



**“YOU MAY WANT US TO  
FOCUS ON EDUCATION  
AND OUR FUTURE -  
BUT WE HAVE TO PUT  
THAT SECOND.”**

**INQUIRY INTO REMOVING THE BARRIERS  
TO HIGHER EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND  
TRAINING FOR YOUNG ADULT CARERS  
SUMMARY REPORT**

**JANUARY 2026**

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All-Party  
Parliamentary  
Group for  
Young Carers &  
Young Adult  
Carers

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**We would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to the three young adult carer co-chairs and 14 youth advisors who have supported us throughout this inquiry. Their contribution has been vital, from helping to shape the consultation questions to leading oral evidence sessions to feeding into the recommendations and supporting the launch of this report.**

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Any errors or inaccuracies are the responsibility of the report authors alone.

# FOREWORD – INQUIRY CHAIRS

**On behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers, we are proud to be publishing our first inquiry of this parliament.**

Our 2023 inquiry, into life opportunities for young carers, highlighted how young adult carers are less likely than their peers without caring responsibilities to go onto higher education or employment. As an APPG, we wanted to explore these important issues in greater depth, so as to gain a better understanding of the barriers to opportunities for young adult carers, and how, collectively, we can remove them.

Through this inquiry we have heard loud and clear about the personal, practical and systemic barriers which young adult carers are facing, such as:

- the level of caring responsibilities being undertaken, or feeling restricted in where they can go to study or work due to needing to be close to home and the person they care for
- a lack of consistent financial support which places huge pressures on young adult carers to juggle caring, education and paid employment
- a continued lack of support for young adult carers as they transition into early adulthood
- a lack of awareness among too many education/training providers and employers of the needs of young adult carers.

If the Government is to successfully tackle the epidemic of the near one million young people not in education, employment or training, then young adult carers must be included in all activity. Whether that is the Milburn review, work by the Youth Guarantee trailblazers, or the recently announced Jobs Guarantee – young carers’ voices and needs must be on their radar.

The inquiry heard that more than 40,000 young adults are caring for over 50 hours each week. The scale of this issue means that removing the barriers to opportunity for young adult carers cannot be achieved by a single organisation or single government department. It will require cross-government joined-up thinking. And the focus on young adult carers must flow down from central government to combined authorities, to local councils and to providers of support.

Too many young adult carers are not getting the future they deserve. Too many young adult carers are having to choose between caring and learning or between caring and work. As an APPG we are clear that this has to change. Young adult carers need action.



**Chris Vince MP  
(Chair of APPG for  
Young Carers and  
Young Adult Carers)**



**Alison Bennett MP  
(Vice-Chair of APPG  
for Young Carers and  
Young Adult Carers)**

# FOREWORD – YOUNG ADULT CARER INQUIRY CO-CHAIRS

**In today's education system, young carers are still being asked to carry far too much. Every day, hundreds of thousands of children and young people are juggling homework, exams and friendships alongside the responsibility of caring for someone they love. It's exhausting. But all too often our caring role is invisible. Too many schools, colleges and universities still don't recognise what young carers do. The result is that we feel forgotten, misunderstood and, at times, punished for circumstances beyond our control.**

And for too many young adult carers – our caring responsibilities coupled with a lack of understanding and flexibility from employers mean it can be really difficult – sometimes even impossible for us to get our first step into employment.

This report makes clear that these challenges are not isolated incidents – they are symptoms of a system that needs urgent reform. Almost half of young carers at secondary school were persistently absent last year. Nearly 40% of young adult carers have had to turn down or not apply for jobs because of our caring responsibilities. These figures tell a story of structural inequality that cannot be solved by goodwill alone. We need systemic change: consistent policies, dedicated resources, and accountability at every level to ensure young carers are no longer left behind.

We hope this report challenges everyone – from policymakers to educators to employers – to act boldly. Change is possible. We have seen examples of universities, employers and services making a real difference, but these must become the norm, not the exception. Every young carer deserves the same chance to thrive as their peers.

To the young carers who shared their stories in this report: thank you. Your voices are at the heart of this report, and they must drive the changes needed so that caring does not mean compromising our futures.



**Bakoory**



**Danny**



**Farzana**

# BACKGROUND TO THIS INQUIRY

**In 2023, the APPG for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers held the first ever parliamentary inquiry focused on young carers.**

Our inquiry into the life opportunities of the estimated one million young carers across the UK highlighted just how many young carers miss out on opportunities other young people might often take for granted. Specifically, we heard how young adult carers can struggle to access higher education, training and employment opportunities.

Since this inquiry concluded, new data available from UCAS has shown a concerning under-representation of young adult carers within higher education. Research suggests that between 10% and 12% of young adults have caring responsibilities – around 500,000 across the UK. Yet, in 2025, just 2.9% of young adult higher education applicants declared they were carers. The data shows significant variation between the four nations, with more young adult applicants in Scotland identifying as carers (4.9%) than in Wales (2.9%), England (2.8%) or Northern Ireland (2.3%).

Our previous inquiry also received evidence to show that young adult carers are 46% less likely to either enter, or be in, employment if they are caring for 35 hours or more a week. Evidence from Carers Trust showed that, in 2023, there were an estimated 70,000 non-working unpaid carers aged 16-24 who could have been working. The opportunity cost of these young unpaid carers being out of the workforce was estimated to be between £0.7 billion and £1.1 billion.

In light of the Government's ambition for all young people to be earning or learning, we launched this inquiry to help better understand and eradicate the barriers to higher education, employment and training for young adult carers.

This inquiry had an open call for written evidence from young adult carers and professionals such as organisations or academics. This inquiry received written evidence from 42 organisations or academics and 92 young carers, young adult carers and former young adult carers. We also consulted with a further 106 young carers at the Young Carers Festivals in England and Wales. We then held four oral evidence sessions, one of which was exclusively for young people.

A full breakdown of stakeholders who provided evidence to the inquiry is included in [Appendix One](#).

# KEY FINDINGS

## Young carers and young adult carers do not feel they have a fair future

As part of our inquiry, we asked 198 young carers and young adult carers across the country whether they feel they have the same future opportunities as their friends who are not carers. For example, opportunities to go to university or find work. **Just 26% of young carers and young adult carers believe they will have the same access to opportunities as others when they are adults.**

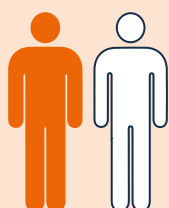
92 of the young carers and young adult carers submitted additional written evidence to the inquiry to highlight the significant barriers young adult carers face in accessing education, employment and training. Of the 92:



**73%** OF YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS FEEL LIKE THEY ARE FALLING BEHIND THEIR PEERS OR MISSING OUT ON OPPORTUNITIES THEIR FRIENDS ARE ACCESSING, BECAUSE OF THEIR CARING ROLE.

**75%** SAID THEIR CARING ROLE HAS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO TAKE PART IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

(E.G. ATTENDING CLASSES, KEEPING UP WITH HOMEWORK, GOING ON PLACEMENTS).



**Almost half (49%)** OF YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS SAID THEY HAD MISSED OUT ON EDUCATION OR TRAINING BECAUSE OF THEIR CARING ROLE.



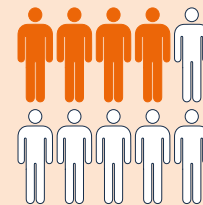
**53%** OF YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS SAID THAT THEIR CARING ROLE HAS AFFECTED THEIR FINANCES IN A WAY THAT MAKES TAKING PART IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING HARDER.

**51%** OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS SAID THAT CARING HAS MADE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO APPLY FOR, FIND OR KEEP A JOB.



OUT OF THE 60 YOUNG ADULT CARERS WHO WENT TO COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY, MORE THAN HALF (**57%**) DID NOT RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO SUPPORT THEM DURING THEIR STUDIES.

**38%** OF YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS HAVE EITHER HAD TO **TURN DOWN OR NOT APPLY FOR A JOB** BECAUSE OF THEIR CARING RESPONSIBILITIES.



**52%** SAID THEIR PHYSICAL HEALTH HAS BEEN NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THEIR CARING RESPONSIBILITIES IN A WAY THAT HAS INFLUENCED THEIR EDUCATION OR CAREER PLANS.

**79%** SAID THEIR MENTAL HEALTH HAS BEEN NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THEIR CARING RESPONSIBILITIES IN A WAY THAT HAS INFLUENCED THEIR EDUCATION OR CAREER PLANS.



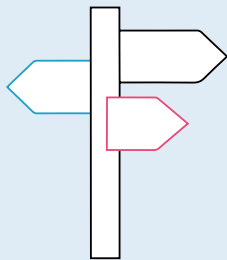
# Barriers to higher education, employment and training

Evidence submitted to our inquiry identified a number of barriers facing young adult carers. They can be categorised under three main headings:

1. Personal barriers
2. Practical barriers
3. Policy and systemic barriers.

## Personal barriers

### Academic barriers



**IN 2025, FEWER THAN HALF (46%) OF YOUNG CARERS LEFT SECONDARY SCHOOL WITH FIVE GCSE PASSES, INCLUDING ENGLISH AND MATHS. YOUNG CARERS WERE 25% LESS LIKELY THAN THEIR PEERS WITHOUT CARING RESPONSIBILITIES TO ACHIEVE THIS ACADEMIC MILESTONE**

**AT KEY STAGE 5, YOUNG CARERS WERE 60% LESS LIKELY TO ACHIEVE THE EQUIVALENT OF THREE A-LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS THAN NON-CARERS AND OBTAINED 19% FEWER A-LEVEL PASSES THAN NON-CARERS**



## Young adult carers lacking confidence or not seeing higher education or employment as an option or priority for them

“At one point I felt like I would never be able to live my own life or make decisions that didn't directly benefit his health.”

Young adult carer

“I have supported many young carers who quietly close down their future options as it feels unachievable, given their caring role.”

Family Action

## Physical and mental health and wellbeing, including feelings of guilt

“We've seen many young carers apply for higher education and then turn down their place because they feel guilty leaving their cared-for person or feel guilty that other siblings/family members will have to take on the caring role.”

Young Carers National Voice

## Implications of wider family dynamics and support needs

“There is often pressure to stay at home and not access further education/ training/ employment outside of the local area. This limits possibilities and therefore aspirations.”

MYTIME Young Carers

“The glaring issue for us is the lack of visibility of siblings in relation to carer issues. The pattern for sibling carers is often set at a young age, many are used to taking a backseat in their families. Their needs, ambitions and dreams are often overlooked to prioritise the needs of a disabled brother or sister.”

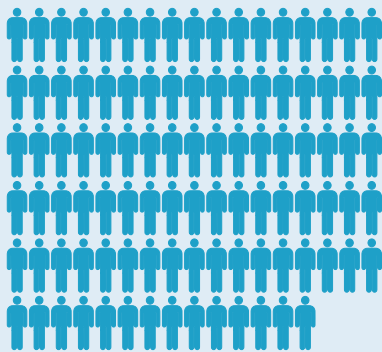
Sibs

“Mum could never take me to open days because there was no-one to look after my sister.”

Young adult carer

## Practical barriers

### The level of caring responsibilities and a lack of alternative care options



THERE ARE **131,417** YOUNG PEOPLE IN GREAT BRITAIN AGED 16 TO 24 PROVIDING AT LEAST 20 HOURS OF UNPAID CARE PER WEEK.

Over **40,000** OF THEM ARE CARING FOR MORE THAN **50 hours** A WEEK

YOUNG ADULT CARERS ARE **39%** MORE LIKELY TO CHOOSE TO LIVE AT HOME WHILE THEY STUDY



“I live alone with my mum so any time I’m away I’m still the only person to care for her. So leaving for a few hours is stressful, let alone thinking of leaving for university.”

Young carer

“I missed out on university for two years before my mum improved enough to be left at home in the daytime for me to attend lectures. I felt isolated, I became depressed, I felt angry that I could not live my life as planned.”

Young adult carer

## Time and deadlines

**57%** OF YOUNG CARERS SAID THEY GET LESS THAN AN HOUR A DAY TO FOCUS ON THEIR SCHOOLWORK (CARERS TRUST).



**“ I have to travel two to three hours home if I’m needed and I sometimes have to rush home on weekends to provide care.”**

Young adult carer

**“ I have no spare time to relax. I am up throughout the night and am so exhausted it’s hard to study out of uni as I also work.”**

Young adult carer

## Financial barriers



**70%** OF YOUNG ADULT CARERS APPLYING TO HIGHER EDUCATION SAID THEY HAD CONCERNS AROUND FINANCES, COMPARED WITH 52% OF NON-CARERS (UCAS).

**“ During my undergraduate degree, I had to juggle two part-time jobs to provide money for myself, my sibling and looking after my mum. This was during COVID, and we lost access to the food bank since our local one closed. I ended up doing online sex work to supplement our incomes and afford groceries. I hated it, and it put me in a really dangerous position.”**

Young adult carer

## A lack of tailored information and support

“ Young adult carers are due to be 'reassessed' at 17/18 in our local authorities. This involves them being sent a letter making them aware of the support for adult carers. The onus is on them to follow up - those which do and are able to, find that adult carer services are set up for older carers.”

MYTIME Young Carers

“ It felt quite overwhelming and unpredictable - I wasn't aware of what support was available for going to university, if any.”

Young adult carer

“ 72% of young adult carers stated that they never or rarely spoke to teaching staff about their caring responsibilities.”

UCAS

## Policy and systemic barriers

### Support for young adult carers across Government and across regions

“ Despite growing awareness about young carers, many youth employment and social mobility programmes still fail to fully recognise or accommodate their unique challenges. For instance, mainstream apprenticeship schemes or job placement programmes often require strict attendance and inflexible working hours.”

Young Carers Service Manager

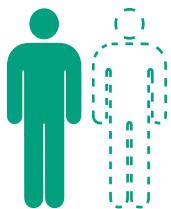
### Data issues

“ Most data focuses on under-16s. Young adult carers are often excluded from youth or adult datasets, leaving a blind spot in transition support. There's little tracking of how many carers drop out of education or employment due to their role.”

The Vault Unlocking Potential)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence we received, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers makes the following recommendations:



## 1. Improving identification and support for young adult carers in education

- The Department for Education should require all education settings to have a young carer/student carer lead responsible for ensuring there is support across the setting.
- All education providers should be required to implement a young carer/student carer policy which clearly sets out the support available to students with caring responsibilities.
- The Department for Education should ensure that tracking of attendance by students in 16-19 provision includes attendance for young carers.
- The Government should ensure that its' Higher Education Access and Participation Task and Finish Group seek to address the specific barriers to higher education faced by young adult carers.



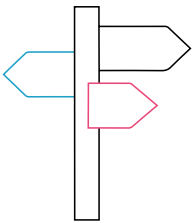
## 2. Removing the financial barriers

- The Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions should set out how they intend to ensure that young adult carers have access to financial support which does not require them to choose between learning or caring. This should include consideration of improving access to support for young carers through the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, the planned partial re-introduction of maintenance grants, and reducing the impact of the 21-hour rule for Carer's Allowance.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should also consider how it can make it easier for young adult carers to know whether changes in employment or wage increases will impact eligibility for any benefits they receive.
- As part of the work on the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, the Department for Education should consider the merits of giving young adult carers who are distance learners access to maintenance support where they cannot study in-person because of their caring responsibilities.



### 3. Improving access to employment and training opportunities for young adult carers

- The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that all activity linked to the Youth Guarantee and Jobs Guarantee proactively considers and responds to the specific needs of young adult carers and that their voices are specifically heard.
- The Milburn inquiry into young people and work should ensure it considers the specific challenges faced by young adult carers.
- The Government should commit to a cross-government carers strategy/plan, with dedicated actions relating to improving access to support and opportunities for young adult carers
- The Department for Work and Pensions should also ensure that work coaches and staff working in Youth Hubs are aware of, and able to respond to, the specific needs of young adult carers.
- Mayoral Strategic Authorities should ensure that programmes to reduce youth unemployment specifically consider the voices, needs and experiences of young adult carers.



### 4. Improving transitions and support for young adult carers

- The Independent Commission on Adult Social Care (Casey Commission) should consider how reforms to adult social care can improve transitions and support for young adult carers.
- The Department of Health and Social Care should identify opportunities to improve transitions for young adult carers, which includes ensuring that local authorities are complying with statutory obligations in relation to transitions.
- Every local authority should ensure that they are offering transitions assessments and age-appropriate support for young adult carers.
- The UK Government should commission research to better understand what works in supporting young adult carers, including supporting them from school through to work.

## 5. Improving data relating to young adult carers

- The Department for Education should add young adult carers to the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset.
- It should also ensure that any reporting from local authorities about young people who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) should include whether they are known to be a young carer.
- The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care should commit to improving data on the numbers of Young Carers Needs Assessments and Transitions Assessments being completed and the outcomes being achieved through assessments.











All-Party  
Parliamentary  
Group for  
Young Carers &  
Young Adult  
Carers

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers brings together Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum who are committed to improving the lives of young carers and young adult carers.

The group's mission is to provide a forum for key issues affecting young carers and young adult carers which will be addressed collaboratively by Parliamentarians and other key stakeholders, including young carers and young adult carers.

The APPG holds regular meetings in Parliament with an ambitious agenda of work and seeks to make the very strongest collective case to Central Government as it seeks to achieve the best support, services and outcomes for young carers and young adult carers.

**Chair:**

Chris Vince MP

**Vice-Chairs:**

Alison Bennett MP

Baroness Keeley

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Carers Trust provides the Secretariat for the APPG for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers.

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