

UTS Carer Inclusion

A Model

Action Plan

Acknowledgement of Country

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal People of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal People and the Gamaygal People upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

About this project

This UTS Carer Inclusion Model Action Plan arises out of a larger research collaboration between the UTS Centre for Carers Research, Institute of Public Policy and Governance and the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, and was undertaken with funding support from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Carer Investment Program.

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The UTS Carer Inclusion Action Plan

UTS's innovative approach to carer inclusion through research informed, experience-led practice is now well established. Our work through the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion (CSJI) and the NSW Government-supported Centre for Carers Research (CCR) evidences our expertise in this space.

The Centre for Carers Research was established in 2018 as part of the UTS Institute of Public Policy and Governance (IPPG), co-funded by the NSW Department of Community and Justice (formerly Family and Community Services) through the Carers Investment Program. It was established to produce work that directly informs development of policy and leading practice by collaborating with a broad network of stakeholders and experts.

This Carer Inclusion Action Plan builds on our work to date to enhance UTS's support for and inclusion of carers who work or study with our institution. We are led by inclusive values that not only *acknowledge* and *support* carers working and studying at our university, but *celebrate* them.

UTS aim to be a leader in the higher education sector as an organisation that addresses the needs of carers in our own institution and beyond. We are recognised as a Level 1 Accredited Carer Employer, as part of the NSW Carers + Employers programⁱ. Significant work has been undertaken to ensure employees and students with carer responsibilities are acknowledged, supported, and celebrated through activities including research projects, the development of student-focused resources, community engagement, establishing an industry-first Carer-in-Residence position, and providing information for employees to support carers in the UTS workforce. We are committed to a continued, sustained effort to ensure UTS's staff and student carers are heard, respected, and supported for the most meaningful opportunities for us all to succeed.

Our model for carer inclusion was developed by CSJI and CCR, and critically, informed by research undertaken in the UTS community with staff and students that centres their lived experiences as carers. It reflects the value we place on the experiences and perspectives of people working and studying with us while undertaking unpaid care work for family and friends.

This proposed model also reflects UTS's significant relationships with, and support from, industry and community partners. Development and consultation was undertaken with Carers NSW; NSW Department of Communities and Justice and the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS).

UTS's approach to developing our own model for action is informed by key work by the NSW Government to develop robust, evidence-based strategy to support carers. The recently released *NSW Carers Strategy: Caring in New South Wales 2020-2030*ⁱⁱ builds upon the *NSW Carers Strategy 2014-2019*. Alongside this strategy, the NSW Government has developed their own Action Plan, with a focus on the immediate and essential work necessary to improve outcomes for carers. The *Carers (Recognition) Act 2010* underpins this strategic work as a legislative base from which to consider our understandings of definitions of carers.

UTS's first Carer Inclusion Action Plan, in building on the progress we have already made in delivering evidence-based support for carers, is focused around the four priorities outlined in the *NSW Carers Strategy 2020-2030*ⁱⁱⁱ:

Priority 1

Carers have better access to information, services and supports

Priority 2

Carers will be recognised, respected and empowered

Priority 3

Carers have improved financial wellbeing and economic opportunities

Priority 4

Carers have better health and wellbeing

Our proposed actions align with the NSW Government's ongoing strategic focus and directly reflect input and feedback from our student and staff carers. We see this plan as data-informed best practice; a collaborative effort across campus that will empower not only those currently undertaking unpaid carer responsibilities, but also our future carers.



Source: De an Sun

Chau Au: Education Student

Pursue your passion and ambitions, and tailor the opportunities that are out there to suit your needs.

“I fell into a caring role at six years old. Growing up, one of my parents spent a lot of time in hospital as they suffer from mental illness. When I was 12, another family member, Oscar*, was also diagnosed with mental illness and I’ve been caring for him ever since.



I initially enrolled in a law degree but ended up switching to primary education. I like to help out in the community, and as a teacher I’ll be able to understand and support children who might have similar experiences to mine.

I was to be a mentor and role model for them.

Oscar often comes to uni with me; while I’m in class, he’ll be at a computer or study space nearby. He was really unwell one semester, which meant I couldn’t complete a two-week practicum and had to withdraw from one of my subjects.

At the end of the day, my caring responsibilities come first. I tell other carers that it doesn’t matter how long it takes to complete your degree. If you can’t study fulltime, try part time or defer.

**names and details have been changed for privacy reasons.*

Chau Au Education Student

Snapshot of Carers

The most recent national Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers found that across NSW there were approximately 854,300 carers^{iv}. Carers exist across all communities, cultural backgrounds, and age groups and the way each person becomes a carer and how they undertake their caring responsibilities is different. There is both a strong business and social case to be made for providing supportive workplaces for those balancing caring and work, study, and other roles. The business case reveals cost savings in increasing student retention, reducing employee absenteeism and in reducing stress. The social case argues that as most of us will be carers, and/or need care at some point in our lives, we all benefit from a society that values and supports caring.

It is consistently found within the research that caring alongside working and studying is a complex balance of factors, where addressing stand-alone concerns is not effective for every staff member or student with caring responsibilities^v.

Empirical research at UTS has been undertaken to better understand the experiences of students and staff who work or study while caring. Key findings from the 'Carers, We See You' UTS Student consultation report^{vi} as well as the 'Supporting staff carers in Higher Education: A case for reform at UTS's'^{vii} report inform this proposed model for action.

Student Carers

According to research by peak body, Carers NSW, there are approximately 44,000 carers in NSW currently attending university, with just under half (45%) aged under 24 years^{viii}. These numbers are likely understated, as research indicates that many people in caring roles do not identify as carers and as such are frequently not linked to services and supports that can assist them. UTS does not keep centralised records of student carers, so the exact number of those with caring roles is unknown.

Staff Carers

Staff carers can self-identify through mechanisms such as the UTS VOICE Staff Engagement Survey but UTS centralised records are not maintained in HR or similar systems. As a result, the exact number of staff balancing working and caring roles at UTS is unknown. However, in the most recent comprehensive VOICE Survey conducted in late 2018, 316 staff members identified as carers of people other than dependent children – representing 9.3% of all staff who completed the survey. This is consistent with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers which is the most reliable source of generalisable population level data regarding carers in NSW: the most recent ABS survey data (2018) indicates that 10.3% of the employed NSW population were carers^{ix}.

Leila Frijat: Carer-in-Residence, the Centre for Carers Research

Social change can't be achieved without embedding the lived experiences and perspectives of the people that you want to help.

“I am a carer for my younger brother.

I Think there is a common misconception that caring is frantic and chaotic. For me, caring has been the complete opposite. It is grounding and gives me time to reflect on what is important.

Usually the most profound moments of caring are the most subtle and unassuming, things that other people may not even notice but mean the world to you.

Our day-to-day sees me helping my brother around the house with food preparation and getting ready for outings. I also help manage his administrative needs – coordinating his NDIS – to build his independence and capacity.

At UTS Carer-In-Residence, I feel as though my personal life and research interests collide, perfectly suiting my caring responsibilities and career ambitions. I hope I can help inform research specifically about culturally and linguistically diverse



young carers, and help support the carers in my own life – especially the hidden ones – with the knowledge I learn.”

Leila Frijat Carer-in-Residence, the Centre for Carers Research

Carers Continuing to Thrive: Key Actions

Research undertaken at UTS and beyond has yielded a range of recommendations for organisations to than can enhance their acknowledgment of, support for and celebration of carers. In undertaking empirical research with working carers, we can offer findings that offer specific insight into approaches by UTS to engage in establishing further support. UTS's proposed actions (below) are grounded in the empirical research and draw on literature reviewed for CCR in 2020 alongside a number of other recent publications (in particular Taylor et al. 2021^{viii} and Andrewartha and Harvey 2021^{ix}).

We aim to progress these actions via a newly established Carer Inclusion Working Group that includes representation of key stakeholders from across UTS and provides updates on our progress to senior management via the Vice Chancellor's Social Justice and Inclusion Committee.

Priority 1 – Carers have better access to information, services and supports

A lack of information about accessing supports and services was found to have a significant impact on carers working and studying at UTS. We aim to ensure that our growing range of resources for staff and student carers are centralised and accessible and communicated regularly.

To do this we will:

- Collaborate across campus to centralise digital resources for carers, including Carers+Employer resources for staff
- Consider the development of Carer Welcome Packs for students and staff that provide information and advice about where to access resources
- Provide training to staff across campus who interact with carers including student support teams and line managers
- Develop clearer feedback mechanisms for student and staff carers to ensure ongoing systems improvements
- Strengthen student carers access to ALOs (Academic Liaison Officers) and provide additional training to ALOs on supporting student carers
- Identify a contact officer to assist staff carers in accessing information, services, and support
- Offer students continued access to academic services and resources such as the library, software, and research platforms during breaks in their studies resulting from carer responsibilities

Priority 2 – Carers will be recognised, respected and empowered

UTS will dedicate ongoing effort to programming a range of activities, beyond National Carer's Week, to raise awareness and the profile of carers working and studying at UTS. This aims to ensure that carers have a confident understanding of the supports available to them and are encouraged to access these and that managers and student support staff have the skills to understand and respond to the needs of carers.

To do this we will:

- Work to reduce repetitive processes around academic adjustments for student carers, through investigating options for one-time registration of student carers and/or the development of a carer's card/passport

- Investigate educational access and support programs for student/prospective student carers
- Clarify processes for leave requests for staff carers, and nominate an identified contact for Human Resources support
- Develop more robust data collection processes to establish clearer understanding of the number and experiences of carers working and studying at UTS
- Develop a carer representative/champion role to facilitate a point of connection for student carers to interact with carer support processes
- Continue to invest in communications/awareness raising campaigns focused on the work carers do and the value they contribute to UTS, using case studies of student and staff carers
- Undertake further efforts to embed a culture that supports flexible working, including additional professional development for line managers
- Ensure the needs of working carers are considered in policy development and strategic planning, actively encouraging direct carer engagement where possible
- Clearly articulate the differences between parental responsibilities and carer responsibilities in UTS policy frameworks

Priority 3 – Carers have improved financial wellbeing and economic opportunities

Carers experience a range of financial stressors. While many options exist for accessing financial support, carers may not always know what is available. UTS will assist, where possible, to provide guidance and advice around applying for financial support.

To do this we will:

- Provide regularly updated information to carers at UTS about free and low-cost assistance to support themselves and their care recipient
- Investigate offering specific information sessions dedicated to assistance with financial support for carers
- Provide access to information to support financial planning for carers
- Investigate a program to support student carers preparing to enter the workforce with additional coaching, mentorship, and job application advice, including specific support to participate in UTS Careers events and workshops
- Recognise the substantial skills of staff and student carers, and work to link carers with entrepreneurial opportunities through UTS Startups, internships and participation in entrepreneurship as a study or professional development opportunity
- Continue to build a workplace culture that recognises the valuable skill base that comes with unpaid care work as an asset, including by continuing programs that support the professional development and career progression of UTS staff carers

Priority 4 – Carers have better health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of our staff and student carers is critical to their continuing ability to support their loved ones, but also in to their own continued connection to their communities, future life plans and careers. We want our carers to feel confident in their work and study, knowing their health and wellbeing is a priority for us.

To do this we will:

- Provide clear information about how to access free and low-cost resources to help manage mental and physical health, including free counselling and access to the medical centre
- Connect student and staff carers to the Carer Gateway for additional support and information and ensure UTS communications support carer engagement with external events, information sessions etc
- Investigate campus based options for carers to rest during work breaks and ensure remote working options are available to support carer health and wellbeing
- Encourage the building of staff and student networks that offer opportunities to engage with other carers at UTS, through carer-lead groups and events with university support. These should include hybrid options, that reflect the COVID-19 environment
- Ensure regular opportunities for carers at UTS to engage in evaluation of programs and initiatives
- Dedicate ongoing attention to the impact of COVID-19 on working carers daily responsibilities, including considerations of challenges around working from home and changed access to support, informed by Carers + Employers COVID Briefings^x



Notes

- ⁱ Carers NSW (2020). *Carers + Employers*. NSW Government. <https://carersandemployers.org.au/>
- ⁱⁱ NSW Government (2020). *NSW Carers Strategy: Caring in NSW 2020-2030*. <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/inclusion/carers/nsw-carers-strategy>
- ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid* (2020)
- ^{iv} Carers NSW (2020). *Carers + Employers*. NSW Government. <http://www.carersnsw.org.au/facts/whoarecarers#SDAC>
- ^v Hill et al. (2016). *Carers and Social Inclusion Summary Report* (Issue December); Woods, R., & McCormick, S. (2018). *Carer Wellbeing and Supports: A review of the literature and directions for research*.
- ^{vi} Svejkar, D, Gleeson, P and Viswanathan, P 2019: *Carers, we see you*, Centre for Carers Research, Institute of Public Policy and Governance, University of Technology Sydney
- ^{vii} Gleeson, P, Viswanathan, P, Frijat L, Taylor, H 2021: *Supporting Staff Carers in Higher Education: A case for reform at UTS*, Centre for Carers Research, Institute of Public Policy and Governance, University of Technology Sydney
- ^{viii} *Ibid* (2019).
- ^{ix} Carers NSW (2020). *Carers + Employers*. NSW Government. <http://www.carersnsw.org.au/facts/whoarecarers#SDAC>
- ^x Jordan Taylor, Paula Gleeson, Tania Teague & Michelle DiGiacomo (2021) *Practices of inclusion for carers who are higher education students*, International Journal of Inclusive Education.
- ^{xi} Andrewartha, L. & Harvey, A. (2021). *Supporting carers to succeed in Australian higher education*. Report for the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. Melbourne: Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research, La Trobe University.
- ^{xii} Carers + Employers. (2020) COVID Briefings 1,2&3. <https://carersandemployers.org.au/news-andevents>
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