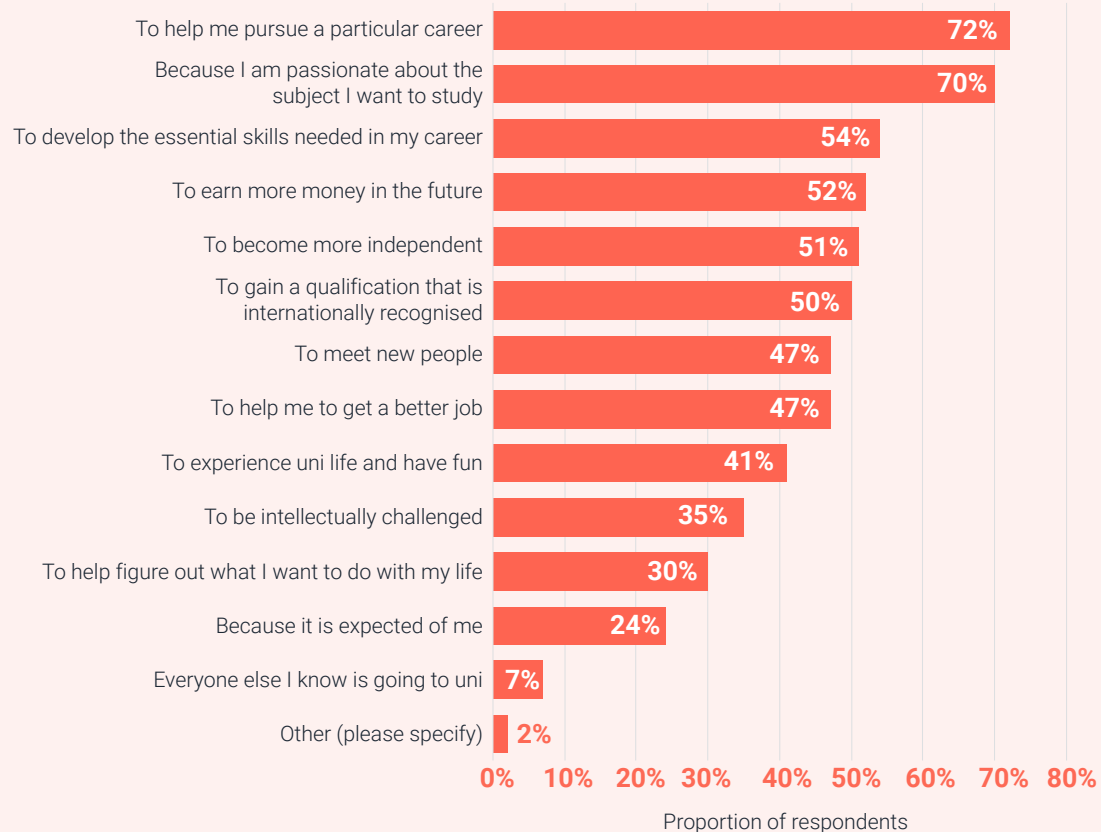


Figure 12: Responses to the question "Why do you want to go to university or college? Please select all that apply."

This cohort frequently emphasised their desire to support others through their chosen education pathway and subsequent career:

“

“Entering [the] medical sphere- I want to help people like how I help my mum and be able to alleviate people’s suffering the same way doctors do it for my mother.”

“

“To benefit society with my future career.”

As discussed in Section 1 of the report, young adult carers had a strong preference for courses that have a caring component. UCAS plays a role in providing young people with information and guidance that allows them to explore all options, including exposing them to those pathways and courses they have not previously considered. Through enhancing personalisation in the [UCAS Hub](#), UCAS is continuing to work on providing tailored guidance to young adult carers which present an expansive range of opportunities and futures.

FINANCES AND CHANGES IN CARING ARRANGEMENTS DOMINATE YOUNG ADULT CARERS' CONCERNS ABOUT STARTING HE

Only 4% of young adult carers applying reported having no concerns about entering higher education, in comparison to 16% of all applicants who placed at university or college. As discussed previously, financial considerations ranked highest in terms of concerns that young adult carers had about going to university or college, with 70% identifying this as an issue in comparison to 52% of the entire applicant population who placed at university or college.¹⁵ One respondent elaborates on their apprehensions about balancing part-time employment with higher education:

“Mostly financially, money is a key thing within studying and I mostly worry about having to work at the same time as studying as I don't want to be too tired to attend lectures or only half pay attention.”

Across the sector, individual institutions can choose to provide bursaries for students with caring responsibilities. However, the absence of a tailored system of financial support that can be accessed alongside higher education has the potential to make their participation and progression from university or college challenging.

Young adult carers were also worried about looking after their mental health and wellbeing, and how the person that they care for will cope once they start university.

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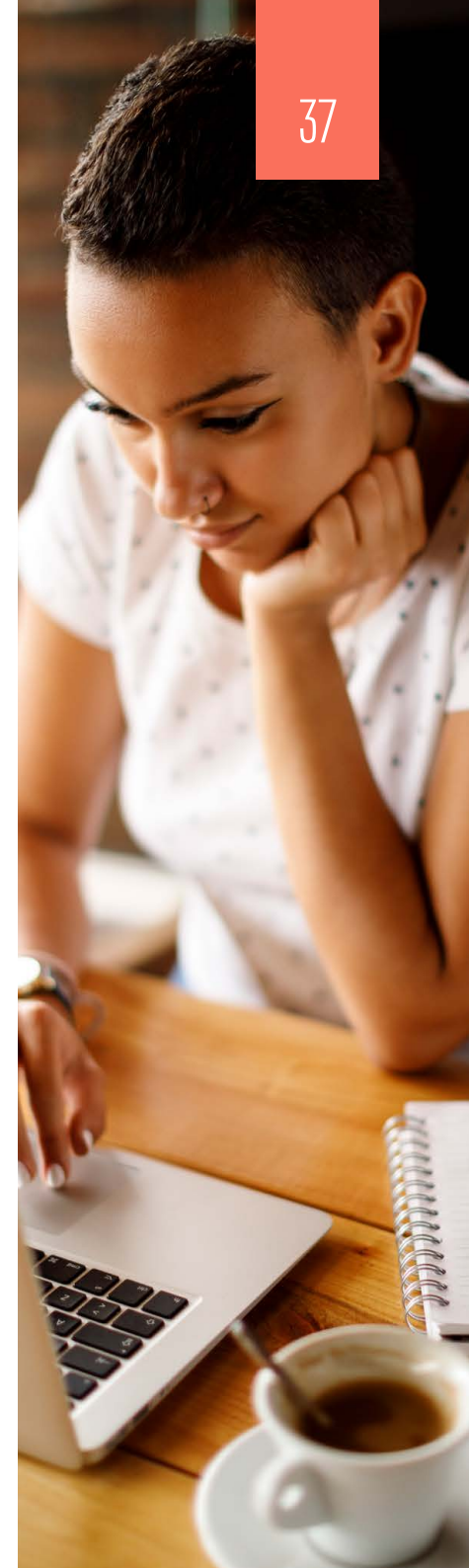
“My major concern is being away from the people I care for and if things are going to be able to run smoothly without my help.”

“

“The issue with travelling away for university is as the sole carer there is a risk that I will have to be rushed home to help out.”

Being able to access financial support dedicated to young adult carers while studying at higher education may alleviate the financial burden on young adult carers, and support with their wellbeing. With the new questions identifying students with caring responsibilities in the UCAS application, universities and colleges can now identify young adult carers at an early stage in their application. This could be utilised by institutions to provide targeted financial support, for example, for young adult carers who may need help with the financial costs of having to return home at short notice.

¹⁵ End of Cycle Placed Applicant Survey 2022, questions: “Do you have any concerns about starting university or college? These could include anything from concerns about making friends, financial worries, or concerns relating to your course” and “Which, if any, of the following do these concerns relate to? Please select all that apply.”



MAJORITY OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS FEEL NEUTRAL ABOUT SHARING THEIR STATUS, BUT SOME CONFUSION REMAINS OVER HOW THE INFORMATION WILL BE USED

Only 16% of young adult carers felt uncomfortable sharing their status as a young adult carer in their UCAS application, with the majority feeling either comfortable (47%) or neutral (37%). As examined previously, many young adult carers were reluctant to share their caring responsibilities with the wider school community. This presents challenges as the period of transition into higher education is important for guaranteeing that appropriate provision is in place. 38% said they see no reason not to share this information, and 30% affirmed that they shared so that they could access support available in higher education for young adult carers, and this was the best way to let their university or college know.

“

“Due to a talk I had previously had at an open day I was reassured that this would not affect my application, it would instead open doors to support and understanding from universities and the application process.”

“

“I was nervous to be so open about such a difficult issue, but I knew that it would be helpful for my universities to know in terms of the support I can get when I move to university.”

“

“I was unaware that there was support available, but finding out during the application I figured it was the best way to let my university know.”

Young adult carers were also positive about sharing their experience, and the skills that it had given them:

“

“I am generally a very open person regarding this, as I don't feel that it is something to be ashamed of and I am proud of my achievements given my extra responsibilities.”

While 45% of young adult carers were sure that sharing this information wouldn't negatively impact their chances of receiving an offer, just under a third (29%) were worried that it might, and almost a quarter (24%) were unsure.

UCAS strives to create a culture of 'positive disclosure' in which all applicants can make the right decision for them about their next steps, and can communicate any circumstances that might need additional support. However, UCAS recognises that there are still improvements to be made in reassuring students that sharing their caring status will not disadvantage them, and in confirming that information is being gathered from the right students.

UCAS is committed to working across schools, colleges, and the higher education sector to create an environment where the needs of young adult carers are better recognised, and appropriate preparation is in place to enable this cohort to thrive at university and college.



ANNEX A: **METHODOLOGY**

Section 1 is based on UCAS application data from the full 2023 application cycle, using the application question introduced for the 2023 cycle: "Do you have any unpaid caring responsibilities?". Those who did not supply a yes or no response to the question have been removed from the analysis. Unless otherwise stated, analysis has been carried out on UK domiciled applicants aged 24 or under.

Section 2 is based on a survey carried out in February 2023, which was sent to UK domiciled applicants who had applied by the equal consideration deadline in 2023, who had used the application question above to share that they had caring responsibilities. Their responses were weighted up to represent the entire population of UK 24 and under applicants from the 2023 equal consideration deadline who shared that they had caring responsibilities, accounting for differences in response rates observed in different characteristic groups, including gender, age, and ethnic group.

The first question in the survey was used to confirm their status as a young adult carer, of which 97% of respondents answered positively, and continued with the rest of the survey. Due to the proportion of survey respondents who stated that UCAS' supplied definition of having caring responsibilities did not apply to them, and hence negating their answer in the UCAS application to the same question, the figures for young adult carer applicants could be overcounted; however, UCAS has chosen to include all applicants who shared this information in their application in this analysis.



ANNEX B: DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Different legal definitions exist across the UK to outline the status of a **young carer** is, but all recognise a young carer as someone under the age of 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person.¹⁶ This care may be provided because of illness, disability or addiction. The status of **young adult carers** is not enshrined by law. Young adult carers represent an older group of young people, usually aged between 16-24 who support with a range of tasks as outlined by The Carers Trust:

1. Practical tasks, like cooking, housework and shopping.
2. Physical care, such as helping someone out of bed.
3. Emotional support, including talking to someone who is distressed.
4. Personal care, such as helping someone dress.
5. Managing the family budget and collecting prescriptions.
6. Helping to give medicine.
7. Helping someone communicate.
8. Looking after brothers and sisters.

As the experience of caring varies greatly for each individual, UCAS has chosen not to exclude applicants with shorter experiences of caring, or those who are not recognised as a young adult carer by their local authority or educational institution.

¹⁶ [The Children and Families Act 2014](#)

[Part 1: Key Definitions - Carers \(Scotland\) Act 2016: statutory guidance - updated July 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#),
[Overview of the Social services and well-being... | Social Care Wales.](#)



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