

**University of Glasgow
Chief Advisers Sub Committee**

20 April 2015

**Carers' Policy – Feedback from GUSRC Event
Cover Sheet**

Breffni O'Connor, SRC President

Brief Description of the Paper

On 25 March 2015 the SRC hosted a Student Carers' Lunch to obtain feedback from carers about their experience of combining studying with caring responsibilities, and the impact that the Carers' Policy had on that experience.

The paper briefly summarises the findings from that event.

Action Requested

Chief Advisers are asked to notify/remind Advisers of Studies about the provisions of the Carers' Policy and the Student Carer's Plan.

www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/policies/studentssupport/studentcarerspolicy/

Chief Advisers are asked to facilitate discussion with the Advisers of Studies in their areas as to how Student Carers can be best supported by staff at the University.

Chief Advisers are asked to consider what further actions may be taken in order to improve awareness and support for Student Carers.

Recommended Person(s) responsible for taking the action(s) forward

Chief Advisers

Resource Implications (where appropriate)

Minimal

Timescale for Implementation (where appropriate)

As soon as possible

Equality Implications

Whilst carers are not explicitly a protected group under the Equality Act 2010, there is protection by association with disability. In addition, carers are disproportionately likely to be women, and disproportionately likely to be mature students. Therefore any action to benefit carers is likely to have a positive impact on these groups.

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1. Student Carers' Lunch Event

On 25 March 2015 GUSRC hosted a Student Carers' Lunch to obtain feedback from carers about their experience of combining studying with caring responsibilities, and the impact that the Carers' Policy had on that experience.

A mass email was sent out to students by the GUSRC President, outlining the definition of a carer and inviting any student fitting that description to attend the event.

20 students responded to the email, and ultimately 17 attended the lunch event. One student provided feedback prior to the event via email. Considering the event was organised at fairly short notice, GUSRC is pleased with the response received.

Discussion tables were hosted by the GUSRC President (Breffni O'Connor), GUSRC Senior Advice, Policy & Training Officer (Helen Speirs) and GUSRC Age Equality Officer (Elliot Napier). The University Chaplain, Stuart Macquarrie, also attended for part of the event.

2. Findings from the discussion

The discussion at the lunch, and resulting tablecloth comments, could be sorted into the following themes:

Identification as 'A Carer'

There was a commonly expressed view that many people would not identify as a 'carer' without an explicit description of the role. Where caring responsibilities were intermittent, this may also affect perception of self as a carer, or others' perception of carer status.

Awareness of Carers' Policy

There was very low awareness of the policy – only two out of seventeen had seen it before. Attendees also reported low awareness on the part of Advisers of Studies.

Once the attendees had had a chance to look over the policy there was agreement that it was potentially very useful. The Carers' Plan was singled out as particularly helpful in the way that it retains focus on carer rather than the person being cared for.

Dealings with University Staff

There was widespread agreement from attendees that responses from University staff were inconsistent, and many had experienced impersonal responses and what they perceived as a lack of empathy and understanding, particularly if the person being cared for was someone other than a parent or child of the student.

As noted above, not all University staff seem to be aware of the policy, or where to signpost for help.

There was a reluctance in some cases to tell the whole truthful story to University Staff as it was felt that the situation would not be understood, or the student would be judged as less capable of fulfilling the academic requirements of the course.

It was perceived that there is a general expectation that everyone is single, has no children or other responsibilities and lives near the University, and this leads to problems when seminars/group work are rescheduled.

There was comment that Progress Committees seem to just want an assurance that the caring situation is 'okay' or 'getting better', rather than looking into what kind of support could be offered to help the student.

Students were unhappy at having to go into deeply personal details over and over again with different people. The Carers' Policy should mitigate this by specifying the AoS or supervisor as central point of contact who will co-ordinate information sharing with other staff, but as noted earlier, the low awareness of the policy means this is not happening. Students noted that they often do not know their AoS very well and have more contact with their tutors.

Isolation/Social exclusion

Carers reported often feeling socially excluded by other students having no idea what their life is like. Certain conditions are stigmatised e.g. alcoholism/drugs, mental health (one student reported having been told 'just leave them to it' about the person she cares for.) There was a perception that the general public view of disabilities is negative, and that it was becoming more common for other people to feel confident in expressing negative views.

During discussion several attendees agreed that the emotional impact on carers of the caring situation itself is often ignored.

Attendees felt that events like the Carers' Lunch were great for reassuring them that they are not the only student carer, as it can feel that way. The opportunity to talk to people who 'get it', and the ability to vent, were considered very helpful.

Requests and Recommendations for next steps

The main requests from the lunch attendees were:

- A network of some kind – perhaps a facebook group to start with – for peer support. They would appreciate other events such as meeting for coffee or lunch being organised throughout the year.
- Consider provision during Freshers' Week and how information on the carers' policy and other welfare issues is disseminated. It was felt that links with Carers' Organisations could also be strengthened, and that GUSRC should investigate engaging with the Carers' Trust Young Adult Carers campaign.
- Advisors of Studies should receive training to address the disparities in support provided. A request was also made for Equality & Diversity training for staff, to improve their awareness of different situations, and for the University to consider whether a Carers' Champion should be appointed.

3. Action to be taken forward by GUSRC

GUSRC will:

- take forward the set-up of a Student Carers facebook page, working towards a self-sustaining network.
- consider how further events might best be facilitated, including during Freshers' Week.
- aim to improve information provided and links to Carers' Organisations both via the Advice Centre and by inviting Carers' Organisations to future events. GUSRC will look into engaging with the Young Adult Carers campaign.
- discuss with Student Lifecycle Support & Development and Equality & Diversity Unit the feasibility of capturing carer status in MyCampus at registration, and uploading the Student Carer's Plan to MyCampus once completed.

4. Action requested from CASC

Chief Advisers are asked to notify/remind Advisers of Studies about the provisions of the Carers' Policy and the Student Carer's Plan.

Chief Advisers are asked to facilitate discussion with the Advisers of Studies in their areas as to how Student Carers can be best supported by staff at the University.

Chief Advisers are asked to consider what further actions may be taken in order to improve awareness and support for Student Carers.