

WELCOME TO YOUR CARER'S PACK



A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.

Carers Trust Wales

We recognise the rewards and challenges that come with being a carer. Being a student can provide you with some space for yourself and your own personal development, but we understand that your study needs to be flexible to fit in with the other demands in your life. We want to help you get the most out of your studies with the OU and reassure you that we are here to support you and help you succeed.

At the OU in Wales, we have worked with the OU Students Association, student carers, OU tutors and educational and careers advisors to develop this Carer's Pack. We hope it will provide you with useful information, guidance, and signposting to other resources that may be helpful while you are studying with us.

Open University study allows you to fit in your studies around the demands of your life. It is part-time and flexible which means it can be fitted around your caring role and other responsibilities. You can also take a break between modules if you need to and build up your qualification at a pace to suit you.

"During my studies I took a 'four-year gap year' after my marriage ended"

This pack will provide you with information about what it's like to study with the OU and the flexible ways we can support you. At the end of this Carer's Pack you'll also find a list of

contacts to signpost you to further sources of support, both inside and outside the OU.



You may not want all of the information when you first start, but keep the pack handy and you can dip in and out of it as you progress through your qualification and beyond.

Always remember that staff at the OU are here to help you. We will be updating the pack on a regular basis, if there's something we've missed please let us know!

For more information, please contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team
T: 029 2047 1170
Wales-support@open.ac.uk

This pack is also available in Welsh [here](#)

Please give us feedback on the pack through our [online survey](#)

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The Open
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WALES CYMRU

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The real joy of studying with the OU is that the time and place you study is totally your choice. You could be studying in your pyjamas at 1.00 am or reading your course materials whilst waiting for an appointment, bus or train. Materials can be accessed through a PC, laptop, tablet or mobile.



To give you an idea of the time involved, if you are starting with one of our Access modules you will need around 9 hours of study time each week. If you want to study part-time towards a degree, you'll need around 18 hours study time per week. Part-time study means completing 60 credits worth of study per year and an Honours Degree would usually take 6 years to complete. If you have more time, you may wish to study more credits in some years or less in others. We're flexible and you can ebb and flow depending on your commitments.

Finding time to study may be an issue and only you know when you

"My son is very unpredictable, and it was difficult to plan ahead. I'd have a week scheduled to do my assignment and then something would happen with him and I'd be tied up with appointments all week and wouldn't get my assignment done on time. My tutor was brilliant; he knew my situation and was able to give me extensions on my assignments."

are likely to have time and space. However we have a handy online Time Planner that allows you to check how many credits you could study per year. Visit the [website](#) to work out if you have enough time.

We'll provide you with support during your studies to help you manage your time. Each module has a detailed study calendar, that highlights key dates for assignments and tutorials, breaking down what you need to study and when. Your Student Recruitment and Support Team are at the end of a telephone and your tutor will offer you guidance on how to stay on track if you need help.

As a carer your circumstances may change during your studies. If you are concerned about having time to study or want to chat about fitting things in please get in touch.

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FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT YOU DURING YOUR STUDIES



The Open
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WALES CYMRU

The OU offers real flexibility so you can fit your studies around your role as a carer. For example you can study at times that suit you.

"I was able to do one of my exams from home it really helped"

You can download your module materials in different formats from your module website. You could have an audio version to listen to on the train or download materials as an e-book to your tablet.

As a carer you may also be entitled to special arrangements during your studies, for example sitting an exam at home (see the *What if something happens?* section).



"It really helped me to have audio versions of my books...enabling me to listen to my work while I did other chores, like walk the dog..."

"I studied through the night as I had to stay awake with my daughter, and then slept during the day whilst she was at school"

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WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS? DEALING WITH THE UNEXPECTED



“When I started my degree, I didn’t realise how much support was available for carers.....When I finally did tell one of my tutors that I was a carer, I was amazed at how much support I was given. He explained that I could always contact him if I needed extensions and extra support.”

Here at the OU we know that life happens. Most of our students combine coursework with employment and family commitments, but your responsibilities as a carer may demand much more of your time, often at very short notice.

It’s important that you tell us that you are a carer and about any other issues that may affect your studies, so we can offer any extra support you may need.

Who to contact for support

Your tutor

Throughout your studies you will have a support network to help you stay on track. The first point of contact will be your module tutor who can

- assist you with planning your workload and with identifying study priorities when time gets short
- offer individual support sessions to help you catch up with your coursework
- clarify parts of module materials you may find challenging.
- give you occasional extensions to tutor-marked assignments (TMAs).

But please be aware that extensions are not allowed for computer-marked assignments (iCMAs) and for final assignments of the module, so it is essential to plan ahead and keep in regular contact with your tutor to be informed of your options. There is a wealth of information and advice at the Help Centre which you reach via StudentHome.

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[Wales-support@open.ac.uk](mailto:support@open.ac.uk)

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“I’m hugely impressed by the way many students at The Open University balance their studies alongside caring. This isn’t easy, and as a tutor I really appreciate when students take the trouble to get in touch to help me get a better picture of their situation, or to discuss when and if things become more difficult during their studies. Sometimes this might be something I can resolve quickly (such as organising short extensions on assignments, or advising on how best to prioritise the module workload), or I might be able to request some additional help from our Student Recruitment and Support Team. The main thing is to make contact and share what’s going on. Tutors won’t mind - in fact, they will be delighted to have a better insight into the individual needs and perspectives of each student. This helps us to feel confident that we are doing our best to support your studies.”

Chris Dowling – OU Tutor

Your Student Recruitment and Support Team

The other most important point of contact is your Student Recruitment and Support Team. Advisers here can help you with module choice and registration or planning your qualification. They will also discuss your options with you, should it become difficult to keep up with your study.

Reporting special circumstances

Towards the end of each module you will be able to report any special circumstances that affected your progress throughout the year, so that the Assessment Board can take it into consideration. Your Student Recruitment and Support Team will advise you on the process.



Deferring a module

Sometimes, it may become necessary to put your study on hold until the next academic year. This process is called “deferral”. For many modules you will be allowed to “bank” assignment marks you have achieved so far. This means you can carry the marks forward, so you can pick up where you left off. Should you consider this option, it will be crucial to get in touch with your Student Recruitment and Support Team as early as possible to discuss the way forward.

Special examination arrangements

Your Student Recruitment and Support Team can also advise you about examination arrangements. As a carer you may be allowed to sit your exams at home, so please check with the Team to find out what you will need to do to apply.

Tutorials and residential schools

Some courses have residential schools and tutorials. As a carer, alternative arrangements may be available, and most courses offer online tutorials as well as face to face ones. Please speak to your Student Recruitment and Support Team for more information.

IS THERE EXTRA SUPPORT IF I HAVE A DISABILITY?



You may not think of yourself as disabled but if you have:

- a long-term health condition,
- a specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) or
- a mental health difficulty

then the OU considers that you are entitled to reasonable adjustment to support your study. We use the terms 'disabled' or 'disability' to cover all these conditions.

It's important that you tell us if you have a disability and about any other issues that may affect your studies, so we can offer any extra support you may need.

"I also have my own additional learning needs and was able to get extra time in exams and the OU arranged for me to take my exams at home"

If you declare a disability, you will be invited to complete an online form to tell us more about your study requirements.

You will then be

contacted by a member of the Disability Support Team who will discuss the study support arrangements that can be put in place for you and write a confidential student profile that will help your tutors and your Student Recruitment and Support Team to make the right adjustments for you.

Adjustments the OU can make for you include:

- Accessible study materials
- Tailored assessment
- Specialist equipment
- Residential school support
- Access to tutorials and day schools

You may also be entitled to financial support including Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and also help with the cost of diagnostic assessment for a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia.

You can find more information [here](#).

Alternatives may be available to tutorials and residential schools please speak to your Student Recruitment and Support Team for more information.

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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENT ASSOCIATION



The Open University Students Association has a range of support services. Their services and groups are run by students and it's a great way of linking with the OU student community.

You can find out more about OU Students Association [here](#).

We have listed below, some specific groups that may be of interest to you as a carer.

OU Students Association Caring & Dependency Group - This [closed Facebook group](#) is for Open University students who either are carers or have carers. Its purpose is to provide support and a safe place to share the day to day experiences of being or having a carer. The group is administrated by some members of the OU Students Association Disabled Students Group (DSG) and members of the Association's Central Executive Committee (CEC).



Disabled Students Group - [The Disabled Students' Group](#) is run by, and consists of, a group of students from all faculties: some undergraduate, some post-graduate. They are all students either with disabilities or with other long-term physical or mental health problems.

Nightline – [Nightline](#) is a listening, emotional support service run by students for students, available from 6pm to 8am through the night during term time. A limited service over summer and Christmas periods.

PLEXUS - [PLEXUS](#) is a group open to all students and is designed to provide specific support and comfort for LGBT+ students.



The Open University Students Educational Trust (Ouset) is the student charity where funds raised by students are used to benefit students in financial hardship. It is a separate registered charity operated by the OU Students Association.

For more information, please contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team
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TOP STUDY/SURVIVAL TIPS FROM OUR STUDENTS WHO ARE CARERS



Please see below some tips from other OU student carers. We'd like to hear your tips too, please share them [here](#).

Motivation and how to keep going



"I would imagine my graduation, that's what got me through. When I got to my last course, I could taste it"

For more information, please contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team
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Wales-support@open.ac.uk

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Organising your study

"I used the study calendar and always tried to stay 2 weeks ahead, so I could give myself a bit of leeway if anything cropped up"

"The other thing that worked really well for me, especially at the hardest of times was the [pomodoro technique](#) [time management]"



"Use the time wisely, get to know your student home page at the beginning it's the gateway to all the things you'll need."

Please give us feedback on the pack through our [online survey](#).

Looking after yourself



"I also would say that you need to ensure you make time for yourself. Being a carer and an OU student is overwhelming, scary and stressful. It can feel like you don't have enough time for yourself. While your responsibilities are important, make sure you take time to do something for you."

"I also found that exercise helped as it reduced my stress so although it took some study time I found that my concentration and retention during study improved."



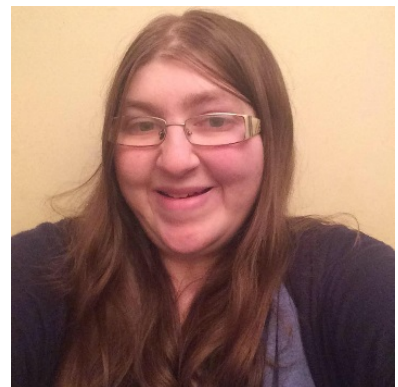
Contact your tutor

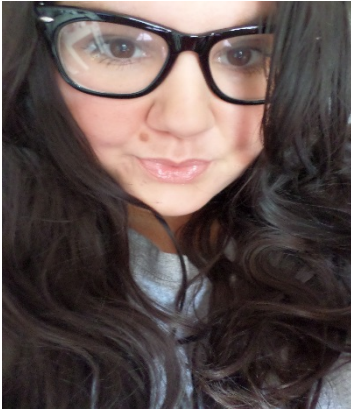
"I found that it was better to let my tutor know what was going on to prepare the path for an extension if I needed one later on"

"At the end of the day everyone at the OU wants you to succeed, they are all there to help you"

"It's important for students to know that it's okay to ask for an extension or ask for help"

"My son is very unpredictable, and it was difficult to plan ahead. I'd have a week scheduled to do my assignment and then something would happen with him and I'd be tied up with appointments all week and wouldn't get my assignment done on time. My tutor was brilliant; he knew my situation and was able to give me extensions on my assignments"





"Don't be afraid to call your tutor if have any problems, they are there to help you"

Exams

"Don't be worried about the exams, as long as you have revised, you'll be fine"

"I had an exam at home and this really helped"

Tell the OU that you are a carer and also if you have a disability or additional needs

"I also have my own additional learning needs and was able to get extra time in exams and the OU arranged for me to take my exams at home"

"My advice to anyone about to start studying with the OU would be to tell your tutor(s) about your situation. Being an OU student in general is difficult, but being one with extra responsibilities can sometimes feel impossible. Don't make the experience harder than it needs to be by not telling the OU about your situation. I was embarrassed to open up and ended up regretting it, when really it would have made my experience even better. There is a lot of support available and the experience doesn't have to feel scary. "

HELP WITH THE COSTS OF YOUR STUDY



You will only ever have to pay fees for the module you are currently studying and there are part-time tuition fee loans available through Student Finance Wales. Depending on your circumstances, various grants may also be available to you.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) - available if you have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty.



The level of support you receive will depend on your particular circumstances, to find out what may be available for you visit our [website](#) or give us a call to talk through the various options. [See also Student Finance Wales.](#)

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BUILDING YOUR QUALIFICATION

With the OU, you choose the starting point that suits you best: whether that is one of our Access modules right up to Postgraduate level study.

Wherever you start, the next stage is to pick a module that will gain you credits that can be used to build a qualification. If you have already chosen the qualification you want to work towards then the choice will be available through StudentHome.

Undergraduate Study

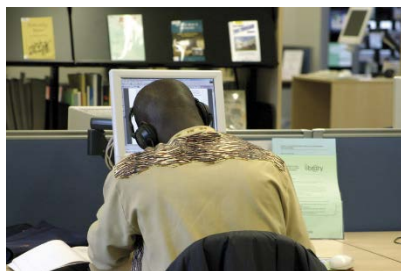
At the OU Undergraduate qualifications include Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education, and Honours degrees (Bachelors of Science, Arts, Law, or Engineering). To build these qualifications you study modules at undergraduate levels 1, 2 and 3. Most of these modules carry either 30 or 60 credit points each.

- You need 120 credits for a Certificate of Higher Education,
- 240 for a Diploma,
- and 360 for a full Honours Degree.

We also offer more flexible qualifications through our Open Programme, which allows you to build a qualification by studying modules from a variety of subject areas. This means you could study subjects that interest you purely for pleasure and use them to build a qualification later if you wish.

You can read about our range of undergraduate courses [here](#).

Postgraduate Study



Once you have a degree or equivalent qualification, you might be interested in studying one of our Postgraduate Certificates, Diplomas, or Taught Masters degrees. Again, these are made up of individual postgraduate level modules with allotted credit points and we offer programmes in a wide range of subject areas. You can find out more [here](#).

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Wales-support@open.ac.uk

This pack is also available in Welsh [here](#)

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What if I change my mind and want to change my course?

If you are working towards one qualification but change your mind, it's often possible (depending on the modules you've taken) to change to something else. Our Open Degrees in particular give you a lot of flexibility in what you study.

"After I completed the Da Vinci course and AA100, I realised that I also had an interest in philosophy. Instead of just focusing on a purely history degree, I thought I would try and combine the two subjects. While I had considered an Open Degree, I opted for a joint humanities degree in philosophy and history. I think that is one of the reasons why the OU is exceptional, it doesn't just restrict you to one subject, but allows you to study whatever you desire."

You can also take a study break if life gets too hectic and in some cases increase study if things quieten down.

Free informal courses and resources

The websites **OpenLearn**, **OpenLearn Cymru** and **FutureLearn** have a wealth of free courses and resources. These informal courses can help give you a taster of subject areas or modules before you start your formal studies. They can also be useful preparation in-between modules. There are some specific vocational courses that could help you think about careers and employment beyond your OU studies.

You might be interested in our [short personal development course for carers - What about me?](#)

EXPLORING CAREER PROSPECTS



Some OU students combine their studies with caring responsibilities for their own personal development. However, many will also want to explore future career opportunities either alongside caring, or on a full time basis if there is a change to your caring role.

If your caring role has necessitated a long break from paid employment the thought of returning to work can feel daunting. The OU Careers and Employability Service are there to support you and offer the following resources to help you explore your options and progress towards your goals.

“I haven’t worked for a few years because of my health – and I had a heart attack during my final module – but I’m getting there now and I’m hoping to get back into part-time employment. I thought by going to The Open University, keeping active, learning more and getting new skills, I could sell myself out there on the job market.”

- **One to one discussion with a careers consultant**

If you feel you need personal support to explore your career plans it’s easy to arrange a one to one discussion by email, phone or Skype. Just send us a few details and we’ll [get in touch](#) to make arrangements.
www.help.open.ac.uk/contact-a-careers-adviser

- **Webinar recordings**

As a first step it’s a good idea to reflect on your skills and interests. Take a look at the webinar '[Developing your career alongside caring](#)' for an overview of issues you’ll need to consider when beginning your career planning.

- **Career planning tips**

Section 1 of the OU [Career planning and job seeking workbook](#) also has a wealth of information and interactive activities to help with this process.

For more information, please contact your Student Recruitment and Support Team
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Wales-support@open.ac.uk

This pack is also available as a PDF with embedded weblinks at www.open.ac.uk/wales/carers

And in Welsh at www.open.ac.uk/wales/gofalwyr

Please give us feedback on the pack through our online survey at – <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DSTTZKK>



- **Which career sector?**

The next stage is to begin exploring potential career sectors and roles which match well to your skills and interests. Try to keep an open mind until you've thoroughly researched different options – it's easy to rule things out simply due to lack of confidence. The following resources will help you narrow your choices and also explore alternative and more flexible types of employment such as home working.

[Jobs and work experience](#)

[Homeworking](#)

- **Volunteering opportunities**

Volunteering can provide a flexible and supportive return to the workplace, providing opportunities to develop new skills, test out different types of work or simply build confidence through a phased return to an external working environment. The OU Students Association also have a range of volunteering opportunities.

[Voluntary work](#)

[Students Association volunteering](#)

[Webinar: Finding flexible work experience](#)

- **Building your CV**

When you are ready to start making applications you might be concerned about employment gaps on your CV or application forms, but there are steps you can take to emphasise skills developed through care, study and unpaid activity. Tips and examples can be found on the careers website and look out for our careers webinars on CV's and other career related topics.

[CV applications and interviews](#)

[Webinar: Mind the gap - planning a return to work after an employment break](#)

- **OU OpportunityHub**

Don't forget to register for the OU [Opportunityhub](#) vacancy service to monitor both paid and voluntary opportunities and access a range of useful resources.

- **'Returnships'**

If you have a professional background and are worried about how to get back into employment **you might want to consider a returnship – a paid internship aimed at professional returners. Take a look at the [Women Returners](#) website for more information.**

- **Up to date benefits information**

If you're concerned about how a return to work might impact on any benefits you're claiming it's a good idea to get a benefit check before making further decisions – **the Carers UK advice line** can carry out a free benefit check for you.

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/talk-to-us

- **Informal learning**

The websites **OpenLearn**, **OpenLearn Cymru** and **FutureLearn** have a wealth of free courses and resources. There are also some specific vocational courses that could help you think about careers and employment beyond your OU studies.

What about me? A personal development course for carers in Wales was developed between the OU and Carers Trust Wales which may be of interest. See the information section at the end of this pack for specific web links.

- **Work experience & internship opportunities in Wales**

If you're a carer aged 18-24, you may be eligible to join our supported work-experience programme.

If you're aged 18+ (no upper limit) you may also be eligible for our Santander Internship programme. Both programmes provide placements with real employers and businesses within Wales. For more info contact us at gowales@open.ac.uk

USEFUL CONTACTS OF SUPPORT AND INFORMATION



This section has useful contact details and signposting information including important OU contacts, and external organisations that support carers.

Useful contact points at The Open University

The Open University	This is the main Open University website. Explore our courses and qualifications.	www.open.ac.uk/study You can access contact points via your StudentHome. Contact: 029 2047 1170 Email Wales-support@open.ac.uk
OU Help Centre	A-Z of help topics	www.help.open.ac.uk or via StudentHome.
OU Library services	Get started with our guide to using and getting the most out of library resources.	www.open.ac.uk/library or via StudentHome.
Skills for OU study	Tips and guidance on effective study, from preparing assignments to revising for exams - simply choose the links that interest you.	www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy or via StudentHome.
OU Careers Advisory Service	This is a useful website to explore potential career options linked to OU courses and qualifications. There is a wealth of materials and information here, please also see direct links in the Careers section of this pack.	www.open.ac.uk/careers or via StudentHome.
Go Wales programme in Wales	Offer internships and work placements	gowales@open.ac.uk

Open University Student Association

OU Students Association	<p>Led by OU students, it has a range of services and peer support including:</p> <p>OU Students Association Caring & Dependency Group</p> <p>Disabled Students Group</p> <p>Nightline</p> <p>PLEXUS - specific support and comfort for LGBT+ students.</p>	www.oustudents.com
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Careers advice support

	<p>A comprehensive careers website for people living in Wales. It's for all ages and abilities and has information on jobs, courses and apprenticeships. It's a bilingual interactive site with specific information relevant to careers and opportunities in Wales.</p>	www.careerswales.com/en/
Directgov: National careers service	<p>A UK-wide website with information and help with careers. It offers:</p> <p>skills tests,</p> <p>course search,</p> <p>job search advice</p> <p>personalised help from careers advisers.</p>	www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx Directgov: education and learning

Other education and training opportunities

There are lots of opportunities to develop your learning with free online resources or through local courses and tasters, which may be run through your local carers' centre or adult education provider. Local colleges also offer a programme of adult education classes.

OpenLearn (Open University)	<p>A website with 10,000 hours of free learning content including video, audio and short courses.</p>	www.open.edu/openlearn
OpenLearn Cymru (Open University in Wales)	<p>A bilingual website with free courses available in English and Welsh including the What about me? Personal Development course for Carers.</p>	www.open.edu/openlearncymru
FutureLearn	<p>A website with a range of courses offered free by different universities.</p>	www.futurelearn.com
Khan Academy	<p>Free learning resources and online video tutorials mostly on maths, science and IT</p>	www.khanacademy.org

Adult Learning Wales	The largest provider of adult community learning in Wales. Provides courses in local community venues.	www.weacymru.org.uk
Local further education colleges	Many local further education colleges offer community learning courses.	This website lists all the colleges in Wales and through this you can link to their websites. The colleges in North and Mid Wales cover large areas and have many local centres.

Support organisations for carers in Wales

Carers Trust and Carers Trust Wales	24 hour online support; where to find your local carers' services; dedicated help and advice including benefit entitlements, carers' needs assessments and much more.	www.carers.org
Local Carers Centres and services	Carers' centres are independent charities that deliver a wide range of local support services to meet the needs of carers in their own communities. All carers' centres provide, either by telephone, drop-in or outreach surgeries, the following core services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional support • information and advice; • a carer's voice. 	To find your local carers' centre please look here .
Crossroads Care schemes	Crossroads Care schemes are a network of local independent charities providing respite services in the home enabling carers to take a break. This may be provided either as part of a care package funded through the local authority or paid for privately.	To find your nearest Crossroads Care scheme look here .
Samaritans	Whatever you're going through, call us free any time, from any phone on 116 123.	www.samaritans.org Tel: 116 123 (Free number)
Mind	Mental health charity, have specific website section for carers and how to cope when you're supporting someone else.	www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/carers-friends-family-coping-support/#.Wnrewq5l-Um

Local Health Board and Local Authority information for carers

Local Health Boards in Wales	All Health Boards have a requirement under the Carers Strategy (Wales) Measure 2010 to publish and implement a local Carers Information and Consultation Strategy telling carers what information and support they are entitled to, to help them in their caring role.	To find out what your Local Health Board is doing, log onto the ' NHS Wales ' website and type in 'carers' in the search option.
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Support provided by your Local Authority	Your Local Authority will also have details on carer support and what they provide.	You can find a list of them all on the link below. Just click on your region and type 'carers' in the search engine. www.gov.wales/topics/localgovernment/unitary-authorities/?lang=en
Citizens Advice Wales	Free advice on a wide range of issues – open to everyone in Wales and across the UK.	www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales

Give us your feedback

We'd really like to know what you think of this pack and how we can make it better. Please give us your feedback and top tips for other student carers [here](#).