

Guidance for supporting student carers

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Content

1. Summary	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Scope of guidance	4
4. The University's commitment	5
5. Key responsibilities	5
6. Next steps for students:	6
a. Disclosure	6
b. Confirming carers status	7
c. Who to inform	7
d. Confidentiality	7
7. Flowchart for students	8
8. Next steps for staff:	9
a. Initial contact	9
b. Enabling continuation of study	9
c. Academic standards	10
d. Delineating arrangements	10
e. Implications for study	10
f. Withdrawal from or suspension of studies	10
g. Resuming studies	10
h. Financial considerations	11
i. Accommodation	11
j. Confidentiality	11
9. Flowchart for staff	12
10. Support and signposting	13
11. Complaints	13
12. Using the checklist	13
13. Reviewing the guidance	13
14. Appendix A – Action Checklist - student carer	14

1. Summary

What is this guidance about ?

This guidance document sets out the University's approach to supporting students or prospective students who are carers and have identified themselves as needing support. It explains the parameters of support the University is able to provide to student carers along with sources of further information and signposting to other services. It also provides comprehensive details to staff on the University's agreed approach to managing within this situation as well as giving advice, guidance and signposting information that can be used to support these students.

Who is the guidance for?

This guidance is for prospective and current student carers as well as all staff supporting students. It may also be of interest to the wider public.

How does the University check this guidance is followed?

The University has various formal ways of monitoring that this guidance is being used and working effectively. Use of this guidance will be monitored through a number of channels including student feedback, referrals to the Student's Union and/or Sabbatical Officers and student complaints.

Who can you contact if you have any queries about this guidance?

If you have questions about this guidance please contact the Equality and Diversity Team at equality@port.ac.uk.

2. INTRODUCTION

The University aims to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all its learners. It acknowledges that some will be carers, and at times, may need support in their studies due to the implications of their caring responsibilities. This guidance has been developed with this in mind and aims to provide advice to:

- Students who need support, at any point during their studies at the University, due to the emotional or practical assistance they provide as a carer.
- University staff who have a role in advising or supporting students who already are, or who anticipate becoming carers and need support due to their caring responsibilities.

A carer is defined as:

An adult who provides or intends to provide care for another adult needing care. (Clause 10:3 of the Care Act 2014)

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 2017)

This guidance is underpinned by the following relevant legislation:

- **The Care Act 2014** sets out expectations of Local Authorities to make sure that people needing care who live in their areas receive services that prevent, reduce and delay their care needs from becoming more serious; can get the information they need to make good decisions about care and support and have a good range of providers to choose from. The duty to promote wellbeing also extends to carers, and this emphasis on prevention means carers should receive support before reaching crisis point.
- **The Equality Act 2010** is significant to all carers and can be applied if they experience direct discrimination by association with someone who has a 'protected characteristic' within law such as in relation to disability.

3. SCOPE OF GUIDANCE

The guidance covers any current or prospective student who has sole or shared responsibility for a relative, close friend or neighbour because they are ill, have a disability, are experiencing mental distress or are affected by addiction. This responsibility for emotional or practical support may occur at any point in their University career and may not be predictable, or have a set timescale.

The need for care can often be differentiated as 'short' or 'long' term. The University acknowledges that requirements and demands on the carer may fluctuate and can often intensify over time and recognises that each carer's needs are unique and need to be dealt with on an individual basis based on need and circumstances.

The scope of this guidance does **not** include parental responsibilities, unless for a child with a disability. It does not cover any caring responsibilities that are part of a voluntary placement or where payment is received.

The guidance focuses primarily on the responsibility of the caring and impact on study-related matters. Sources of help and advice on related issues can be found at the end of the document.

Due to specific UK Visas and Immigration and/or sponsor requirements, this guidance does **not** cover international students who have a caring role. However those who do raise caring concerns with you should be signposted to the International Office at internationaloffice@port.ac.uk or telephone 023 9284 3488 and ask for the International Student Adviser for further advice.

4. THE UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT

The University believes that caring responsibilities in themselves should not prevent students from succeeding in their studies. The University is committed to providing as much flexibility as possible to facilitate students' success, making sure no student is disadvantaged whilst ensuring academic standards are not compromised. The degree of flexibility that can be offered will vary between University Faculties, (eg, professional degrees may have less leeway for flexibility than others), but all Faculties will follow the general approach set out in this document.

5. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The University will ensure that:

- Sufficient information is provided about the essential requirements of a programme of study for a prospective student to make an informed decision about whether the programme is realistic for them in light of the demands of their caring responsibilities.
- Any student who has responsibility for the care of another before or during a period of study at the University is accommodated as far as practicable to allow them to complete their programme of study, providing academic standards are upheld.
- Relevant staff are made aware of the terms of this guidance and their responsibilities arising from it.
- If required, the Equality and Diversity team are available to discuss with staff the best way to support the continuing study of such a student to ensure they are able to complete their programme of study.
- Appropriate support is available to students through various support services
- This guidance is kept under review and updated as necessary.

The Faculties must ensure that:

- A member of staff, such as a personal tutor/research supervisor, or someone of the student's choosing, is identified as the point of reference for the student carer to discuss the options available to them.
- The guidance is widely publicised and available to staff and students.
- Whenever practicable, accommodation is made to ensure that such a student is able to complete their programme of study.
- The student is given information on other sources of advice/support.

Individual staff members

All individual staff members are **advised to**:

- Familiarise themselves with this document and the University's responsibilities towards students who disclose caring responsibilities

Individual staff members to whom caring responsibilities are disclosed are **responsible for**:

- Reading the guidance and, in particular, becoming familiar with the procedure for supporting student carers
- Treating any disclosure of caring responsibilities seriously and making students aware of appropriate sources of support
- Discussing with the student how the caring responsibilities might impact on their programme of study. This may be particularly important on programmes leading to professional registration
- Respecting a student's right to confidentiality and gaining the student's consent to their situation being discussed with others for whom it is relevant to know – particularly when information needs to be passed onto other staff members to arrange any agreed accommodations to the programme of study or adjustments to fees
- Ensuring accurate information is given to prospective students regarding the availability of support for students with caring responsibilities
- Seeking advice from colleagues, central support services and the Equality and Diversity team within the University if they are unsure of how best to support the continued study of such a student

Students (and applicants)

Students and applicants whose situations are covered by this guidance are **advised to**:

- Disclose their situation promptly to a trusted member of staff within their Department, including giving an indication of the anticipated impact on their studies
- Read the guidance in order to understand the University's approach to support student carers
- Ensure that they have a clear idea of what will be expected of them on their course of study in order to understand the potential impact of any absences resulting from their caring responsibilities.

6. NEXT STEPS FOR STUDENTS

Once a student has decided to inform the Department of their caring responsibilities the following should happen (there is a flowchart which can be used as a quick reference guide on page 7):

a) Disclosure

Students are **not** under any obligation to inform their Department if they are or are going to become a carer. However, the University will only be able to offer effective support if it knows of the situation, as soon as possible. If informed the Department will be in a much better position to provide information on:

- The options on assessments
- Catching up on missed seminars and lectures

- Course placements
- Time to attend appointments (if necessary)
- Deferment, withdrawal or suspension of studies

Whilst making a decision on whether or not to inform their Department, students are encouraged to consider the following:

- Will an absence (eg, to make alternative care arrangements or accompany the person you care for to medical appointments) impact significantly on your studies? *The Faculty will only be able to take into account reasons for absence if they are notified of these.*
- Does an absence from University need to be discussed with another organisation(s) ? (eg, if you are a postgraduate research student and are in receipt of a bursary, scholarship or external funding, you should refer to the terms and conditions relating to your award)
- Would an absence from University adversely affect the work of other student(s) you are working alongside (for example, on a group project or in a research team)? *This might make it imperative to notify the Faculty, so that plans can be made to deal with any such issues arising from absence.*

b) Confirming carers status

A student carer has the responsibility for confirming their status as a carer. The University recognises that proof of status may come from a range of sources. The following supporting documentation may be regarded as acceptable confirmation of the student's status as a carer:

- Self- certification regarding the nature of the caring duties and how this may affect their study, including how long they anticipate this will last.
- A doctor's letter confirming that they have the responsibility of caring for a close friend, relative or neighbour and any perceived impact on the student.
- A local authority carers' assessment.
- Any other reasonable evidence.

This evidence would usually be given to the student's School/Department. At any point the School/Department may request further evidence to confirm caring status or any changes to the student carer's responsibilities.

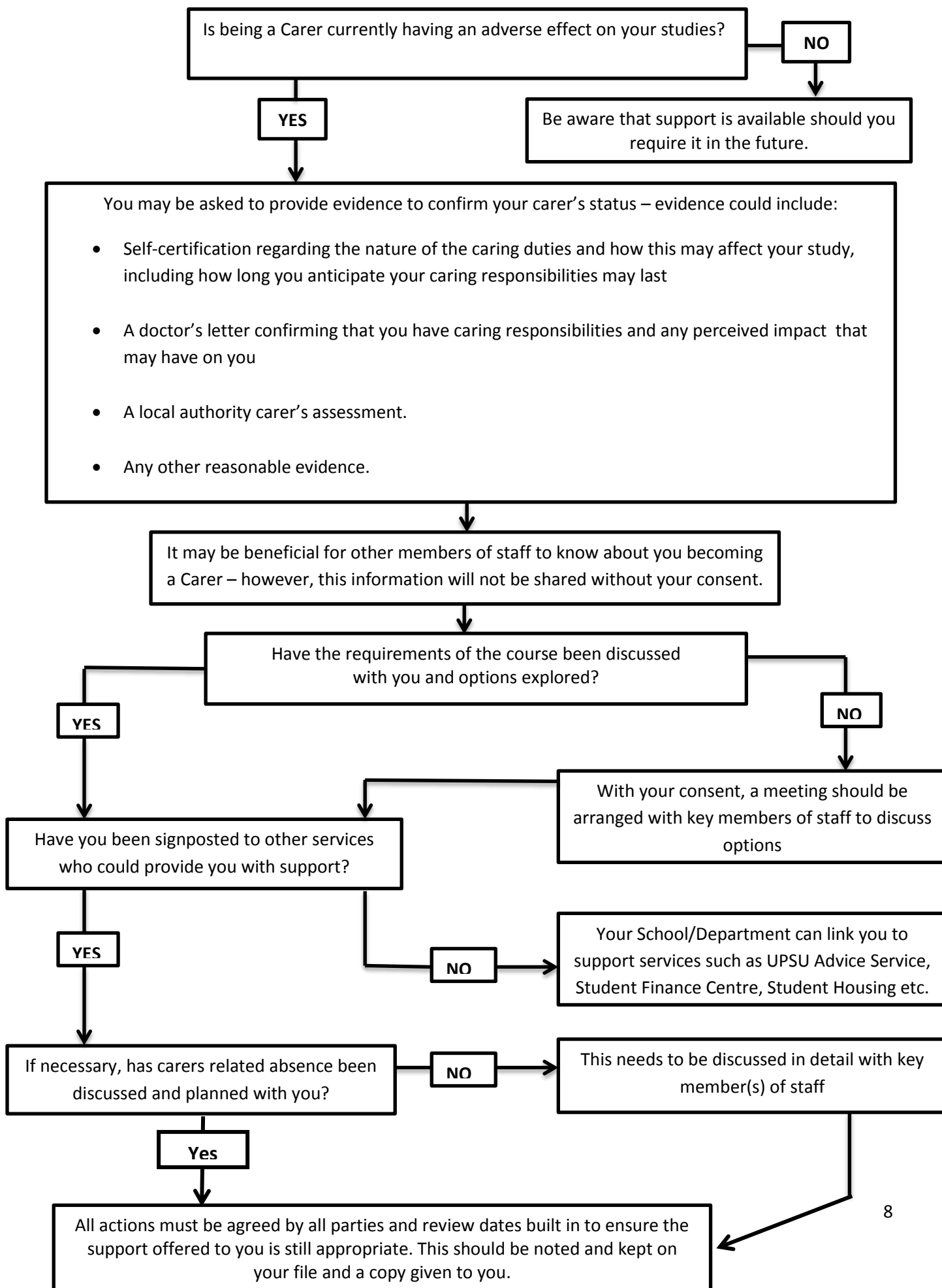
c) Who to inform

Once a student has decided to inform the University of their caring status they may wish to inform their personal tutor or research supervisor who is the first point of contact for undergraduates/Masters postgraduates and PhD students respectively. In addition the student may also choose to speak to another member of staff, with whom they are comfortable to talk about their circumstances.

d) Confidentiality

Any information that the student carer discloses will be treated confidentially and will only be passed on with agreed prior consent.

7. Quick Reference Guide for Students



8. NEXT STEPS FOR STAFF

This section provides further information on supporting students coming under the scope of this guidance and for any member of staff with a role in advising or supporting students. At all times, staff must ensure that students with caring responsibilities are not treated less favourably than any other student on the basis of their circumstances. In line with the University's legal obligations, flexibility should be shown where possible to ensure continued learning is facilitated. Information provided by students should be treated confidentially (being passed on only when necessary and only with the student's consent) and with sensitivity. Staff should not attempt to influence any student's decision but should be non-judgemental and provide impartial advice.

a) Initial contact

When a student contacts a member of staff to discuss any circumstances covered by this guidance, a response should be made as soon as possible in order to minimise concern or undue stress to the student. Where the member of staff contacted by the student is not the student's personal tutor, or research supervisor in the case of postgraduate students, permission should be sought from the student to inform the personal tutor or research supervisor. They in turn should inform their respective Associate Dean Students who is the most appropriate person to be the Faculty contact with the central support services and advise where the student should seek further help.

b) Enabling continuation of study

Whilst it is recognised that each request must be dealt with on an individual basis, there are a number of measures that can be used in order to enable the student's continuation of study. These include:

- Allowing time out of study for an anticipated amount of time if increased support is required by the person for whom the student provides care.
- Giving permission for periods of absence for medical appointments, where the student carer is required to provide support or transport, and making arrangements for the student to catch up on missed classes where practicable.
- Giving consideration for student's to change their timetable to another group if possible and space permits.
- Showing a degree of flexibility, as demonstrated through the existing Extenuating Circumstances process, if the student's circumstances make it difficult for them to meet assignment deadlines and/or attend examinations.
- Consideration of any requests to transfer to part time study, where this is possible (although the student should bear in mind the financial implications of this course of action).
- Offering support, based on discussions with the student, to help them reintegrate back into their studies after a prolonged period of absence

It is important to take the views and wishes of the student into account, rather than applying a standard set of arrangements, as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not suit all students. All decisions taken should be discussed with the student and, with the student's permission, the student's personal tutor or research supervisor, should be kept informed.

c) Academic standards

Whilst an appropriate degree of flexibility should be exercised, care must be taken to ensure that academic standards are not compromised. A balance must be achieved between ensuring the student is not disadvantaged, and giving undue special

treatment. It is not mandatory for the University to grant every request made, although efforts should be made to meet reasonable requests.

If any request is refused, the reasons for the refusal should be provided in writing to the student, and should include details on the right to appeal. More information on the appeal process can be accessed [here](#).

d) Delineating arrangements

Where specific arrangements are required to be put in place for a student who is already granted additional arrangements (for example, on the grounds of disability), these should be kept separate in order that it remains clear which arrangements relate to which particular circumstance. This ensures that these arrangements are in place for the required amount of time and also clarifies adherence to the different pieces of legislation. The Equality and Diversity team will endeavour to support staff requiring guidance on considering these implications.

e) Implications for study

Discussions will identify what the implications on studying are for the carer. Once a final agreement has been made between the member of staff and student carer this will have to be agreed and signed off by the Head of Department (or their nominee) as there may be timetabling, budgetary and resource implications. Once this has taken place any agreement between the member of staff and student carer should be recorded and kept on the student's record. This should detail arrangements required during the period in which care is being provided. This plan may cover short, long term or intermittent caring responsibilities, and the nature of this should be reflected within this agreement and signed by both parties to ensure that the implications are clearly understood, and that steps have been put in place to mitigate any impact on study. It would also be advisable at this stage to seek permission from the student to share the agreement where necessary. The student carer must receive a copy of this agreement for their information.

f) Withdrawal from or suspension of studies

The carer's responsibilities may change and develop over time, and in some cases students may need to withdraw temporarily or suspend their studies. Any such decisions should also take into consideration the academic requirements of the programme of study. Students can get more information [here](#).

If a student decides to withdraw they must let Academic Registry know by completing and submitting the on-line Student Withdrawal form.

g) Resuming studies

The student should inform their personal tutor or research supervisor once they are ready to return, and plan, with them, an appropriate timetable for re-integration into their programme of study, including the examination schedule where appropriate.

Before a student returns from a period of carer related absence consideration should be given to their needs on their return. Options should be discussed with the student before and during their carer related absence and these should be reviewed should the student's circumstances change.

Any student who has formally withdrawn from their course must formally reapply to the University to resume their studies. This is also the case if a student has arranged a change to a part-time programme of study and wishes to resume a full-time curriculum.

h) Financial considerations:

Students who have caring responsibilities during their studies need to consider any financial implications and the support they can access. Students can get information and advice from the [Student Finance Centre](#).

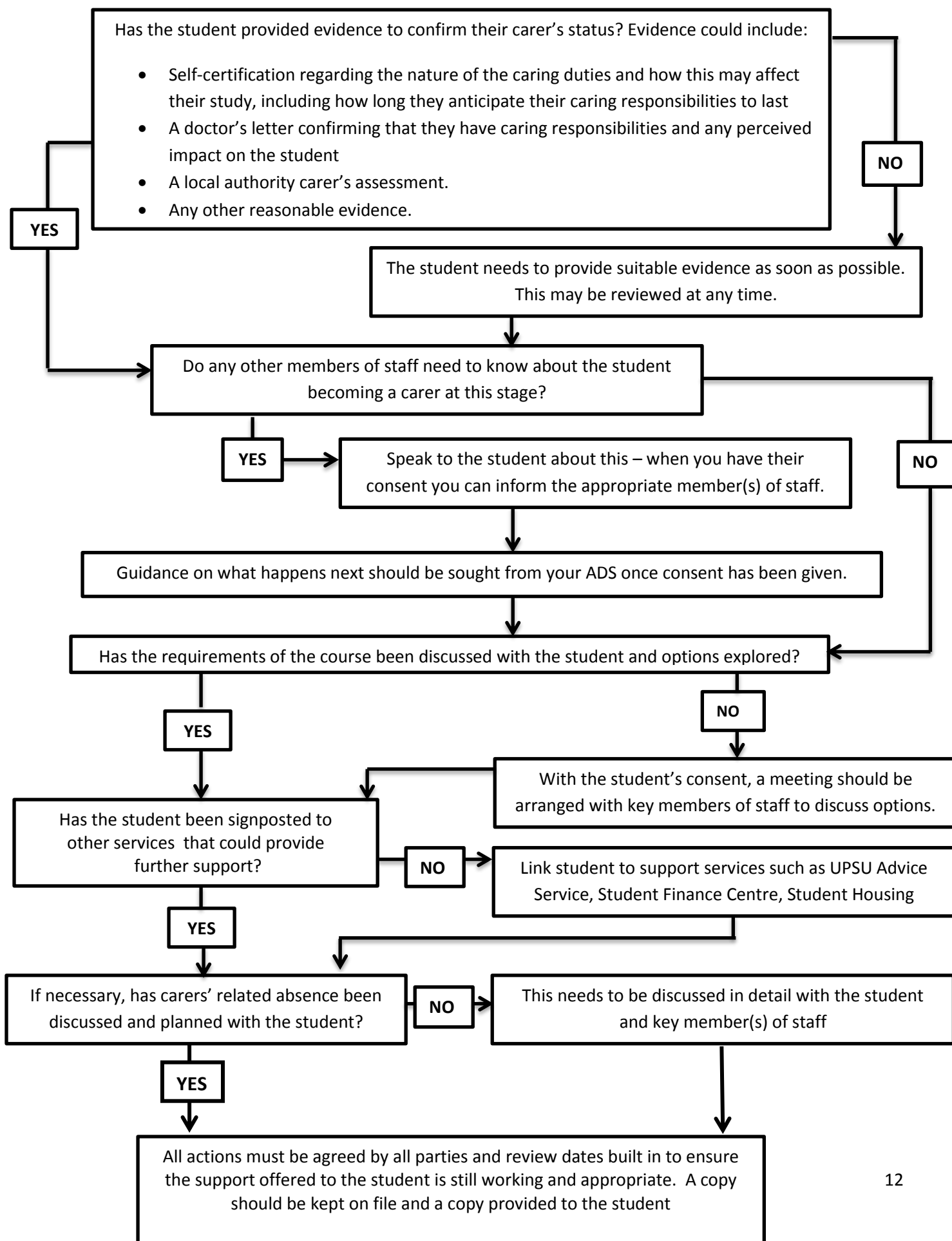
i) Accommodation:

Students who are/became carers whilst living in Halls of Residence, shared accommodation or privately rented housing may find this is no longer suitable as they may need to move closer to the person they care for to offer further support. Students can get advice on their options from [Student Housing](#)

j) Confidentiality:

To reiterate: any information that is disclosed should be treated confidentially and should only be passed on with the student's consent. Details of who is informed and when should be agreed with the student.

9. Quick reference guide for supporting student carers whose caring responsibilities are having an adverse impact on their studies:



10. SUPPORT AND SIGNPOSTING

A range of services across the University and the Students' Union (UPSU) can offer confidential support and information to student carers. This includes dealing with emotional issues as well as other practical types of assistance. These services include:

- [Health and Medical Care](#)
- [Chaplaincy](#) – Nuffield Centre – 023 9284 3030 – chaplains@port.ac.uk
- [Student Wellbeing Service](#) – Nuffield Centre – 023 9284 3157– wellbeing@port.ac.uk
- [UPSU Advice Service](#) – 023 9284 3478– advice@upsu.net

Students also have access to external organisations for information, advice or support. These include:

- Student's GP
- [Portsmouth Carers Centre](#) - 023 9285 1864 - carerscentre@portsmouthcc.gov.uk
- [Carers UK](#) – 0808 808 7777 – info@carersuk.org
- [Carers UK Portsmouth](#) - 07946 382432 (Evenings 6-9pm & Weekends only) - suedawkins59@googlemail.com
- [NHS - Carers Direct Helpline](#) – 0300 123 1053
- [Carers Together](#) - 01794 519495 – admin@carerstogether.org.uk
- [Carers Trust](#) - 0844 800 4361 - info@carers.org
- [Healthwatch - Portsmouth](#) - 023 9397 7079
- [Portsmouth Local Offer](#) – for children, young people and their families with special educational needs or a disability

11. COMPLAINTS

Any student who feels that the University has failed to adhere to this guidance may raise a complaint under the University's Complaint Procedure which can be found [here](#). It is best if complaints are raised informally, with the individuals involved in setting up/maintaining the agreement, in the hope of resolving the matter informally. If that is not possible a formal complaint may be lodged with University Complaints Team who can be contacted via complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk USPU Advice Centre can provide impartial, confidential advice to students in this situation. A link to their complaints guidance on their website can be found [here](#).

12. USING THE CHECKLIST

On the following page is a checklist (Appendix A) which might assist in making sure that all the information needed has been gathered in order to support the student carer. This can be placed on the student's record along with accompanying notes so that both parties are aware what has been discussed and agreed. It would be good practice to ensure that all actions are noted, review dates agreed and a copy given to the student.

13. REVIEWING THE GUIDANCE

This guidance was produced in consultation with student support services, academic support and the Students' Union. Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of this Guidance will take place through the following mechanisms:

- [Student feedback and complaints](#)
- [Staff feedback, including academic and support staff](#)
- [Referrals to the Students' Union and/or Sabbatical Officers](#)

Appendix A: Action Checklist – student carers

- Contact details – student details, next of kin, course details.
- Confirming the student’s carer’s status.
- Communication – student’s preferred method and ensuring this is kept up to date.
- Informing others and ensuring confidentiality - identifying with the student who should know and when this information should be disclosed. ADS should be informed so that appropriate advice and guidance can be provided.
- Delineating arrangements – ensuring that if any additional arrangements are already in place that these are kept separate from any new arrangements relating to their caring responsibilities.
- Exploring options to enable continuation of studies including withdrawal or suspension.
- Caring related absences – need to be noted (dates and duration) and what academic support has been arranged.
- Assessments – have any of these not been completed as a result of the caring responsibility and what alternative arrangements have been made for any outstanding or incomplete ones?
- Extenuating Circumstances – need to ensure that the student has been informed about the University EC policy in the event of impact from their caring responsibilities on their studies and how this affects examinations and assessments.
- Financial implications – if applicable need to discuss any changes to study that may impact on the receipt of a bursary, scholarship or external funding.
- International students – must be referred to the International Office who can provide them with information on what needs to happen next and impact on their studies.
- Return to study – identify what support will be provided to the student on their return to study (for example, meetings with key staff, put in contact with other student carers).
- Signposting and support – ensuring that the student carer has been directed to other services (internally and externally) who could provide further assistance.
- Ensure agreements are noted and placed on the student’s file along with review/checking-in dates, with a copy being given to the student.
- Any further information – any points of importance not covered in the checklist.