Young Carers in Tertiary Education
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Executive Summary

Young adult carers are at a significant stage of transition in their lives. This transition might include vocational training, higher education and/or employment, living independently or living at home, forming relationships and potentially starting their own families, and usually increased mobility.

There is a paucity of information in the literature about the experiences of young carers in tertiary education in Australia. Carers Australia has identified a gap in the recognition and support for this group.

Tertiary education institutes across Australia vary in terms of their approach to carers who study. The majority do not have services or programs specific to carers. There are a limited number of policies specifically relating to students who have a caring role, and formal services advertised for carers. Even where there are references to carers in generic student rights and support policies, there is little in the way of explicit identification of these policies or guidelines on university websites.

The eligibility for being able to access formal services is, at times, restrictive. For example, services may only be available for primary carers or those provide a certain number of hours of caring. University and TAFE Disability Liaison, Counselling, Student Welfare or equivalent services every so often extend their role on an informal or case-by-case basis to support carers. Where this is not the case, carers need to independently negotiate with their subject coordinators or lecturers, academic liaison staff and/or examination centres for adjustments such as extensions on assignments, and flexible study options. This can be particularly overwhelming for young people who are not familiar with such processes, or who are juggling multiple commitments in addition to study.

Where there is a lack of recognition of carers in tertiary education, carers remain a ‘hidden’ group. Students in a caring role may be less likely to identify as a carer, disclose their caring status, or seek support, and are more likely to experience misunderstanding or being labelled by peers and teaching professionals. Ultimately, this can result in young carers withdrawing from tertiary education, which can be detrimental to their career paths.

Carers Australia has reviewed the information available about this group and has made key recommendations on how to progress work.
Introduction

This report discusses the situation for young carers in tertiary education in Australia. It includes statistics on young carers, key issues raised by young carers anecdotally and in the literature, an outline of policies and practices for young carers in selected tertiary institutes, and recommendations to improve recognition and support for this group.

Definition of a ‘carer’

Carers are people who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail aged. Caring may include help and support in any of activities of daily life of the person being cared for. It may include physical and personal care and assistance such as dressing, lifting, showering, feeding or providing transport. Commonly carers are responsible for the management of medications. Carers provide emotional, social or financial support. Caring may also involve helping the person they are caring for to be organised, reminding them to attend appointments and dealing with emergencies.

In Australia, young carers are defined as those carers who are aged under 25 years. Many young carers emphasise that caring is a positive experience. However, research clearly indicates that when inadequately supported, their health and wellbeing can be seriously affected. Furthermore, caring can impact upon a young person's studies, ability to work, and social and community life.
Narrative from a Young Carer in Tertiary Education

Julie’s Story

Julie has been caring for her mother (who has a long-term illness and a disability) since she was ten years old. As a young carer, Julie helped her mum recover from several strokes, regularly assisted with cooking and cleaning, and also helped to pay household bills when she was old enough to work part-time.

When Julie was in her second year at university, her mother became very ill and was placed in an induced coma in hospital. Finding it hard to keep up with attendance and assignments, Julie approached both her faculty and the student centre for support and guidance. They said to me “we really cannot do anything. The only thing you can do is either drop out of your units or every time you have an assessment apply for special consideration”.

Julie was not referred by student services to any counselling. When she requested to see a counsellor, she was sent to the one for international students who informed her “I really do apologise, but I am not the person you should be speaking to”.

Unable to gain any flexibility in study or assessment, Julie dropped all but one of her units. Upon sharing her situation with her tutor, Julie was advised she would receive help. But that never happened, and I got an absent fail.

Young carers like Julie need recognition and understanding from tertiary institutes so they can maintain their caring role whilst completing higher education.
Data on Young Carers in Australia

Australia has an estimated 2.6 million carers which is 12% of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). Primary carers are those that provide the majority of care to an individual. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009a), in 2009 there were 215,200 carers, including 22,900 primary carers, aged 15-24 years.

It is known that carers aged 15-24 years are less likely to participate in study - at school, university or TAFE. It is estimated that approximately 40% of young primary carers participate in study compared to approximately 60% of young people who are non-carers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). It has been reported that young carers aged 19-24 years are less likely to have completed Year 12 or equivalent (66%), compared with non-carers of the same age (73%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in study by 15-24 year olds, by caring status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All carers aged 15-24 years:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 43.9% (94,600) were studying full-time;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 9.5% (20,500) were studying part-time; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 46.6% (100,200) were not studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary carers aged 15-24 years:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 26.6% (6,100) were studying full-time;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 12.7% (2,900) were studying part-time; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 61.1% (14,000) were not studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-carers aged 15-24 years:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 50.5% (1,448,400) were studying full-time;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 9.5% (273,400) were studying part-time; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 39.9% (1,144,200) were not studying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009a)
In relation to the 18-24 year old age bracket, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009b) estimates that of the 150,200 young people who identified as a being a carer: 61.2% were not studying and 36.3% were in further education or training (i.e. ‘higher education’, ‘TAFE’, ‘business college’, ‘industry skills centre’, or ‘other’); 20.7% were at university, and 11.8% were at TAFE. The respective participation rates of non-carers for the 18-24 year old age bracket were: 54.9% not studying and 44.9% in further education or training; 28.1% at university and 12.1% at TAFE (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b). These figures emphasise the gaps in higher education participation of young adult carers.

Research involving young carers aged 15-24 years has been completed by the University of New South Wales’s Social Policy Research Centre. A study found that whilst young carers under 18 years reported high satisfaction with being able to participate in education (average ranking of 8.2/10), young adult carers did not (average ranking of 5.3/10) (Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Adamson & Hamilton 2011). The low aspirations of young adult carers are mirrored in findings from the United Kingdom in research by Aylward (2009).

![Average satisfaction of YC and YAC life areas](chart)

In a study by Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Hamilton & Adamson (2011), it was found that young carers had lower rates of participation in study in around 74 per cent of local government areas under consideration. The figure below shows gaps in study rates between young people who are carers and those who are non-carers by local government areas. The darker shades of purple indicate a greater level of disadvantage, whereas the blue areas correspond to greater level of participation in education by young carers than their non-carer peers (Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Hamilton & Adamson, 2011).

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006 Customised Supertables, Author’s calculations

A further study by Bray (2012) highlights the lower levels of participation in education amongst young people due to a caring role, which focussed on 20,363 young people who were aged under 25 years at some point between September 2001 and June 2006 and received Carer Payment or Carer Allowance, or both. Levels of educational qualification amongst young carers in the study were low when compared to other young Australians. While some young carers studied in the period covered by the young carer dataset, three quarters did not, either while they were caring or at other times. Of those who had completed caring, a relatively small proportion undertook further study.
Key Findings from the Literature

There is a lack of information in the literature about the experiences of young adult carers in tertiary education Australia. The focus of research is on young carers in primary and secondary education. More extensive research about this group has been conducted in the United Kingdom where there are published research reports and articles, and recommendations for policy and practice, specific to young adult carers in tertiary education. For example, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales) has a toolkit: ‘Supporting inclusion of young adult carers in further education: self-assessment and development planning tool’.

Caring often impacts negatively upon study

- Caring negatively impacts upon studies, in terms of: exhaustion, not having enough time to meet all commitments, being late and having attendance issues, and not being able to participate in university life as much as other students (Kirton, Richardson, Jack & Jinks, 2012; Frank, Tatum & Tucker, 1999 cited in Aylward, 2009).
- Many young adult carers do not achieve formal qualifications and this has a direct impact upon future employment choices and opportunities (Dearden & Becker, 2000; Frank, Tatum & Tucker, 1999 cited in Aylward, 2009). The practical skills gained through independence and maturity due to a caring role is offset by the decreased educational, social and employment opportunities (Dearden & Becker, 2000).
- The unpredictability of caring tasks can have important repercussions for education, such as missing examinations (Levine, Hunt, Halper, Hart, Lautz & Gould, 2005). A study by Saunders, Moore and McArthur (2010) found young adult carers often needed to take time off study because of their caring role, some on a regular basis.
- Due to the financial impacts of a caring role, students who are carer are often unable to afford course costs and costs of books and other resources required (Opinion Leader Research, 2007). It is common for young carers to experience poverty and social exclusion (Dearden & Becker, 2000). Young carers are often completely dependent on security benefits and are unable to make a contribution to the wider economy (Aylward, 2009; Dearden & Becker, 2000).
- Young adult carers experience increased difficulty with university or TAFE compared to high school in terms of increased workload and balancing employment with education and care responsibilities (Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Hamilton & Adamson, 2011).
Young carers are often restricted in their vocational choices

- Young adult carers report that their caring responsibilities shape their choice of institution (usually the one in closest proximity to home) (Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Hamilton & Adamson, 2011).
- Young adult carers report that the caring role is likely to affect their choices about their path in life and their ability to live independently, whilst young carers under 18 possess a greater sense of future possibility and opportunities (Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Hamilton & Adamson, 2011).
- Students who are carers in disciplines that require undertaking placements can face particular difficulties negotiating the location and contact hours of placements (Kirton, Richardson, Jack & Jinks, 2012).
- Students who are carers in certain disciplines may be more at risk of caring ‘burn-out’, such as health care students (Kirton, Richardson, Jack & Jinks, 2012).

Young carers report lack of understanding from peers and professionals

- Negative experiences of learning, such as lack of understanding by peers and professionals, means that many young adult carers become deeply marginalised and “turned off” learning (Aylward, 2009; Frank, Tatum & Tucker, 1999 cited in Aylward, 2009).
- Young adult carers have reported occasions where they have been misunderstood by tutors and teachers who have labelled them as truants when they turn up late for college or school or have poor attendance (Aylward, 2011). Some students found their university teachers very accommodating of their caring responsibilities, whereas others were less so (Cass, Smyth, Hill, Baxland & Hamilton, 2009).

Students often do not disclose their caring responsibilities

- Students who are carers often do not want people to know about their caring responsibilities, due to not wanting to add to the burden of others, feeling guilty or not wanting to blame the person being cared for (Kirton, Richardson, Jack & Jinks, 2012).
- Upon disclosure, teachers and tutors often do not respond in a sensitive or flexible manner to young adult carers (Aylward, 2009).
- Young adult carers have identified a need to raise awareness of their needs and experiences, particularly among educators, to better enable disclosure of carer status (Aylward, 2009).
- One study found young male students in particular do not disclose carer status, due to perceptions that it is not ‘natural’ for young men to be carers (Aylward, 2009).
Students who are carers are often not connected to student supports or other services

- Students who are carers lack awareness of student support services to assist them in their caring role, such as counselling and student loans (Hussain, Pickering, Percy, Crane & Bogg, 2011; Kirton, Richardson, Jack & Jinks, 2012).

- Many carers feel that more support should be provided on campus to students with caring responsibilities (Cass, Smyth, Hill, Baxland & Hamilton, 2009).

- Students who are carers are more likely to socialise with, and seek support from, other students who are carers (Hussain, Pickering, Percy, Crane & Bogg, 2011; Kirton, Richardson, Jack & Jinks, 2012).

- It is reported that a number of young adult carers have learning difficulties (Aylward, 2011).

- Many young adult carers feel they have outgrown services for school-aged carers, but are too young to qualify for adult carer services (Cass, Brennan, Thomson, Hill, Purcal, Hamilton & Adamson, 2011).
Scoping of Tertiary Education Institutes in Australia

The following is a summary of selected tertiary education institutes’ policies and practices for carers. Information has been derived from websites and/or information provided by tertiary education institution staff. A number of staff at these institutes have indicated a desire to further explore how this cohort of students can be better supported.

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<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Services and Programs</th>
<th>Policies and Guidelines</th>
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| Australian Catholic University | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
- There is a procedure in place for the Disability Unit to provide reasonable educational adjustments for carers as they would for students with a disability.  
- The Disability Unit providing a service for students who are carers is not explicit on the university web site.  
- It was reported in March 2013 that no carers were registered with the Disability Unit. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
- In the ‘Deferred Examination’ rules, the circumstance of a student being a primary carer is considered to meet the criteria of acceptable grounds for an application. |
| Australian National University | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Centre and other equity services for support rather than Disability Services.  
- With documentation from the student to support their claim as a carer, the Counselling Centre can provide assistance with special consideration and extensions of work while they are studying  
- The Counselling Centre offers counselling to carers and referral to Carer Associations.  
- As of March 2013 there were no support programs for carers though there have been in the past for both staff and students. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers. |
| Bond University | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services. Students can also seek support informally through the Disability Support Service, though this is not explicit on the web site.  
- As of March 2013 the Disability Support service has not received any applications for assistance from carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers. |
| Central Queensland University | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services. Students can also seek support informally through the Disability Support Service, though this is not explicit on the web site.  
- Support for students who are carers can include assignment extensions where a staff member has been working with the student and is aware of the impact their circumstances have on their capacity to meet course requirements.  
- Contact with students is often over the phone to meet the needs of students across a number of locations. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
- In the ‘Disability Policy’ it is stated that the university may make special provisions and support for students who are the carers of someone with a disability. |
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| Charles Darwin University | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services. Students can also seek support informally through the Disability Support Service, though this is not explicit on the website.  
- The Disability Liaison Officer would usually develop a Learning Access Plan for the carer which informs the lecturers of the student’s reasonable adjustments. The adjustments could be: provision to negotiate an extension on the due date for assessment tasks; exam arrangements such as extra working time, rest time, may be a separate venue (quieter), and undertaking the exam in the home environment; and flexibility with attending and participating in on-line tutorials and discussions.  
- Students who are carers are able to contact the Academic Liaison Unit or Central Examinations to apply for Special Consideration. Supporting documentation is required.  
- There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
- If a student who is a carer feels like they are being discriminated on the basis of their caring status, they can lodge a complaint as per the student grievances and complaints procedure and in accordance with the university’s policy on ‘Equal Opportunity’. |
| Charles Sturt University | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services. Students can also seek support informally through the Disability Support Service, though this is not explicit on the website.  
- The Disability Service does not register students who are carers, though from time to time they provide information and advice.  
- Academic assistance for carers is provided under the academic regulations. There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
- The academic regulations within the ‘Academic Manual’ has a number of considerations for students with caring responsibilities. These are primarily in relation to personal/family misadventure, which may include extensions on assignments, delayed exams and approved withdrawal should the student be unable to complete a subject due to circumstances beyond their control that would not have been reasonably anticipated, avoided or guarded against and are sufficiently grave or of a nature or duration to have caused considerable disruption to the student’s capacity to study effectively or to complete subject requirements.  
- The ‘Equal Opportunity Policy’ states that the university will take action for those who discriminate against students who are carers. |
| Curtin University   | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services. Students can also seek support informally through the Disability Support Service, though this is not explicit on the website.  
- Disability Services can accommodate a carer’s needs within reason on request. They may move an exam to suit a carer’s schedule, or support a carer for an extension on an assignment date.  
- There are no specific programs for carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers. |
| Deakin University   | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
- According to the university web site, students who are full-time sole carers of someone with a disability may be able to access some services from the Disability Resource Centre.  
- A university fact sheet on discrimination and harassment advises students who are carers to discuss their responsibilities with a lecturer or tutor. It states the student may need to arrange for alternative ways to make up time or meet the requirements of their unit of study. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers. |
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| Edith Cowan University    | - Students who are carers are able to access services and support from the Equity, Diversity and Disability Service and this is outlined on a university flyer. Services on offer include a personalised assistance plan and assistance in applying for extensions of alternative exam arrangements.  
  - There are equity scholarships and students with caring responsibilities are eligible.                                                                 | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                   |
| Flinders University       | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Centre and other equity services for support rather than Disability Services.  
  - Counsellors support carers with extensions for assignments, or alternative exam arrangements, etc. However, counsellors do this on an 'as needs basis' for students who are carers, whereas the Disability Service develops an Access Plan for students with disabilities. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
  - The university 'Equal Opportunity policy' outlines that it is unlawful to discriminate against students on the basis of caring responsibilities. |
| James Cook University     | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Centre and other equity services for support rather than Disability Services.  
  - Students who are carers are not explicitly considered for the AccessAbility Service. However, they indirectly receive support largely because they unfortunately often display mental health impacts from their role. There may be plans to include carers explicitly in AccessAbility’s brief in the future. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                   |
| La Trobe University       | - Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
  - Students who are carers receive similar support to students who have a disability. They can be provided a Learning Access Plan to give to lecturers indicating that the student may need extensions to assignments, may miss classes and may require alternative exam arrangements due to their responsibilities as a carer. A carer’s eligibility for these services is not made explicit on the university web site.  
  - It has been reported that there have been an increasing number of students who are carers coming into contact with the Equality and Diversity Centre. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
  - The university ‘Harassment and Discrimination’ policy outlines that it is unlawful to discriminate against students on the basis of caring responsibilities. |
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| Macquarie University | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• The university website has a section specifically about students who are carers. This includes facts about carers, how students can seek help if they are a carer, and guidelines for university staff members and students to talk about carers without labelling and breaching confidentiality.  
• According to the university website, carers are advised to contact their course convenor for support. | • As outlined on the university website, Macquarie University recognises:  
- The responsibilities of a carer impacts on all aspects of their life and are not confined to the 'private' sphere. The fact that carers' responsibilities impact on work and education makes them a concern of the University.  
- Carers' responsibilities affect both women and men.  
- Care relationships are diverse. 'Care relationship' is defined by the law in an inclusive way, and includes same sex, de facto partners and former partners, as well as parental and other familial relationships. The University also recognises the wide kinship and family networks of many cultures, and attempts to give sensitive consideration to cultural difference in the implementation of its family-friendly policies.  
- Students and staff should have access to the same educational and employment conditions regardless of their carers' responsibilities.  
- Leave and benefits should be reasonably provided to accommodate students and employees with respect to carers' responsibilities.  
• Carers are able to apply for Special Consideration for assessment so long as they experience what the university defines as a 'serious and unavoidable disruption to studies' as per a set of criteria. |
| Murdoch University | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• Students are able to seek support from Disability Services if they are the primary carer for someone with a disability or ongoing medical condition, and this is made explicit on the university website.  
• Disability Services include a pre-orientation program and assisting with adjustments to exams and extensions for assessment. Supporting documentation is required.  
• There is a database called Equity Quality Assisted Learning (EQAL) to store students’ details – this is voluntary. Students can elect to have information such as a Learning Plan sent to senior lecturers. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• Caring roles are included as equity grounds for alternative entry pathways into the university. |
| Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• Students who are carers are able to seek and receive support from the Disability Liaison Unit informally – this is not explicit on the university web page.  
• The Unit receives contact from carers occasionally. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• Carers are eligible for and covered by the university’s policy on equitable assessment arrangements. |
| Southern Cross University | • Students who are carers are able to seek and receive support from Student Equity and Disability Services or the Counselling Service informally – this is not explicit on the university web page. Students can be assisted on a case-by-case basis by staff, for example being able to provide a letter regarding the student’s needs to lecturers.  
• There are no specific services or programs for carers. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers. |
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| Swinburne University of Technology | • Students who are carers can register with Disability Services and can have Access Plans to enable flexibility with deadlines. Carer eligibility for registration is not explicit on the university web page. Issues of study load are negotiated individually with the relevant program convenor - it is up to the student to raise concern.  
• Students with caring responsibilities are eligible for equity scholarships. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• The university ‘Discrimination’ policy outlines that it is unlawful to discriminate against students on the basis of caring responsibilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| University of Adelaide      | • Students who are carers can access the university Counselling Service and other equity services. They are not eligible for the Disability Service or Access Plans.  
• The University counsellor can assist the student to negotiate flexible study requirements e.g. around attendance or submission of assignments. The counsellors can liaise with disability advisors if required for generic advice on disability/medical conditions which may impact the person for whom the students cares for.  
• The student may apply for Replacement Exams on compassionate grounds if their capacity to prepare for or sit the exam is significantly impacted by carer responsibilities. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| University of Ballarat      | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• The Manager of Equity and Equal Opportunity has provided advice on determining what is a reasonable adjustment for a student who is a carer. Carers can apply for special consideration or seek flexibility as a form of a reasonable adjustment.  
• There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• The ‘Equal Opportunity and Valuing Diversity Policy’ specifies that caring responsibilities is one of the characteristics considered in the provision of reasonable adjustments.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| University of Canberra      | • Students who are the primary carer of someone with disability and/or continuing health condition are eligible to register for the AccessAbility Service. This is made explicit on the university website. Supporting documentation is required.  
• Students may discuss with UC AccessAbility the possibility of alternative assessment or examination modifications. These issues are negotiable with the teaching staff. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| University of Melbourne     | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• For students who are carers their first point of contact is with faculty Student Equity Officers / Student Advisors.  
• There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• Carers are covered by the university policy on ‘Equitable Adjustments’. These include arrangements for extensions, alternative exam arrangements, etc.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| University of New South Wales | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• It was reported in March 2013 that students who are carers are managed by the disability services team so that they have appropriate adjustments in place. However, this is not outlined on the university website.  
• There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| University of Southern Queensland   | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• Students who are carers are able to register with the Disability Support Service to receive support and advocacy – this is not explicit on the university website. They must provide supporting documentation for registration purposes and meet with a Disability Advisor to discuss what adjustments can be recommended.  
• Appropriate adjustments may include but are not limited to: extensions of time for assessment items, flexibility with attendance and spacing of exams if needed to allow for carer responsibilities. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• Carers are covered by the university policy on ‘Reasonable Adjustments’                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| University of Newcastle             | • Students who are carers can seek support from the Counselling Service and other equity services.  
• Students who are carers are able to register with the Disability Support Service if their carer responsibilities impact upon their studies – this is not explicit on the university website. They must provide supporting documentation for registration purposes and meet with a Disability Advisor to discuss what adjustments can be recommended.  
• Appropriate adjustments may include but are not limited to: extensions of time for assessment items, flexibility with attendance and spacing of exams if needed to allow for carer responsibilities. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
• ‘Caring commitments’ are considered an unavoidable commitments in the Adverse Circumstances Affecting Assessment Items Policy.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| University of South Australia       | • Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Service and other equity services for support rather than Disability Services.  
• Counsellors can provide assistance in the form of recommendation to support extensions and referrals to support agencies etc.  
• There is an informal policy that allows students who are carers to apply for modification to exam arrangements. There is the usual processes whereby students who have a range of circumstances (including carer responsibilities) can apply to defer exams, special consideration for assessment items and variations to field placements etc. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| University of Sydney                | • Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Service and other equity services for support rather than Disability Services.  
• Counselling and Psychological Services is not in a position to provide supporting professional documentation for students on request. Although Faculties may send their students to Counselling and Psychological Services for special consideration, they are unable to assist unless the student is a pre-existing client at the time of the incident. This is due to the fact that clinical psychologists are obliged to provide objective evidence-based opinions on the basis of health practitioner requirements rather than student requests.  
• If the student does not have a pre-existing health practitioner who can attest to the impact of a misadventure on their ability to cope, the student may submit a Statutory Declaration signed by a Justice of the Peace as documentation supporting the application.  
• There is a ‘Disabilities & Carers Collective’ which is is a student-based group run by Disabilities Officers who have been elected by the Student Representative Council to represent student Carers and those with a disability on campus. | • No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Services and Programs</th>
<th>Policies and Guidelines</th>
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| University of Tasmania | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Service and other equity services.  
- The Disability Service does not provide Learning Access Plans for carers.  
- Students who are carers seek support from Unit Coordinators or individual academics and Schools arrange flexibility for carers on a case by case basis.  
- A notice of consideration for marking is available for tests and exams if required.  
- The counselling service can provide documentation/clinical support if required, which in turn can assist with assignment deadlines.  
- There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
- The University of Tasmania ‘Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching 2012-2014’ considers students’ with caring responsibilities in the design of courses and study units. |
| University of Technology Sydney | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Service and other equity services.  
- There is a university web page specific to carers: ‘Carers’ responsibilities’. It advertises Carers NSW services and the Carers NSW Young Carers website.  
- Students who are carers are able to contact the Academic Liaison Officer of their faculty to discuss assistance required whilst study. This could include alternative arrangements for assignments or exams or a Request for Special Consideration in the assessment of a subject or assessment task on the grounds of misadventure.  
- The Counselling Service may be able to provide Special Consideration Professional Authority statements to students who have sought assistance in relation to managing their carer responsibilities. | - There is a ‘Staff and Students with Carer’s Responsibilities Vice-Chancellor’s Directive’ which details provisions for students with caring responsibilities.  
- In the ‘Student and Related Rules’ clause 8.2.3, students who are primary carers may lodge a written application for adjustment to learning and assessment arrangements with the Academic Liaison Officer in their faculty. Applications must include supporting documentation and should be lodged no later than the teaching period census date. Variations to assessment arrangements are determined by the Academic Liaison Officer following consultation with the subject coordinator.  
- There is an ‘Inclusive language and diversity resource’ that has a section on carers. It includes facts about carers and guidelines for talking about carers. It also discusses confidentiality and privacy issues, recognising all forms of caring and the use of labels. |
| University of Western Australia | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Service and other equity services.  
- Students who are carers can register with the UniAccess service – though this is not explicit on the university web page.  
- There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers.  
- Carers are covered by the university ‘Special Consideration’ policy. |
| University of Wollongong | - Students who are carers can use the university Counselling Service and other equity services.  
- Although not explicit on the university web page, students who are carers can access Disability Services and receive an assessment of their situation.  
- There are no specific programs for students who are carers. | - No university policies specifically relating to students who are carers. |
Recommendations

1. Consistency in the polices, practices and programs of tertiary education institutes.

Universities and TAFEs across Australia offer different types of support, and different levels of support, for students who are carers. The tertiary education institutes that do not have policies and programs for carers will face issues in attracting and retaining potential students from this group. Furthermore, services such Disability Units, Counselling Services and Student Welfare will be under increasing pressure as growing numbers of carers request academic adjustments and flexible study options. Ideally, each tertiary education institute will offer similar policies and programs for carers. Best practice would consist of a university or TAFE having:

- Policies or directives that clearly state what the provisions are for students with caring responsibilities;
- Eligibility criteria for students who are carers to access a dedicated service or be included as part of an existing service;
- Staff who could provide referrals for the carer to internal or external support services, liaise with academic and professional staff on the student’s behalf, assess and monitor the student’s ability to complete study and placement, determine necessary academic adjustments or need for flexibility in study, and provide practical assistance on issues such as financial hardship;
- Evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, and key performance indicators that relate to students who are carers;
- Avenues for students who are carers to provide feedback, make complaints or appeal decisions; and
- Carer awareness funding for academic staff.

2. A clear pathway for carers who are seeking academic adjustments and other supports.

Students who are carers often complain that it is difficult to navigate sources of support within their tertiary education institutes. Ideally, universities and TAFEs will make clear to students and staff where the first point of contact is, and who can assist (whether they are an appropriate qualified staff member/s or student representative/s). This pathway should be documented and publically available.
3. **Awareness and recognition of students who are carers in tertiary education.**

The lack of information for, and about, carers in tertiary education leads to this group being hidden and individuals being less likely to identify as a carer. Ways to increase awareness and recognition of students who are carers includes:

- Materials such as posters and flyers on carers in tertiary education placed in student areas;
- Events for young carers during Youth Week;
- Dedicated web pages of university and TAFE web sites with information on carers, advice on where to seek help, etc.; and
- Media coverage of students who are carers using mediums such as online video clips, radio, television and print.

4. **Training and guidelines for tertiary education institute staff on how to deal appropriately with students who are carers.**

It has been reported that students who are carers often experience misunderstanding from university and TAFE staff and their peers who may not be aware of the student having a caring role and what this entails. If the student discloses their caring status, staff should be responsible for an appropriate and empathic response. Training and guidelines could include advice on identifying students who might have a caring role, how to avoiding labelling, and practical strategies staff can use to assist student with their studies.

5. **Established links between tertiary education institutes and carer services.**

By universities and TAFEs referring students who are carers to Carer Associations, relevant non-government organisations, and programs such as the Young Carer program, carers are more likely to have better outcomes with their studies and other aspects of their lives. There is potential for these two sectors to work together, for example in the development of support kits or templates that could be used for the creation of policies and strategies.

It has been identified that young people with caring responsibilities are less likely to participate in study and attain educational and vocational qualifications. The transition into adulthood is particularly daunting, and young people who are carers can face numerous setbacks. There is a need for those students who have been identified as a carer during primary or secondary school to be assisted in their transition to further education – whether this is a handover by teaching staff, the continuation of a learning plan, or linking the individual into new supports if they are no longer being eligible for previous services.

7. Further exploration the situation for young carers in tertiary education.

Services, programs and resources for young carers in tertiary education can be better tailored to this group if there is further exploration of their experiences and needs. Further research is recommended, particularly a national survey of young carers who attend university or TAFE.
Conclusion

In Australia, young people in higher education with caring responsibilities have been overlooked by both mainstream services and tertiary education institutes. This is evident by the lack of consistency in policies, practices and programs of universities and TAFEs and lack of information in the literature about this group. Without action, the gap in study participation rates and educational attainment is likely to widen between carers and non-carers. This report has made recommendations that can be directed at a range of stakeholders.
References


