

Policy to Support Student Carers

Introduction

Brunel University London is committed to supporting prospective and current students who are carers throughout the whole student life cycle. This policy sets out a framework for how the University will support student carers as part of its Access and Participation Plan ensuring barriers to study and success for students from this underrepresented and disadvantaged group are removed and enabling them to reach their full potential. For more information see:

<https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/administration/access-and-participation/Access-and-Participation-Plan>.

Scope

This policy offers advice and support to prospective and registered students who are also carers at any stage of their student experience. This includes from application stage throughout their studies or research and progression onto further education and / or employment. It includes both individuals who have official carer status and those who do not and is irrespective of gender. Appendix A provides a flowchart which summarises the steps which carers can take to access support and guidance.

In addition, this policy aims to provide advice and support to University employees about supporting student carers during the student life cycle, including in relation to study (learning, assessment and examinations) and their research.

Definition: Who are carers?

A carer is someone who provides unpaid support to someone close to them, such as a family member or friend who lives with particular challenges. These could include physical disabilities, mental health concerns, learning difficulties, and/or substance misuse issues. They are protected legally by the Care Act 2014. Responsibilities vary enormously depending on the needs of the individual, but they might include:

- Practical tasks, such as cooking, housework and shopping
- Physical care, such as helping someone out of bed
- Emotional support, such as talking to someone who is distressed
- Personal care, such as helping someone dress
- Managing the family budget and collecting prescriptions
- Helping to give medicine
- Helping someone communicate
- Liaising with health and social professionals
- Looking after brothers and sisters
- Attending to urgent matters at any time of day.

Some individuals may receive a weekly government allowance for the time that they spend caring.

Providing support can be very challenging and can often involve times when unplanned increases in care are needed. This can be very difficult for carers to balance with ongoing commitments such as study or work.

Many carers are able to go to University but have to balance the above responsibilities alongside their studies / research and paid work. Balancing all these responsibilities can leave them with little time to prioritise their own mental health and wellbeing, and can impact on their academic attendance / research and achievement, and their own social life.

Policy Statement

Brunel University London believes having caring responsibilities should not prevent a student from succeeding in their studies or research. The University commits to:

- ensuring that students covered by this policy are aware of the support available and that the most appropriate advice and support is provided
- removing barriers to secure a place at Brunel through the applications and admissions stage because of a lack of comparable qualifications and / or experience
- providing as much flexibility as possible to facilitate students' success
- ensuring that student carers are not disadvantaged whilst ensuring academic standards are not compromised
- ensuring that all university employees are aware of their responsibilities towards a student carer and any implications are considered in a supportive, flexible and confidential manner.

Informing the University

You are not under any obligation to inform the University that you have caring responsibilities. However, you are encouraged to let the University know early on to ensure that the most appropriate support and advice is made available to you.

Applying to Brunel

The University actively encourages applications from a wide range of prospective students, including carers. The University runs outreach activities in support of its commitment to Widening Access and recognises the importance of financial assistance to help ensure that anyone who is qualified to study at Brunel can do so, regardless of their circumstances. For more information follow the link to: <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/study/schools-and-colleges/widening-access>.

To counter disadvantage, the University adopts a contextualised admissions approach when reviewing applications. This includes consideration of an applicant's educational and socio-economic background, such as historic information about an applicant's school or college and relates to an individual applicant's circumstances. The contextual data / information will enable the University to take into account additional factors which may have impacted on an applicant's education.

The University currently works with various local agencies such as the local Carers Trust and Young Carers to provide activities which engage and inform individuals about educational opportunities and options. We can provide support with the application and admissions process.

Support to Student Carers during Your Study or Research

Making the University aware of your caring responsibilities at an early stage will enable discussions, arrangements and support to be put in place, particularly in relation to any potential impact on learning, including attending lectures, tutorials, placements, conducting research, and participating in assessments and examinations.

In the first instance, as a new student you should use the registration process to declare your caring responsibilities. You will then be signposted to the Student Support & Welfare Team where we have a Student Support and Welfare Officer whose role includes supporting Student Carers. For details on how to make an appointment, see <https://students.brunel.ac.uk/support/book-an-appointment-through-our-support-welfare-team>.

We will then work with you to complete a support plan which will enable us to put any specific arrangements in place to meet your needs. As part of the support plan process you will need to provide confirmation of being a carer which can be in the form of documentation from a carers' support organisation confirming that they provide support or the Healthcare/Local Authority Care Plan including details of the person for whom you care. Confirmation of being a carer should come before the signing off of the Support Plan, but the support plan can be filled out whilst you are awaiting the outcome of your carers' assessment to ensure we minimise the time you need to wait before being able to confirm your needs with academic staff. If obtaining formal status is not possible, the Student Support and Welfare Officer will provide guidance on accessing alternative support options for your circumstances.

If you are already studying or conducting research at Brunel when you start to take on caring responsibilities, you should speak to your Tutor / or the Student Support and Welfare Team. If you are a Doctoral Researcher, you should approach your Supervisory Team and / or the PGR Managers in your respective College Office and / or the Student Support and Welfare Team. For details of the Student Support and Welfare Team, follow the link <https://students.brunel.ac.uk/support/book-an-appointment-through-our-support-welfare-team>.

The University encourages students to attend all timetabled sessions, including lectures, seminars, group and individual tutorials, learning support sessions, workshops, inductions and demonstrations. However, speaking to your course leader or personal tutor about your caring responsibilities can help to plan the kind of support and flexibility you may need such as with timetables and dates for course related events. Options might include:

- 1 What happens if you miss a seminar due to your caring responsibilities?

- 2 Can lecture notes / course materials or catch up tutorials be arranged?
- 3 Can you make arrangements for when you need to arrive late or leave early?
- 4 What happens if you are struggling with an assessment deadline?
- 5 How do you manage a circumstance which is unplanned and has a significant impact on your studies or research?

It is important to do this in good time so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Student Support Plan

You are encouraged to develop a Student Support Plan (Appendix C) with your Tutor / Supervisory Team and / or the named contact in the Student Support and Welfare Team who will liaise with other University staff as required with your written consent. The Student Support Plan is intended to help identify and coordinate support for your caring responsibilities throughout your studies or research.

The Student Support Plan will be drawn up in writing and you will sign it alongside a member of staff. A copy will be kept by the University. The signed document will not be shared without your written consent, unless there is significant risk to your health or safety. The Student Support Plan will be monitored and reviewed regularly by the member of staff who created it. You must let the University know if there are any changes to the level of care you need to provide. It will be your responsibility to liaise regularly with your Tutor or Student Support and Welfare to make sure the arrangements put in place are appropriate and effective. Further adjustments can be made if required.

Flexibility

Brunel will provide help and support to facilitate a student's learning and attainment, and endeavour to be flexible where they can. The University will work to ensure that no student is disadvantaged because of their caring responsibilities whilst ensuring academic standards are maintained.

Special Arrangements

The University will endeavour to make arrangements to accommodate a student carers' needs. These will be normally agreed at local level i.e. within the student's department / college and it is very important that the student's views on their options are taken into account. It may not be possible to facilitate all requests as there may be some situations which are not possible or not reasonable because of e.g. timetabling issues, work placements, overall time limit permitted for a study programme set by a professional body. It could be that there could be flexibility in relation to which modules might count towards a particular qualification provided academic standards are upheld. However care should be taken that any work missed would not adversely affect the accreditation of the student. It is not possible to provide a definitive list of special arrangements that might be considered reasonable in every possible situation because the decisions about which

arrangements are appropriate in each particular case will vary according to a wide range of factors. These factors might include the student carer's individual circumstances, the time of year, the structure and content of the particular programme of study and restrictions imposed by professional bodies.

If you need additional support to balance your learning with your caring responsibilities either near to assessment deadlines or during the examination period, you are encouraged to speak to your Tutor, Supervisory Team or make an appointment with the Student Support and Wellbeing Officer who can discuss arrangements or adjustments.

Emergencies

Brunel recognises that occasionally emergencies arise which may lead to a student carer missing lectures or seminars without informing their Tutor or Lecturer in advance. You should contact your Tutor or Lecturer as soon as you possibly can to explain the situation and catch up on any work missed.

Extenuating Circumstances

There may be occasions when caring responsibilities can significantly impact a student's work. In such cases you may submit a claim for extenuating circumstances. This will be considered under the University's Extenuating Circumstances Policy. For more information see – <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/quality-assurance/documents/pdf/Extenuating-Circumstances-Guidance-for-Students>.

Abeyance

Sometimes a student carer's responsibilities may change and develop to the extent that they may need to take some time off away from their studies at the University. This is called abeyance. The Student Centre can provide information about taking a period of abeyance and the process involved. For more information see www.intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/studentcentre/study/Pages/Abeyance.aspx. Your Tutor / Department can provide academic advice about the implications of taking extended leave and must formally approve the request. Permission must be sought from the University's Education Committee in the event of periods of abeyance exceeding one calendar year.

Other arrangements

There may be occasions when a student already has some arrangements / adjustments in place for example because of a disability or their religious observance. This does not mean that it is unreasonable for the student to benefit from separate / additional flexibility relating to caring responsibilities. The department / college are encouraged to separate out these issues and clarify what flexibility relates to which reasons. This will help the department / college ensure that the flexibility remains in place only for as long as it is required.

Wellbeing Support

Being a carer can be stressful particularly when you need to balance study and work commitments. You may need support with your mental health or wellbeing or another issue such as a disability. You are encouraged to contact the Student Support and Welfare Team by phone on 01895 267045, via the following link

<https://students.brunel.ac.uk/support/book-an-appointment-through-our-support-welfare-team> or by email at: studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk

How to Support Student Carers

This section provides guidance to staff on how to support students who have caring responsibilities. Sometimes a student might approach them to share that they are struggling. Other times a member of staff may notice that a student might be having problems with their work, such as submitting work late or incomplete, showing poor concentration, demonstrating high levels of absence or lateness, and/or obtaining fluctuating or persistently low grades.

An academic should be as flexible as they can where it is reasonable to facilitate the student's learning. Information about the student's situation should be treated confidentially and should only be shared with relevant colleagues with the student's written consent. Disclosing that an individual has caring responsibilities can be personal and stressful. Staff should manage these conversations sensitively in a non-judgemental manner and provide impartial advice. Students should be reassured that the University does not discriminate against students who have caring responsibilities and that there is a wide range of support available to enable them to continue with their studies. The student should be encouraged to seek support from their Department or the Student Support & Welfare Team (follow the link: <https://students.brunel.ac.uk/support/book-an-appointment-through-our-support-welfare-team>). They should also be encouraged to give permission to share their details through eVision as this will help to ensure they receive the best support from Student Services.

Each student should be dealt with on an individual basis. There are a number of options that can be used to facilitate the student's study or research. These might include:

- time out of study for a specified amount of time if increased support is required by the student carer to provide care
- permission for periods of absence for medical appointments, where the student carer needs to provide support or transport, and making arrangements for the student to catch up on missed classes where practicable
- flexibility regarding assignment deadlines if the student's circumstances make it difficult for them to be met
- transfer to part-time study where this is possible

Where a staff member meets face-to-face with a student or speaks to them by telephone, the staff member should make a written record and / or use the student support plan (Appendix C) detailing what was discussed, any advice given or what

arrangements were put in place and any follow up required. A copy of the written record should be emailed to the student with a copy of the e-mail saved in a secure location.

Further information is provided in the flowchart in Appendix A.

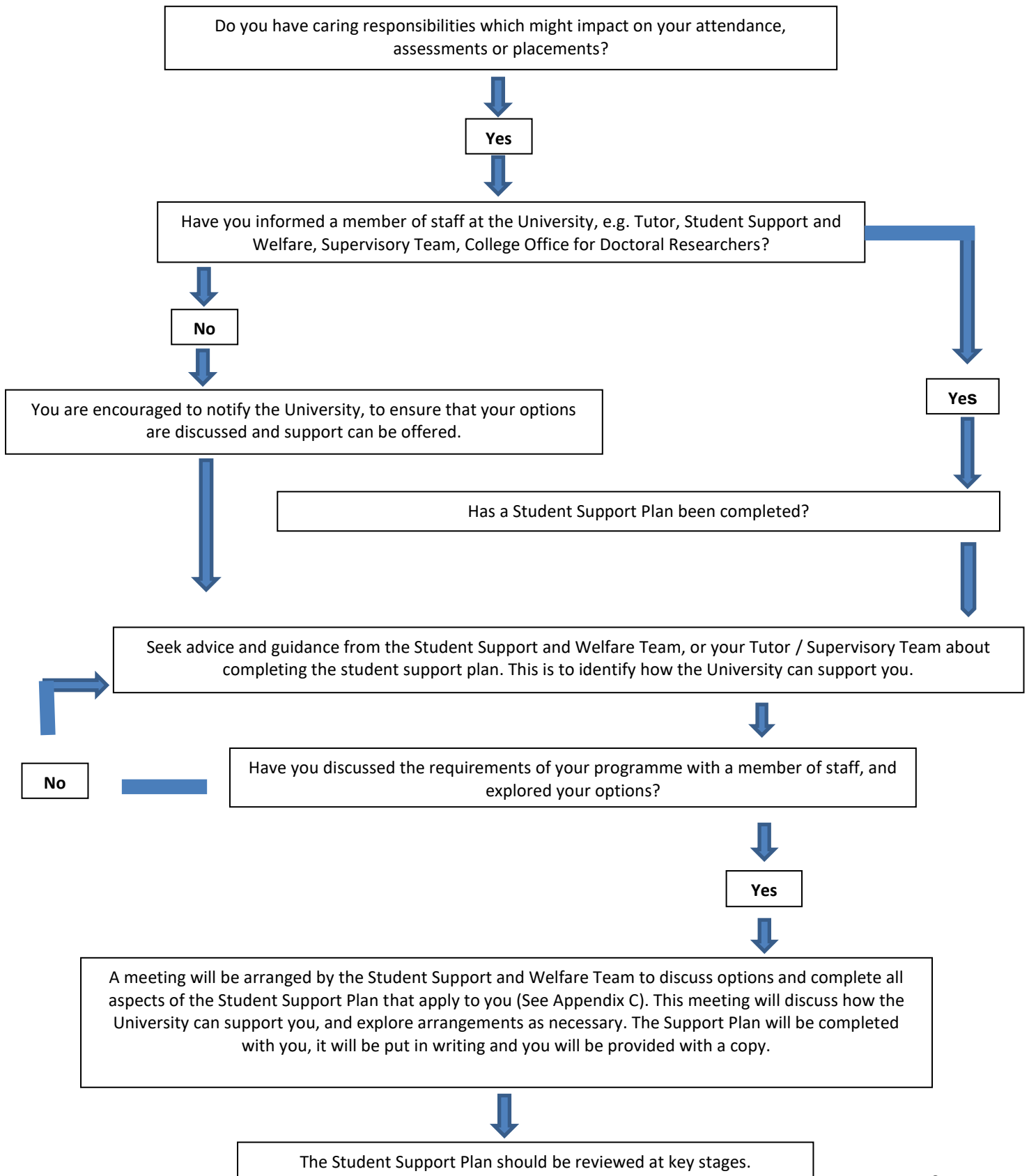
Complaints

If you feel that the University has failed to comply with this policy, you may raise your concerns using the University's Complaints Procedure. For more information see - www.brunel.ac.uk/life/supporting-you/student-complaints-conduct-and-appeals/complaints The Complaints Procedure cannot be used to appeal against a decision of a Board of Examiners for which you should instead refer to Senate Regulation 12 and accompanying guidance.

For more information about this policy, please contact the Student Support and Welfare Team either by phone on 01895 267045 or email studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk or <https://students.brunel.ac.uk/support/book-an-appointment-through-our-support-welfare-team>.

Appendix A

The flowchart below summarises the steps of the procedure and information provided in this policy.



Appendix B

External support agencies who provide help and support

The lists of useful contacts given below is correct at the time of writing (May 2020). Please check the internet for up-to-date contact information. Please note that Brunel University London does not endorse or take responsibility for the information provided by external organisations:

Carers Trust provides information, advice and support to carers. See <https://carers.org/> for more detail.

Carers UK lobbies and campaigns to promote carers' rights. For more information, see <https://www.carersuk.org/>

Direct Gov provides information for carers - see <https://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance>

NHS Carers Direct provides information for those needing care support and carers – see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/support-and-benefits-for-carers/>

Appendix C

Student Support Plan

This form aims to guide discussions to students who have caring responsibilities. It should be completed and agreed with a Tutor, Supervisory Team or the Student Support and Welfare Team.

The form should be reviewed at key stages; or at key points of the academic year. If circumstances change, the plan will also need to be reviewed.

Contact details	
1	Student's details
	Name
	Student ID
	Year of study
	Visa details (International Students)
	Visa type/expiry date
2	Programme details
	Programme title
	Department / College
	Departmental contact
Carer Role	
3	What is the nature of your role?
	Do you have evidence to support your carer status?
	Are you the sole or principal carer?
	Have you provided evidence of your carer status?
	How do your caring responsibilities impact on your studies / attendance?

Informing other staff									
4	Who will need to be informed about your caring responsibilities?								
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name and title</th> <th>Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Name and title	Date						
	Name and title	Date							
Support									
5	What specialist support do you require with your studies?								
Assessments / Examinations									
6	Do you foresee your caring responsibilities impacting on the completion of your studies?								
	If so, provide details:								
	What alternative arrangements are possible?								
Further information									
7									
Signatures									
Plan to be reviewed on									
Agreed by staff member									
Name									
Title									
Signature									
Date									
Agreed by student									

Name	
Signature	
Date	