

Interreg
North Sea Region
I2I

European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION



Abertay
University



STUDENT CARER ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS 2022-23

ABSTRACT

This document provides results from an online Student Carer Survey that was conducted during the 2022-23 Academic Year by the Student Carer Ambassadors Initiative as part of the Interreg North Sea Region I2I (from isolation to inclusion) Project.

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Abertay Student Carer Survey 2022-23

1. Introduction

Many people experience social isolation and loneliness. The public sector struggles to address this complex problem. The EU North Sea Region Interreg funded project (called I2I - From isolation to inclusion) attempts to address this issue through innovation and collaboration with service providers and target groups. Abertay University is an I2I work package leader where a previous project with Dundee Carers identified that a Young Adult Carers network falls through the gaps when they transition to University from school / HE. Student Carers are four times more likely to drop out than those that are not Carers due to i.e., feelings of isolation, concentrating on assignments and mental health issues (Carers Trust Scotland, 2020).

The Abertay Student Carers Working Group, formed in 2021, is a collaboration between the Abertay I2I team, the Students' Association and Student Services. The group recognises that there are many other factors that contribute to drop-out rates. The opportunity to apply for a student learning experience project by Abertay's Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy led to the engagement of four Student Carer Ambassadors with the aim being to inform Abertay staff at all levels (academic and professional services) of the Student Carer experience that balances studying and caring including barriers / challenges encountered in accessing support. This has enabled recommendations to improve Student Carer success rates and ultimately retention rates.

2. Research Methodology

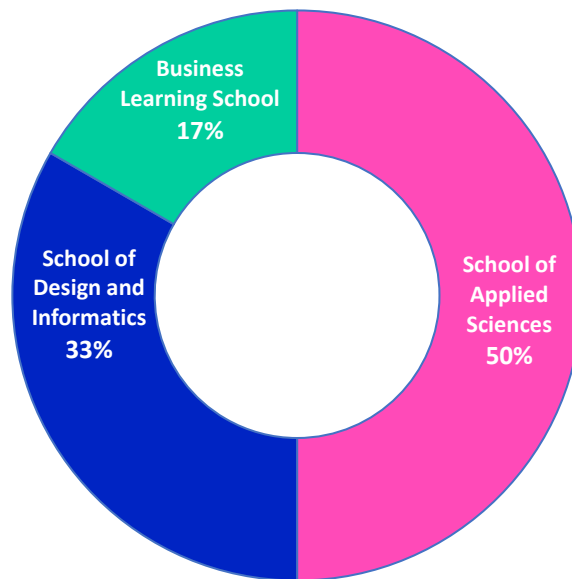
An online survey was designed to elicit Student Carer experiences. The survey was designed by the Student Carers Working Group and Student Carers using google forms. The survey was based on the de Jong Gierveld and the Campaign to end Loneliness evaluation tools and a multidimensional approach to improving service delivery – the 7 items for accessibility of services (CEL 2015, OECD 2019). All questions were modified to relate to Student Carer experiences as reported in the Student carer Experience in Scotland report (Carers Trust Scotland, 2020).

For the Academic Year 2022 - 2023, Abertay University had 168 disclosed Student Carers. There were 19 responses to the survey resulting in an 11% response rate. Student Carer gender was 60% female, 25% male, 10% non-binary with 5% preferring not to say. Age ranged from 42% under 25, 21% between the ages of 26 and 35, 15% between the ages of 36 and 45, 10% between the ages of 46 and 55, and 1% each between the ages of 56 and 65 and older than 65.

Most Student Carers (80%) are studying at undergraduate level with 16% studying at post-graduate level and 5% undertaking the AHEAD programme.

Respondent split between Schools was: 47% School of Applied Science; 32% School of Design and Informatics; 16% Business Learning School and 5% Graduate School.

Survey results are provided in Appendix 1. A final section was provided in the survey that asked Student Carers if they had any further comments on how Abertay could make improvements to support them in their studies. These comments can be found in Appendix 2.



3. Brief Summary of Survey Findings

This document provides results from the Student Carer Survey that was conducted during 2022-23 Academic Year. In general, most student Carers are female (60%), with 42% of all Student Carers under 25 years of age and most studying at undergraduate level (80%).

Overall Abertay provides a good service for Student Carers, especially from an academic service perspective. Sections 3-6 discuss results in full and Section 7 provides all survey results. Key areas where Abertay could potentially improve support for Student Carers:

- Abertay staff should have a better understanding of Carers needs (42% felt needs were only considered some of the time or never);
- 47% felt they only have emotional support some of the time or never;
- 63% find it difficult to focus on studying and exams;
- 84% struggled to find time to socialise due to caring responsibilities;
- and 67% struggle financially.

4. Abertay Service Provision and Support

Student Carer needs (26%) are considered by Abertay staff with 32% needs considered a lot of the time. However 42% feel that their needs were only considered some of the time or never. Student carers are always happy with support provided (28%) with 39% happy a lot of the time. However 39% were only happy some of the time or were never happy with support provided by Abertay.

Student Carers (32%) were always able to access help and information they needed with 32% able to access help and information a lot of the time. 37% felt they were able to access help and information only some of the time or not at all. 79% of Student Carers were aware of the Students' Association Carer Community representative so that they could seek support when they needed to.

Practical support from Abertay was always received by 16% of Student Carers, 53% had practical support a lot of the time with 31% feeling that they had practical support only some of the time or

never. Student Carers were aware of the academic support available (68%) at Abertay with 84% struggling to meet academic deadlines as their caring responsibilities constantly change from day to day. Student Carers (63%) found it difficult to focus on studying and exams at all times with the remaining 36% finding it difficult some of the time.

5. Health and Wellbeing

Student Carers (26%) advise that they have a good level of emotional support from Abertay and 26% have emotional support a lot of the time. However, 48% of Student Carers only have emotional support some of the time or never. Close friendships made at Abertay by Student Carers was 63% however 84% struggled to find time for socialising due to responsibilities (10% struggled some of the time). Student Carers agreed that 84% of academic staff were aware of their caring responsibilities whilst also studying. We asked if a Carers hub or regular social event with other Student Carers and Staff Carers would be helpful with 83% agreeing that this would be helpful.

6. Other issues – Culture, Local Authority Registration and Finances

Cultural issues were covered in the survey with 42% Student Carers noting that their culture does not recognise that they are a Carer which makes combining studying with Caring responsibilities more difficult. 60% of Student Carers had not registered their Caring status with the Local Authority and 67% found that they struggled financially being a Student and a Carer.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Circulation of the survey should be an iterative process over the following academic years in order to compare and review the impact of the work undertaken and interventions implemented by the Student Carer Working Group year on year.

8. References

Carers Trust Scotland, (2020). The Student Carer Experience in Scotland. Available at: <https://carers.org/downloads/scotland-pdfs/the-student-carer-experience-in-scotland.pdf>

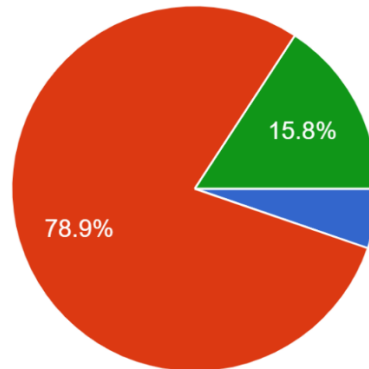
The Campaign to End Loneliness (CEL), (2015). MEASURING YOUR IMPACT ON LONELINESS IN LATER LIFE. Available at: <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-Measurement-Guidance1.pdf>

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), (2019). Measuring Public Sector Innovation Why, when, how, for whom and where to? Available at: <https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Measuring-Public-Sector-Innovation-Part-5b-of-Lifecycle.pdf>

Appendix 1 Survey Results

What stage of study are you?

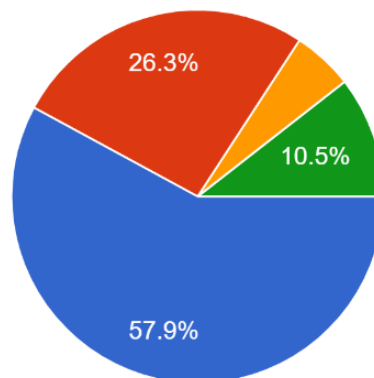
19 responses



- AHEAD
- Undergraduate
- Post-graduate Taught
- Post-graduate Research

Your Gender

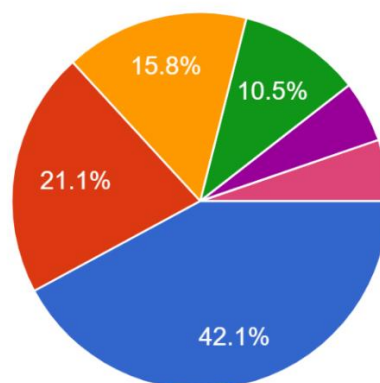
19 responses



- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Non-binary
- Transgender male
- Transgender Female

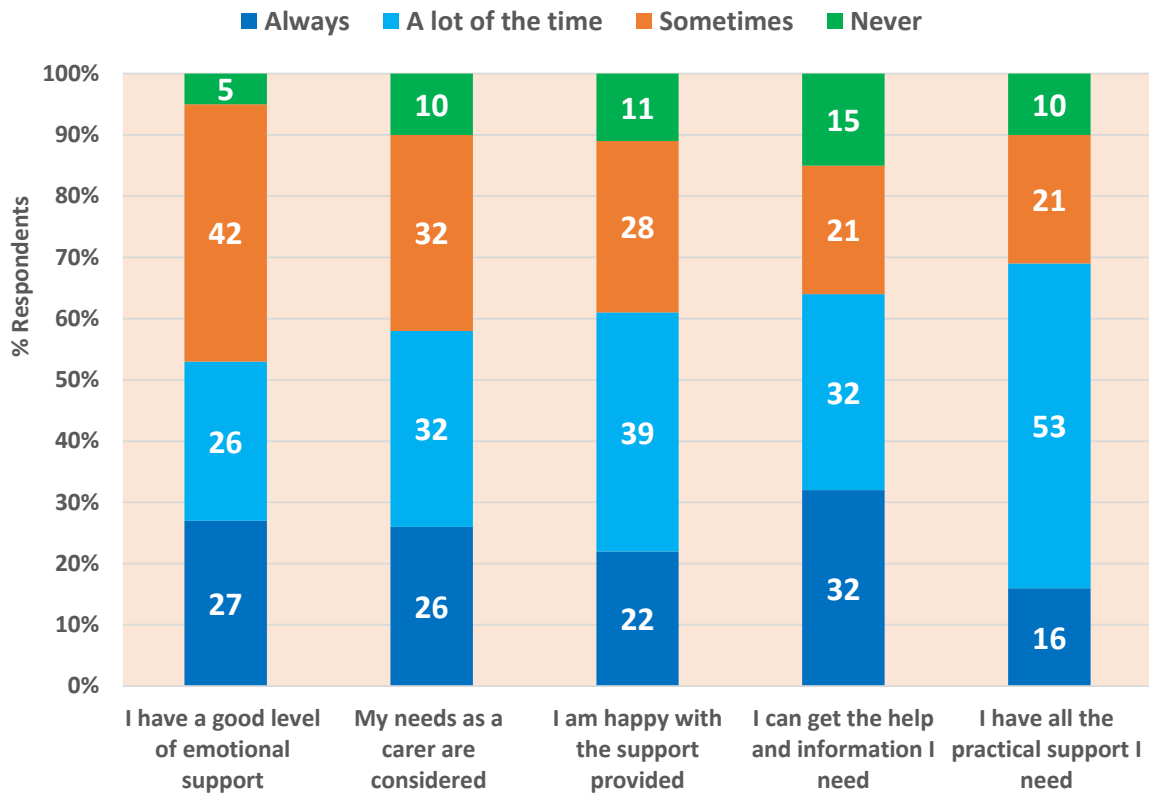
Your Age

19 responses



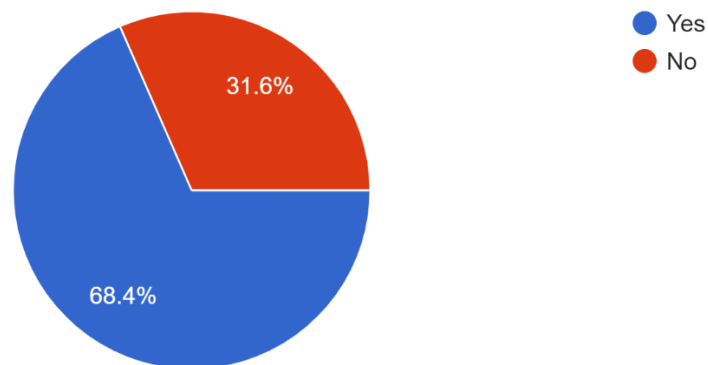
- 25 and under
- 26 - 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56 - 65
- Prefer not to say
- Prehistoric

Abertay service delivery



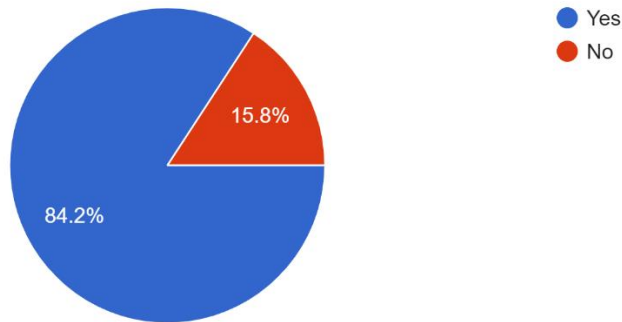
I am aware of what Abertay has to offer me in regards to academic support

19 responses



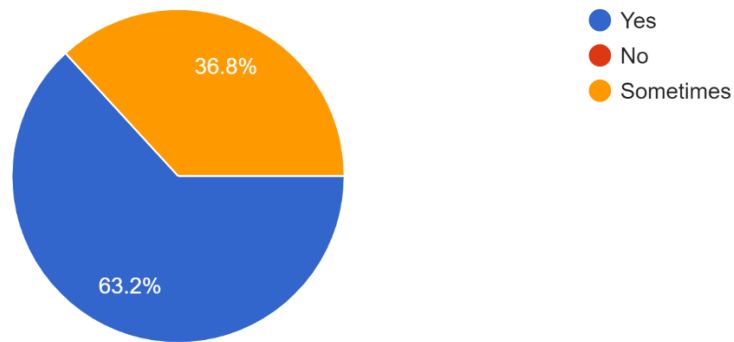
I find that I struggle to meet academic deadlines due to my caring responsibilities as they constantly change, from day to day.

19 responses



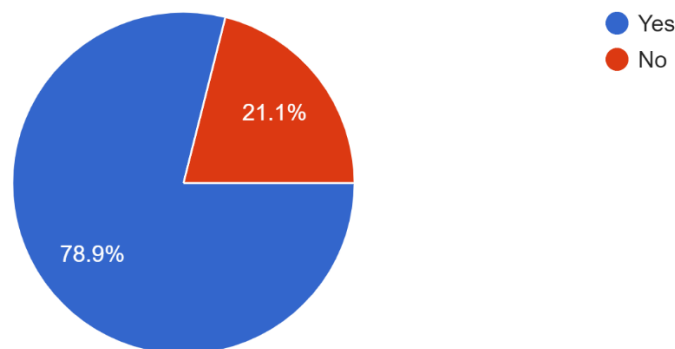
I find it difficult to focus on studying and exams

19 responses



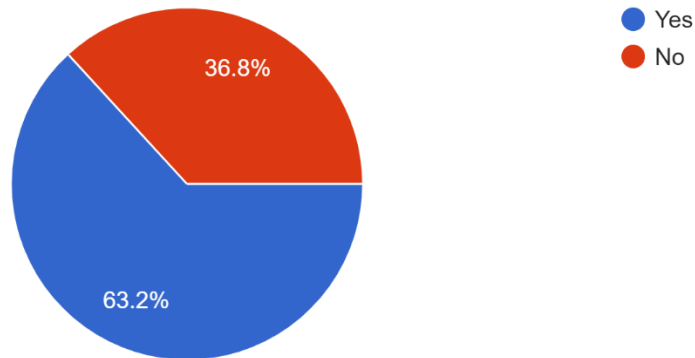
I am aware of the carer community representative and the student association, so I can seek support when I need it.

19 responses



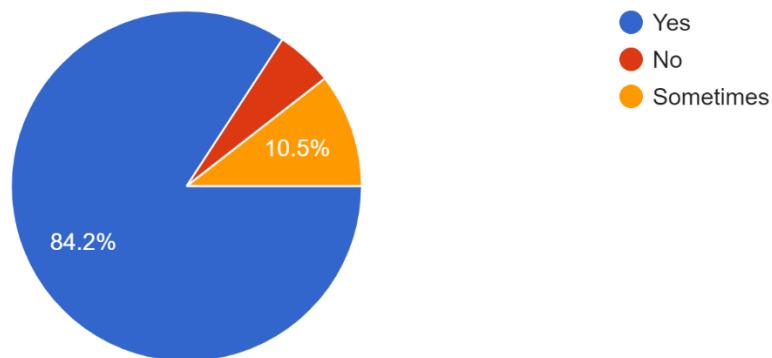
I have managed to make close friendships at university.

19 responses



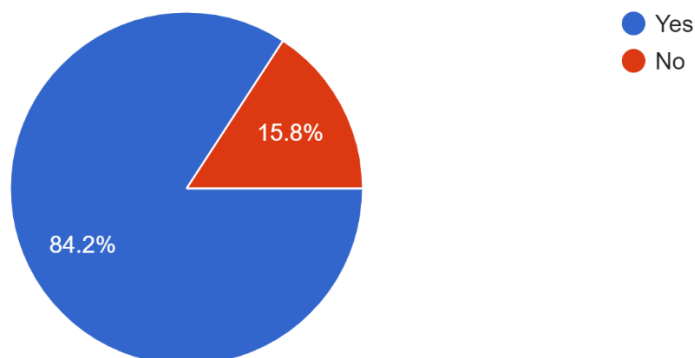
I struggle to make time for socialising at Abertay due to my responsibilities

19 responses



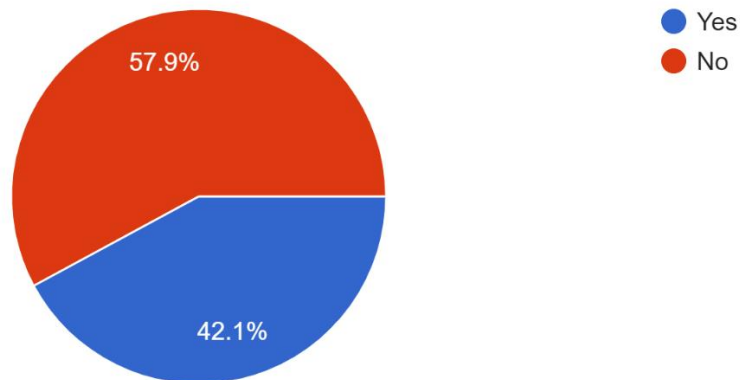
My lecturer staff are understanding and are aware that I have caring responsibilities whilst I study.

19 responses



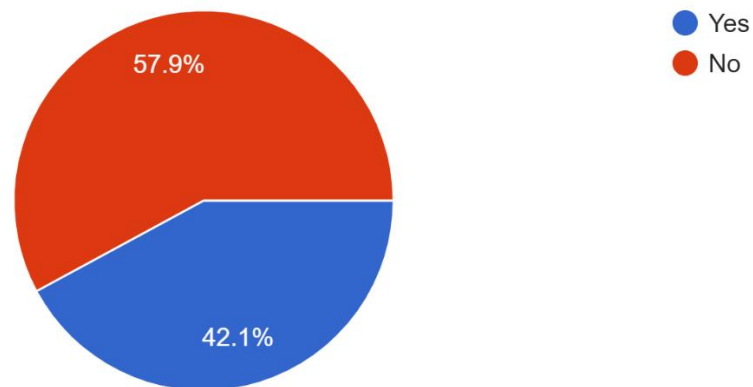
My culture doesn't recognise being a 'carer'.

19 responses



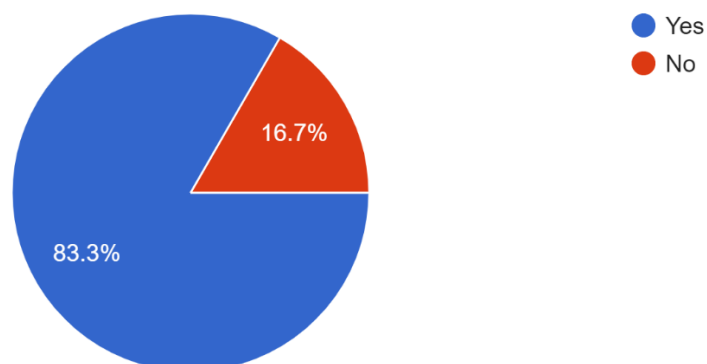
My local authority is aware that I am a carer?

19 responses



I would find a Carers hub or regular social event with other carer students and carer staff helpful.

18 responses



9. Appendix 2 Further Comments



What academic challenges do you face as a Student Carer?

"It's difficult with the workload and deadlines when carer requirements change daily"

"More help with time to put in assessments and exams"

"I sometimes struggle to attend core times as well as keeping up to date with weekly module contents"

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What other challenges do you face?

- Support and Information
- Funding & Finance help
- Employability
- Sports and Leisure
- Mental Health
- Latest Updates

"Whilst my lecturers have been very understanding of my Care responsibilities I have been unable to connect to any other Carer focused resources..."

"...or contacts at Abertay"

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What could Abertay do to help?

"More support to make you aware of funding and other help avenues, as I wasn't aware of the help available until 2 weeks ago (I'm halfway through 4th Year) - I would've had access to much more support"



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What would help before you come to University?

UCAS

"I think as soon as you have ticked the carer box on the UCAS form, it should automatically flag with student services, etc. that you will need extra help rather than you having to ask for it. It would also be useful for this info to be email to carers who are starting university"

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Any other way Abertay could help?



"Perhaps a conversation with someone who deals with students who are full time Carers?"

"Regular booked "check ins" would make me feel seen and heard."

"Someone who understands our daily stresses and can relate to our struggles?"

"Only those who have been through the struggles of being a Carer will understand how difficult that is"

"Maybe help financially if you're an unpaid Carer"

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What good experiences have you had at Abertay?



"I feel supported in studies and am grateful for Abertay's support plan policy. I know that I would have dropped out of university by now if it hadn't been in place. Thank you!"

"I have multiple caring duties and find I have little time for myself at home. I enjoy coming to classes twice a week for some me time. !"

"Having made new friends has helped my confidence and wellbeing. Sometimes you don't realize others are feeling / coping with similar circumstances. Connecting with others is a big part of my wellbeing"

abertay.ac.uk