



Scottish Government: Definition of Care Experienced

Consultation Submission

30.01.25

About the Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland supports people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications.

In 2022/23 we were proud to help over 19,500 students study around their professional or personal life at a pace and level that worked for them. The recently published HESA data (2022-23) shows that apart from The University of Glasgow we teach more Scottish students than any other university in Scotland and are by far the largest provider of flexible, part-time study.

Flexible study is core to our offer with 73% of our students working either full-time or part-time in 2022/23.

Most of our graduates (85%) remain in the location where their study is undertaken, which means their talent and skills benefit local communities.

We offer high-quality distance learning to students, lifelong learners, communities, employees and businesses. Our students range from school age to 92. We have formal partnerships with 16 regional colleges and collaborate with local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and employers across Scotland. Our innovative national schools programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, helps S6 pupils access a broader curriculum and bridge school to university level study.

We are committed to widening access to higher education building on our founding principle of being open to everyone, regardless of age, income, geography and background. The majority of our undergraduates in Scotland are eligible for a part-time fee grant to help towards their tuition fees. In 2022/23 28% of our undergraduates in Scotland declared a disability and 22% live in remote or rural areas. In the same year, 23% of our undergraduate entrants joined with qualifications below standard university entrance level and 21% were resident in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

As part of the UK's only four nations university, we are funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. Over 150 staff operate from our Edinburgh offices with over 400 associate lecturers working across the country. Our student experience is rated the best in Scotland (National Student Survey 2024).

OU research ranks in the top third of UK universities according to the Research Excellence Framework and we are a trusted partner of many leading organisations for teaching and research including the BBC, NASA, and the United Nations. We received a Gold Rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023. Our free platform, OpenLearn, reaches over 300,000 learners in Scotland.

Find out more: open.ac.uk/scotland

Consultation Section 1: developing a universal definition of 'care experience'

1. Do you agree or disagree that there is a need for a universal definition to describe 'care experience'?

Agree strongly.

2. What are your views on the potential advantages of developing a universal definition of 'care experience'? Please explain your answer:

We believe there are two significant advantages to having a universal definition of care-experienced. A universal definition can potentially improve access to available support and entitlements. For care-experienced students, varying definitions can be a barrier. Guidelines indicate that the current definition can incite a sense of stigma. Improving the language is crucial: "Changing and improving the language of care is a key part of normalising this language and ensuring that it is used in a considerate and consistent way".

Furthermore, students using credit transfer to register with the Open University can find different definitions used by institutions confusing, potentially highlighting unintentional disparities in support between institutions. For example, students studying with the Open University cannot access the SAAS care-experienced bursary.

3. What are your views on the potential disadvantages of developing a universal definition of 'care experience'? Please explain your answer:

We do not believe that a universal definition risks complicating things further and adding confusion as suggested in the consultation document. We do believe however that by adding an age limit could cause significant disadvantage to students studying with the Open University. Our current institutional definition acknowledges that the experience of being in care has a lifelong impact and, therefore, does not impose an age limit. This approach recognizes that many of our mature students have experienced being in care. The universal definition should be inclusive, regardless of age. The Care-Experienced Bursary administered by the Student Awards Agency Scotland is another example where part-time students are unable to claim financial support because the system is focused on full-time undergraduate students to the detriment of part-time students.

4. Do you have any views on the definition of 'Care Leaver' as set out in the consultation paper? Please give us your views:

N/A

5. Do you have any views on the statutory definition of 'Looked After' as set out in the consultation paper? Please give us your views:

N/A

Potential scope of a universal definition of 'care experience'

6. What experience of care would you expect to be covered by any definition of 'care experience'? Please choose all that apply.

- Looked After at Home
- Kinship Care (looked after children who have been placed with kinship carers by the local authority)
- Kinship Care (non-looked after children who live with a kinship carer, these children may be subject to an order under Section 11 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or may be living in a completely private arrangement with extended family, with no local authority involvement)
- Foster Care
- Residential Care
- Residential Special School
- Supported Accommodation
- Secure Care
- Adoption

Please give us your views:

At The Open University we consider a care experienced person as:

"...anyone of any age, who at any stage in their life has been in care. This can be for any length of time and includes a variety of settings, such as in residential children's home, kinship care, foster care, or through living at home under a supervision order. It also includes adopted children who were previously looked after'.

[Support for care experienced students | Help Centre | The Open University](#)

We recognise that individual experiences can be complex and believe that all the aforementioned experiences should apply. Indeed, from a corporate parenting experience we already consider all of these experiences at The Open University.

7. Do you have any other comments about a proposed universal definition of 'care experience'? Please give us your views:

N/A

Consultation Section 2: wider language relating to care

8. Do you have any comments on the existing language of care? Please give us your views:

In our experience based on the type of enquiries we receive at The Open University in Scotland regarding the definition of care experienced it can be necessary to translate the language to clarify the meaning of policies and definitions to students. This aligns with the guidance document which states: "...overly formal language such as technical language, legal language or acronyms, which does not resonate with many people with care experience."

9. Do you have any suggestions on potential ways to change and improve the language of care? Please give us your views:

N/A

10. Are you aware of good practice to change and improve the language of care? Please give us your views:

There are a couple of examples of good practice which we would like to highlight. Firstly, the training run by Each and Every Child - 'Introduction to Framing and framing care experience'. Secondly, if we can be so bold the free resources available on our OpenLearnCreate website - 'Corporate Parenting in Higher Education'. This includes interviews with care experiences people within the resources.

