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# **Navigating Caregiving Obligations: Understanding the Experiences of Student-Carers at Trinity College Dublin**

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## Abstract

The current study examines the experiences and challenges faced by student-carers within the third-level education environment, with a focus on Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Using a multidimensional approach, this research examines the overall experience by hypothesising that student-carers experience lower well-being (H1), significant academic (H2) and financial (H3) challenges. Additionally, we hypothesise that the support policy for student-carers is poorly disseminated and implemented (H4), contributing to limited college awareness and responsiveness to their needs.

This research adopted a mixed-methods strategy, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The methodology included conducting an online survey with 232 undergraduate student-carers/non-carers (35m, 195f, 2n.b), semi-structured interviews involving 9 participants (1 policymaker, 5 lecturers, 1 TAP co-ordinator, 2 PhD students), and focus group discussions with 14 student-carers (1m, 13f). Quantitative analysis utilised Mann Whitney U tests examining differences in overall well-being and academic challenges between student-carers and non-carers. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine whether carer status is associated with financial difficulty, and descriptive statistics were employed to measure policy awareness and implementation. Using thematic analysis, qualitative data from interviews and focus groups was analysed to highlight key concepts and recurring patterns, revealing broad themes that reflect the complex reality of student-carers.

The findings suggest that student-carers have lower well-being, greater academic and financial difficulties than non-carers, and that awareness and implementation of support policy is inadequate. The study stresses the need for more inclusive and effective support mechanisms for student-carers to foster their overall well-being and success in higher education. In the study's discussion, suggestions for improving student-carers' experiences are presented, along with research limitations and directions for future research, emphasising the importance of fostering an academic environment that acknowledges and supports student-carers' diverse challenges.

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## **Preface**

Throughout this study we use the term “student-carer” to refer to all students with caring responsibilities i.e. student-parents and informal carers. While we discuss both student-parents and informal carers in this study, in line with TCD’s support policy, “student-carer” is an umbrella term used to cover both these groups.

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## Introduction

Recognising the impact of caring responsibilities on students in third-level education is vital to guarantee equal access to education, and ensure that all students are supported within their college community. However, this can be difficult as they are a very heterogeneous group. Thus, a one-size-fits-all policy may not suit the needs of all carers. There are many factors that contribute towards students having extra caring responsibilities, including contemporary factors such as the housing crisis (CSO, 2022; Higher Education Authority, 2019), immigration (CSO, 2022), ageing population (Eurostat, 2024) and inclusion of mature students in education (Higher Education Authority, 2021). This report investigates the well-being of carers and their experience of the student-carer policy in Trinity College Dublin (TCD). We will examine policy definitions related to those with caring responsibilities and the perceived effectiveness of accommodations provided to support carers. Given the current policy and political climate concerning inclusion and societal understanding of caring roles, we believe this research can offer vital insights into carers in education. While the work focuses on the TCD student experience, it is possible our findings and recommendations may influence wider policy implications, such as government and other academic institutions. TCD, in particular, prides itself in being an inclusive community, with the provision of Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Project (TrinityINC) to enhance inclusivity and the Trinity Access Programme (TAP), to remove barriers to education. Yet, there are many challenges experienced by both informal carers and parents in third-level education, which will be examined in this introduction.

We define 'student-parent' as anyone with responsibility for raising and providing for a child while enrolled in full-time education. They are parents whose children are either younger than 18 or older than 18 who require ongoing support due to disability, mental illness, addiction, or other factors requiring caregiving (Care Alliance Ireland, 2022). We define 'informal carer' as anyone who assists a friend, family member, partner, or others, perhaps due to factors such as illness, age, disability, mental illness, language barriers, illiteracy, or addiction (Becker & Sempik, 2018; Census 2022). Importantly, these individuals are not engaged in a professional

caregiving capacity (Hughes & O'Sullivan, 2017). The scope of informal caregiving also extends to those aiding younger siblings. In the context of our research, we define an informal carer as someone dedicating three hours or more per week to tasks such as shopping, cleaning, translating, reading, and writing, among others (HSE, 2024; National Union of Students, 2015). Student-parents and informal carers constitute a specific sub-population of students, however, as previously mentioned, they are a very heterogeneous group, therefore, it is difficult to outline the experiences and challenges of all carers.

Despite their heterogeneity, there are common issues faced by those with additional caregiving responsibilities, for example experiencing compromised well-being, and inferior mental health. Research also indicates increased internalising behaviours (Crandall et al. 2014), loneliness (Haugland et al., 2022; Moreau & Kerner, 2015), and depression (Greene et al., 2007). Young-adult informal carers face increased health issues (Haugland et al., 2020), however, the impact of caregiving is somewhat dependent on the type of care carried out by the carer. For example, those caring for someone with mental illness are greatly affected (Crandall et al., 2014). Academic demands further exacerbate challenges, affecting concentration and causing frustration (Knopf et al., 2022). Additionally, somatic health issues, including headaches and fatigue, are highlighted by Haugland et al. (2020), while physical demands, like intense caregiving tasks, also contribute to body aches (Chevrier et al., 2022). In addition to this, informal caring responsibilities impact emotional health, fostering feelings of isolation, affecting academic performance, and relationships (Saragosa et al., 2022). However, studies like Van der Werf et al. (2022) suggest positive outcomes associated with informal caregiving, including organisational skills development, emotional maturation, and positive coping strategies.

Informal caring responsibilities also adversely affect the academic experience of the student both directly and indirectly. Informal carers experience poorer educational progression, increased exam failures, and less participation in recreational activities compared to non-carer peers (Becker & Becker, 2008; Haugland et al., 2022). The demanding nature of informal caregiving responsibilities, coupled with the pressures of college, results in dissatisfaction with academic performance, often attributed to time constraints (Burford et al. 2019). Many struggle to maintain regular study habits,

keep up with readings, and find suitable study spaces (Day, 2019). Financial constraints are a further challenge to the academic life of informal carers. According to Runacres et al. (2021), the majority of students with informal caring responsibilities worry about not having financial resources to maintain their basic living expenses, while some frequently take on additional financial pressure due to the economic circumstances of their families (Kettell, 2018).

Similar challenges are evident among student-parents. Balancing academic and parental life can have adverse effects on the well-being of the student, with a substantial percentage suffering from poor sleep, and mental/emotional distress from the combined responsibilities of parenthood, employment, and studenthood (Aspen Institute, 2021). Histories of trauma are also more prevalent among student-parents, linked to family rejection, domestic violence, and insecurities (Aspen Institute, 2021). Lucchini-Raies et al., (2018) indicate conflicting emotions and depression during the transition to parenthood, impacting well-being. Additionally, combining the roles of parenthood and studenthood present a challenging juggling act, with conflicting societal norms and expectations (Estes, 2011). Student mothers face difficulties in balancing study and parenting, as support from family may not be universally available (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Taukeni, 2014). Time constraints also pose challenges for single mothers, impacting their relationships with their children (Mitchell, 2003; Sweet & Moen, 2007). Furthermore, balancing home and academic life becomes a source of stress, particularly for women navigating the dual roles of wife/mother and student (Brown & Watson, 2010). Student-parents, pressured by intensive parenting expectations, work harder due to societal stigma (Estes, 2011). Moreover, the additional responsibilities of student-parents are often overlooked by educators (Wilsey, 2013). Since the university system is designed without consideration for parenting constraints, it hinders student-parents' integration of their dual identities (Estes, 2011).

There is also a high prevalence of academic challenges experienced by student-parents (Dankyi et al., 2019). Nelson et al. (2013) highlight that one-third of parents are low-income or first-generation students, increasing the likelihood of leaving college without a degree with a 53% dropout rate compared to 31% for non-parents after six years. Low-income parents face a 25% lower chance of earning a degree compared to their childless counterparts. Additionally, 40% of



student-parents work full-time, dedicating 30 hours a week to childcare (Nelson et al., 2013). Adjusting to college demands is more challenging for student-parents; managing time is particularly arduous, with 19.44% student-parents finding it difficult, compared to 14.27% of non-parents (Aspen Institute, 2021). Student-parents often actively seek academic support, frequently engaging with faculty both during and outside class/office hours (Aspen Institute, 2021). Additionally, the rigidity of college schedules poses attendance challenges for student-parents, further impacting academic performance (Brown & Watson, 2010). Taukeni (2014) revealed that student mothers often struggle with academic responsibilities, leading to missed lectures, module failures, and difficulties in exams.

There is a perceived lack of support offered by universities to student-carers. Additionally, there is limited literature exploring the significance of informal support, with some students relying on peers for assistance (Areguy et al., 2019). Universities acknowledge the growing population of student-carers, yet struggle to provide flexible accommodations, due to the group's heterogeneity (Day, 2019; Kettell, 2018). Despite ongoing efforts, universities are still in the process of understanding the needs of student-carers, including potential intersections with disabilities (Runacres et al., 2021). Improved understanding could initiate more effective assistance through policies, incentives, and financial aid (Kirton et al., 2012; Morgan, 2019).

Student-parents report that their families and the university environment are their fundamental pillars of support (Lucchini-Raies et al., 2018). However, their research indicates that despite the appreciation for support from their families, discrimination within the university setting is common, particularly among female student-parents. Due to the perceived lack of empathy and blame for choosing dual roles, student-parents felt their lives were difficult (Berg & Mamhute, 2013; Lucchini-Raies et al., 2018). Additional research suggests that student-parents feel isolated or unwelcome in their colleges (Read et al., 2003). In their study of student-parents, Moreau and Kerner (2013) report feelings of not fitting in and missing out on aspects of college life due to time constraints, and therefore feel they are having a vastly different experience compared to "typical students". According to research by the Aspen Institute (2021), 54% of student-parents reported feeling less welcome in the college community, with younger parents reporting higher percentages of unwelcome

(67%). Additionally, only 37% of student-parents in their study felt their college was supportive, highlighting the need for increased acknowledgment and support for student-parents. The discrepancy between university expectations and the reality of student-parent time constraints further contributes to their struggle, emphasising the importance of recognising and addressing these challenges (Levine, 1993).

Similar findings regarding isolation and loneliness have been reported from young-adult informal carers. A report by Family Carers Ireland (2023) found that 19% of young-adult carers reported high levels of loneliness, with a further 31% feeling as though they lack adequate friendships. Similar research by Haugland et al. (2022) revealed that informal carers in their sample had higher scores on the UCLA-3 loneliness scale, reporting that they lacked companionship, felt left out, and felt isolated more than their non-carer peers. Additionally, informal carers in this study were more likely to have fewer close friends. The researchers also found a dose–response relationship between loneliness and hours spent executing care, it is suggested this is due to extended caring hours resulting in reduced recreational time.

The Eurostudent Survey VIII (Higher Education Authority, 2023) indicates that 11% of the total student population has children. However, a 2021 report by the Higher Education Authority discovered that one of the main barriers to higher education for mature students is family responsibilities and commitments, with 50% of participants reporting this as a barrier. Thus, they suggest that more flexible learning may be a relevant option to increase third-level participation among mature students (Higher Education Authority, 2021). A UK study by Lyonette et al. (2015) found that 60% of student-parents had considered dropping out due to difficulties maintaining a balance between home and college. Students in this study exhibited enthusiasm for their courses, but several barriers hindered their learning, such as a mismatch between timetabling, holidays, deadlines, placements, and the needs of their children. A study by Thomas et al. (2021) in which student-mothers were interviewed on their experiences of higher education, stipulated that travel often consumes much of their time that could be spent on academia, suggesting that studying from home was preferable.

Research has suggested that blended learning improves outcomes in adult learning, including improved exam scores and course rates (Deschacht & Goeman, 2015). For mothers in particular, research had indicated that online learning gave women with family responsibilities more control, facilitating a better balance between their conflicting demands (Gokool-Ramdoo, 2005). Stone and O'Shea (2019) also indicated that online learning makes it possible for women to pursue higher education, while maintaining their family responsibilities. Online learning can mitigate the need for childcare in many cases, as college work can be adapted around children's routines, but strict face-to-face teaching schedules may prevent mothers from obtaining higher education (Cuming et al. 2023).

Informal carers face challenges before they even enter university, as many students are also informal caregivers in their leaving certificate/secondary school years. According to a recent report published by the Economic and Social Research Institute using longitudinal data from Growing Up in Ireland (Russell & Smyth, 2024), one-quarter of 17-year-olds are engaged in regular caregiving for a family member, most commonly a younger sibling (15%) or grandparent/other older relative (12%). By the age of 20, the proportion involved in caregiving falls somewhat to one-fifth of the cohort. However, 57% of informal caregivers at age 20 provide care to multiple recipients. Of this population, 13% report that caregiving takes up a significant period of their time and 38% report that it takes up a moderate portion of their time. Contrary to patterns for adults, no significant gender differences in caregiving are found at age 17. By age 20, young men are more likely to provide informal care, particularly to younger siblings and parents. Also, young people (age 20) from a migrant background are more likely to be caring for younger siblings or parents than other young people. Notably, this study found that caregiving for parents, grandparents, and others was more time-intensive than for siblings.

Students involved in informal caregiving tend to earn lower grades on their leaving certificates than non-caring peers (Russell & Smyth, 2024). This holds true even if we consider their previous accomplishments, particularly if they have multiple family members to care for. They have a lower probability of advancing to higher education due to their lower grades. Moreover, when choosing an academic institution, their choices are constrained by the requirement of needing to live at home (Russell &

Smyth, 2024). Nevertheless, access programs, such as TAP, provide opportunities for those of low socioeconomic status who are informal carers to pursue further education. This ensures that third-level institutions are more inclusive and account for the needs of atypical students.

Several recent studies have provided additional insight into the experiences of informal student caregivers. Kettell (2020) indicates that young-adult carers are four times more likely to drop out of higher education than other students. Further, their non-completion of studies affects not only them, but also higher education institutions, as student retention is a key factor for success. This study also noted that there are no official statistics on the number of informal carers in higher education. Despite this, research indicates that more than half of young-adult informal carers are having difficulty coping with higher education and 29% of them have withdrawn from their studies (Sempik and Becker, 2014). Through interviews with informal student-carers, Hess et al. (2002) found that informal caregivers in tertiary education face unique challenges, distinct from those faced by caregivers at other life stages. These students often lead 'hidden lives' as caregivers, feeling excluded from the typical student experience. Thus, the researchers recommend increasing awareness among university staff and advocating for flexible university regulations that accommodate informal carers.

A focus on inclusion practices is essential when it comes to caregiving. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can help promote the inclusion of informal carers by adapting teaching approaches to accommodate students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, and by releasing timetables earlier, so students can plan more effectively (Taylor et al., 2023). Research has demonstrated that informal caring affects labour force participation, hours of employment, and the ability to obtain employment (Bauer & Sousa-Poza, 2015; Ciani, 2012; Russell et al., 2019). Informal carers are also less likely to have a higher education degree (Xue et al., 2023). HEIs can provide support from career advisors and professional development advice services, as well as financial assistance to manage their caring role (Dalton et al., 2018). In order for caregivers to cope with a variety of stressors, support in the form of individualised case management should be offered, including academic and financial assistance, respite care, counselling or mental health support, community

linkages, skills training, and information about external services (Hill & Broady, 2019; Hill et al., 2019; Ireson et al., 2018).

To ensure inclusion and equality of all students with caring responsibilities in TCD, there is a specific policy for student-parents and informal carers. Trinity College Dublin's "Policy on Supports for Student Parents, Student Carers and Students Experiencing Pregnancy" (2023; Version 2.0) emphasises the importance of supporting carers, recognising the unique challenges they face balancing academic and caring duties. Introducing a comprehensive framework, it ensures they do not suffer academic or financial disadvantage because of their caring responsibilities. Among the key features of the policy for carers are the creation of individualised management plans in collaboration with academic staff so they can meet both their study requirements and caring obligations, as well as allowing flexibility in attendance, deadlines, and timetables because caring duties can be unpredictable. The policy recognises the possibility of sudden changes in caring responsibilities, and it includes provisions for self-certification as well as formal medical certification during dependents' illness. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of communication between student-carers and the college, which ensures access to the resources and flexibility students with caring responsibilities need to manage their dual roles effectively.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the multifaceted experiences of student-carers at TCD. There are several key questions that the study attempts to answer. Firstly, we investigate whether student-carers experience lower well-being than their non-carer peers. Our hypothesis proposes that student-carers have lower well-being, highlighting the need for support tailored to their needs (H1). Additionally, we explore the academic challenges faced by student-carers due to their additional responsibilities. We hypothesise that student-carers face increased academic challenges compared to student non-carers (H2). The study also looks at whether student-carers experience heightened financial difficulties. Our hypothesis proposes that student-carers experience more financial difficulties than non-carer peers (H3). Finally, we examine student and faculty awareness of TCD's support policy, along with its implementation effectiveness. Our hypothesis (H4) suggests that the support

policy is inadequately disseminated and implemented, resulting in limited awareness and responsiveness from the college to student-carers' needs.

## Methods

### Design

The study utilised a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The purpose of using a mixed-methods research design was to gain a greater understanding of the challenges faced by TCD students with caring responsibilities, the dissemination of support policy and how TCD can improve the support provided to these students. The quantitative research that was employed in this study was an online cross-sectional survey data on various aspects of student carers' experiences and well-being. The qualitative aspects of this research included both semi-structured interviews with employees and students and focus groups including student-carers (parents and informal carers).

### Participants

#### Survey

A total of 232 undergraduate students (35m, 195f, 2n.b) from Trinity College Dublin participated in the survey. Participants ranged from 18 to over 66 years old, covering a wide spectrum of life stages. Recruitment employed voluntary response sampling methods, such as social media ads, targeted emails from the School of Psychology, Student Union, TAP and TrinityINC. Collaboration with other schools within TCD and faculty, along with posters across campus, further expanded outreach. Additionally, psychology students were invited to participate through the Trinity College Dublin SONA System, with each participation earning them 1 credit. As an incentive, participants were offered the opportunity to enter a draw to win one of three €25 Eason vouchers, sponsored by the TAP, by providing their email address.

## Interview

The interview sample consisted of nine participants. This sample included one policymaker, one TAP co-ordinator, five lecturers representing various academic disciplines, and two PhD students specialising in Psychology. Participant recruitment was conducted by email correspondence, through which participants were contacted to determine their interest in interviewing about the current topic.

## Focus Group

Forteen undergraduate students (1m, 13f) with caring responsibilities from Trinity College Dublin took part in the focus group discussions. Recruitment for the study employed voluntary response sampling methods, which involved distributing email invitations through the School of Psychology, Student Union, Trinity Access Programme, TrinityINC, and enrollment via the Trinity College Dublin SONA System. Additionally, participants were recruited through entering their email at the end of a survey if interested and through posters displayed around campus. A total of four focus groups were conducted, with participants divided into two groups for student-parents (total 6 participants; 0m, 6f) and two for informal carers (total 8 participants; 1m, 7f). Upon completion of the focus group, each participant was awarded a €20 one-4-all voucher sponsored by TrinityINC. Additionally, psychology students who enrolled via the SONA system received 2 credits for their participation.

## Materials and Procedure

### Survey

We employed an online anonymous survey to TCD students via Survey Monkey. The aim of this survey was to quantitatively investigate the well-being, academic performance and financial situation of students with and without caring responsibilities, along gaining insights into the number of students that undertake additional caring responsibilities and details of these responsibilities. We also



gathered data on student's perceptions regarding TCD's support policy, such as awareness of the policy and effectiveness of this policy. As our research is specific to TCD students and includes an investigation into TCD's policy, we formulated a unique survey tailored to our research question.

Student well-being was assessed using pre-existing scales; the WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5; WHO, 1998), the Somatic Symptom Scale 8 (SSS-8; Gierk, 2014), Generalised Anxiety Disorder 2-item (GAD-2; Kroenke et al., 2007), the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9, Kroenke et al., 2001) Cohen's 4-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4; Cohen et al., 1983), Cantril's Ladder of Life Scale (CLS, Cantril, 1965), and the UCLA 3-item Loneliness Scale (UCLA; Russell et al., 1978; UCLA-3; Hughes et al. 2004). We utilised shortened versions of well-being scales, to ensure willingness to respond (Lantos et al., 2023). Those who answered "yes" to having parental responsibilities or other caring responsibilities were directed to an additional well-being scale specific to their situation – the Zarit Burden 4-Item Interview (Bédard et al., 2001; Zarit, 1983). Additional measures were evaluated using specific scales we developed from researching pre-existing literature on caregivers. A priori power analysis was also conducted using G\*Power v3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2007) to determine what sample size we would need to obtain a medium effect size, when calculating differences between two groups (carers and non-carers), which was 92 participants per group.

Prior to launching the survey, a pilot survey was conducted with a small sample of participants (n = 26) to identify any possible issues. Additionally, a cognitive interview was conducted with a small sample (n = 8) to ensure all questions were clear and well understood by participants (Willis, & Artino, 2013). Once the piloting and cognitive interviews were concluded, the survey was launched to TCD's student population, including both carers and non-carers, utilising voluntary response sampling. The electronic link or QR code was disseminated to students via email invitations, social media advertisements, SONA system, and posters. Upon clicking the link or scanning the QR code, participants were directed to a participant information leaflet (see Appendix B) and asked to provide their consent (see Appendix C). Upon consenting, participants proceeded to engage with the survey questions, which covered various topics.

To review the specific questions used in the survey, please refer to Appendix E.

### 1. Demographic Questions

As pre-existing literature has suggested that age (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Manze et al., 2021), gender (Arber & Ginn, 1995; Gault et al., 2014), and immigration status (Haugland et al., 2022) are factors that predict caregiving responsibilities, participants were asked demographic questions pertaining to these factors.

### 2. Caregiving Responsibilities

To investigate the impact of caregiving responsibilities, participants were asked whether they identify as a parent or informal carer, how many hours of care they execute per week, what caregiving responsibilities they undertake and for whom. Participants who answered "yes" to having caregiving responsibilities were asked whether they have disclosed this to their personal tutor, if so have they received support and to rate the support they received. If participants did not disclose this information, they were asked to explain their reasons for not disclosing. Lastly, participants were asked questions regarding the impact their responsibilities have on academic performance, work submission and lecture attendance. As pre-existing literature has suggested that hybrid or online models of teaching and learning improve the balance between academic and caring responsibilities (Cuming et al. 2023; Gokool-Ramdoos, 2005), participants were asked their preference regarding hybrid learning in a "yes", "no" or "don't know" format.

### 3. Well-being

We initially investigated a number of scales to determine the overall well-being of our participants including the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale 21 (Lovibond & Lovibond; 1995) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Following our investigation of these scales, we determined the WHO-5 to be best suited to our research, due to the fact it is

brief, consisting of only 5 items, as well as its multidimensional approach to well-being. The WHO-5 generally takes under one minute to complete and determines well-being by asking participants about their feelings over the last two weeks (Sischka et al., 2020). We chose the WHO-5 to measure general well-being, as it has been indicated that it is an adequate tool for screening for depression (Topp et al., 2015). Additionally research suggests it has high internal consistency, with Krieger et al. (2013) suggesting a Cronbach  $\alpha$  between 0.83 and 0.95, depending on the sample.

As pre-existing literature has suggested that students with caring responsibilities have more negative physical health outcomes (Runacres et al., 2021; Scharp & Dorrance Hall, 2019), we included the Somatic Symptom Scale (SSS-8), which investigates somatic symptoms across 4 main dimensions: fatigue, gastrointestinal issues, cardiopulmonary health and pain. The SSS-8 is reported to have high construct validity, as it is significantly correlated with both depression and anxiety, which is consistent with previous studies demonstrating comorbidity between depression, anxiety and somatic symptoms (Hanel et al., 2009; Löwe et al., 2008). Additionally, the SSS-8 is suggested to have high content validity, as it includes measures from all domains of somatic symptoms, as suggested by Zijlema et al. (2013). This scale also demonstrated high reliability with a reported Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.81 (Gierk et al., 2014). To get a more in-depth understanding of the mental health of our participants, we utilised the Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD-2; Kroenke et al., 2007) to examine anxiety levels, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9, Kroenke et al., 2001), to determine the severity of depression amongst our participants and Cohen's 4-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4; Cohen et al., 1983) to measure participant's appraisal of stress. The PSS-4 has been shown to be a convenient tool for examination of stress levels in the general population (Vallejo et al., 2018). The PSS-4 scale has demonstrated many positive qualities that were essential to our survey, such as less time required to complete and easy to employ via online methods (Herrero and Meneses, 2006). Additionally, research has indicated that students from this cohort suffer from increased loneliness (Haugland et al., 2022; Moreau & Kerner, 2015) and generally have lower levels of life

satisfaction (Költő et al., 2020), thus, the Cantril Ladder (Cantril, 1965) and the UCLA 3-item Loneliness Scale (UCLA; Russell et al., 1978; UCLA-3; Hughes et al. 2004) were included in our survey to reflect this. Again, these scales were specifically chosen due to their brief nature, and both have been demonstrated to have high reliability and validity. The UCLA-3 has been demonstrated to have high validity, high reliability with a reported Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.72 and good internal consistency (Hughes et al., 2004), whereas the Cantril Ladder has shown to have good reliability in an undergraduate sample with a reported Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.71 (Spurr et al., 2021).

#### 4. Informal Carer and Parent Specific Scale

In order to examine the additional burden experienced by students with caregiving responsibilities, we included the Zarit Burden 4-item Interview (Zarit, 1983). This scale has both high reliability and validity, with a reported Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.93; and a reported correlation coefficient for test-retest reliability of 0.89 (Seng et al., 2010).

#### 5. Impact on Academic Performance

A novel, study-specific scale was developed to assess participants' perceptions of their academic performance. Participants assessed their agreement on a five-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Students were asked about their focus during studies, perceived academic success, their level of academic stress, satisfaction with their study habits, and their confidence regarding academic achievement. Items were scored from 1-5 per item. Responses to the 5 questions were totaled, with question 3 (see appendix E) scored using reverse scoring, so that those who answered "Strongly Agree" to feeling stressed received the lowest score of 1. Scores ranged from 5 to 25, with higher scores suggesting greater satisfaction with academic performance.

## 6. Financial Burden

As pre-existing literature suggests that students with caregiving responsibilities have a higher financial burden (Kettell, 2018; Kirton et al., 2012), we formulated 4 questions to assess this among our student population. This scale aims to understand students' financial situations by inquiring about their financial struggles, receipt of university support, and the sources of funding for their education. It examines both personal and external financial resources used for higher education expenses.

## 7. Student perceptions of TCD's Support Policy

Questions were designed to assess students' awareness and opinions regarding TCD's support policy for student parents and caregivers. It explored their perception of the policy's effectiveness, the need for staff training to support caregiving students, and interest in a dedicated service for students with caring responsibilities, similar to disability services.

After participants finished answering the questions, they were offered the chance to enter a draw to win one of three €25 Eason vouchers. Research has shown that incentives maximise the number of participants recruited, thereby enhancing the representativeness of collected data (Smith et al., 2019). Additionally, participants who were parents/informal carers were given the opportunity to sign up for carer-specific focus groups. Following completion of the survey, all participants received immediate debriefing via a digital debriefing form (see Appendix D). The survey completion time ranged between 15 to 20 minutes for carers and 10 to 15 minutes for non-carers. Individual responses were downloaded as a CSV file from Survey Monkey. Statistical analysis of the collected data was performed using Python v3.10.12 via Google Colaboratory.

## Interview

To obtain in-depth information about students with caring responsibilities and the ways they can be supported, we conducted interviews with students and individuals who come into contact with and can support them, while ensuring we gained an understanding of each interviewee's diverse perspectives. The interviews had a semi-structured approach and were conducted in a one-to-one setting. Each interviewee received an information leaflet (see Appendix H) and consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix I).

The questions for the interview (see Appendix K) were formulated from insight gained during our literature review, with questions modified somewhat depending on the interviewee, to ensure each interviewee gave insight into their particular role regarding students with caring responsibilities. For example, the policymaker was asked questions pertaining to the policy itself and its dissemination (see Appendix K.1). Lecturers were asked questions pertaining to their knowledge of the support policy and their experience with student-carers (see Appendix K.2). PhD students were asked questions about their past experience as a TCD undergraduate student-carer and how they could have been better supported (see Appendix K.3) while the TAP co-ordinator was asked questions regarding pathways to education for student-carers, along with the supports that are available (see Appendix K.4). At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to discuss any topics they feel we neglected to include.

Interviews were conducted both in person and through Zoom, depending on the preference of the participant, and were recorded via a recording device. After the interview, participants received a debriefing form (see Appendix J). The interviews were conducted with a maximum duration of 30 minutes per session. Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed, de-identified and securely uploaded to a password-protected file for further analysis.

## Focus Group

The goal of the focus group was to gather insights into the experiences and challenges of student-parents and informal carers and pinpoint opportunities for enhancing institutional support to effectively address their needs.

Prior to the focus group sessions, each participant received an information leaflet providing details about the study (see Appendix M). Alongside the leaflet, a consent form was provided (see Appendix N). Upon obtaining consent, participants engaged in structured focus groups, during which participants were asked a series of questions formulated from insights gathered during a literature review and preliminary interview research.

The focus group questions were categorised into three parts: the first part focused on inquiries related to academic engagement and student life. In the second part, participants were prompted to share their awareness regarding Trinity's policy for parents and carers, along with their comments on dissemination, implementation, and suggestions for improvement. The third section delved into participants' experiences with lecturers and tutors, aiming to assess the overall support they received from them (see Appendix P; student-parents – P.1, informal carers – P.2). These questions were strategically designed to uncover insights into the dual roles of participants as both students and caregivers.

Focus group sessions were conducted either in person or through the Zoom, accommodating the preferences of the participants. All sessions were recorded using a recording device to ensure accurate documentation. At the conclusion of each focus group session, participants were given the opportunity to discuss any additional topics they felt were neglected during the discussion. Following the focus groups, participants received a debriefing form (see Appendix O). Each focus group session had a maximum duration of 1 hour. Following the focus groups, recordings were transcribed, de-identified and securely uploaded to a password-protected file for further analysis.

## Data Analysis

### Quantitative Analysis

To determine differences between carers and non-carers for WHO-5 scores, PHQ-9 scores, GAD-2 scores, Cantril Ladder of Life scores, SSS-8 scores, UCLA-3 scores, PSS-4 and academic scores, Mann Whitney U tests were conducted as the data was not normally distributed due to the use of Likert scale data. To establish whether carers are more likely to report financial difficulty, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted, as both carer status and financial status are categorical data. Carer burden was assessed by calculating the mean burden score. Questions regarding policy awareness, policy implementation and academic burden of carers were also assessed using descriptive statistics.

### Qualitative Analysis

For the data analysis, we conducted thematic analysis to systematically analyse qualitative data obtained from both interviews and focus groups. A thorough review of all interview and focus group transcripts was conducted at the beginning in order to get a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the participants. After this, segments of the data were systematically coded to capture key concepts and recurring patterns (see Appendix S.1 for interviews; Appendix T.1 for focus groups). All transcripts were coded until the point of saturation was reached. Constant comparison and clustering allowed broader themes to emerge, reflecting similarities and differences among participant responses. A second review of the broad themes was conducted to ensure accuracy and coherence. There were eight major themes within the dataset for the interviews (see Appendix S.2) and ten major themes for the focus group (see Appendix T.2), each named to express its primary meaning and significance. A data mapping technique was also used to visualise the relationships between themes and subthemes to explore data connections (see Appendix S.4 for interviews; T.4 for focus groups). Finally, themes were interpreted based on research objectives and broader literature to allow a deeper understanding.



## Results

### Survey

For additional results from the survey, please see Appendix U.1.

### Zarit Burden Interview (For Carers Only)

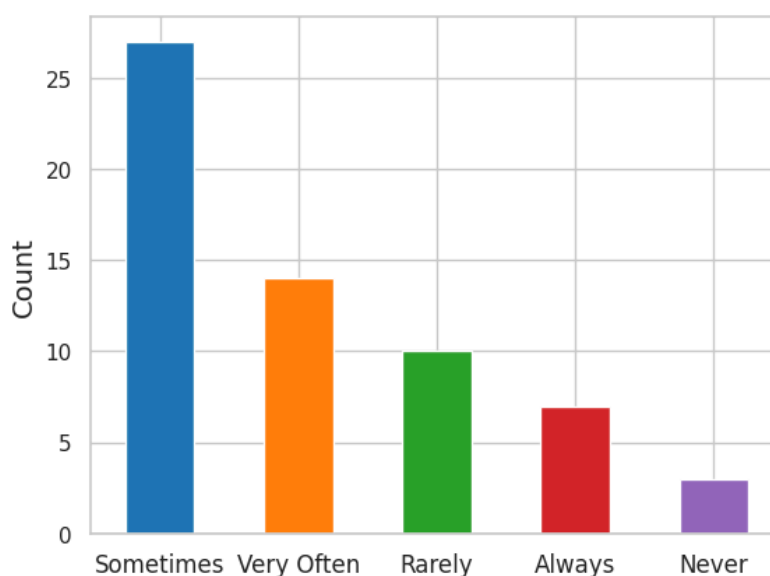
The Zarit Caregiver Burden Score was calculated for participants with caring responsibilities, the mean burden score was 8.78.

### Academic Burden for Carers

Of our 61 caring students who answered regarding the impact of their caring responsibilities on academic performance, 4.92% felt it never affects their academic performance, while the majority (78.69%) felt it impacts their academic performance at least sometimes (Figure 1). Regarding absence from lectures, 19.27% of our caring students never miss lectures, while the majority (52.46%) miss lectures sometimes or more. A further 27.87% reported rarely missing lectures. The majority of these students (60.66%) never or rarely ask for extensions on assignments. 75.41% of students with caring responsibilities reported that they were better able to manage their responsibilities when lectures were streamed and/or recorded.

**Figure 1**

*Carers' Perception of Impact of Caring Responsibilities on Academics*

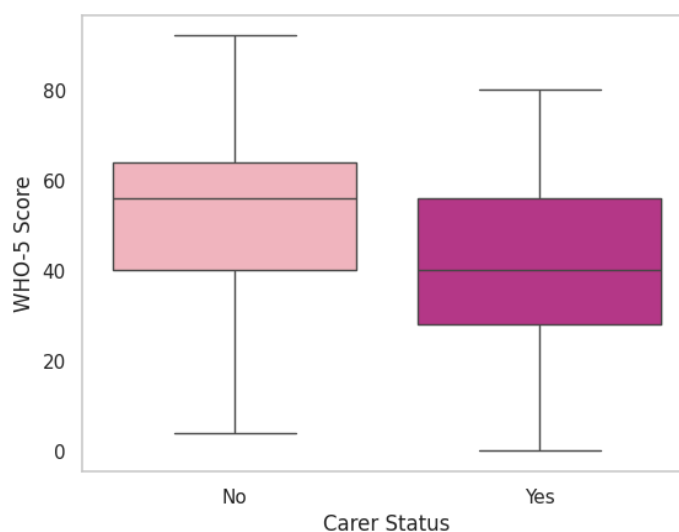


## WHO-5

A significant Levene's test indicated the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann-Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in WHO-5 scores between those who have caring responsibilities ( $n = 57$ ) and those who do not ( $n = 143$ ). WHO-5 scores were significantly lower amongst participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 2) (Mdn = 40; IQR = 28–56) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 56; IQR = 40–64),  $W = 5607.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $RBC = 0.38$ .

**Figure 2**

*Boxplot of WHO-5 Scores by Carer Status*

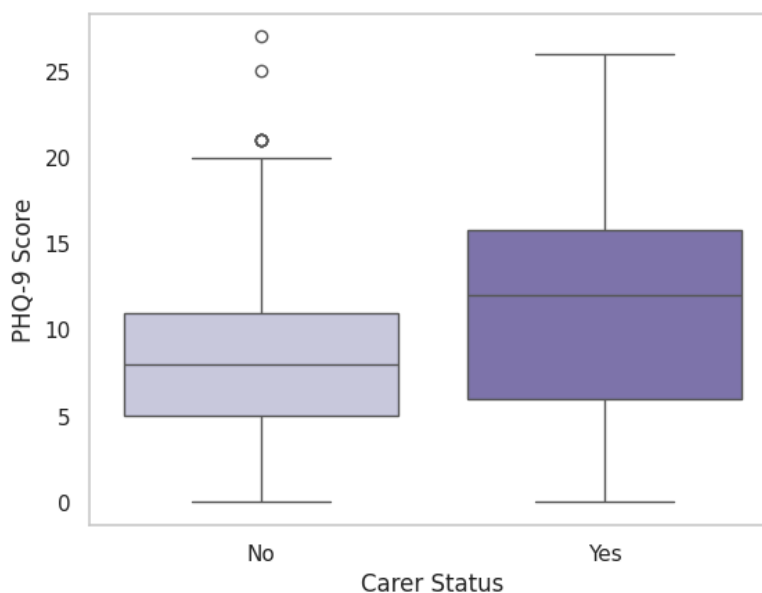


## Personal Health Questionnaire 9-Item (PHQ-9)

A significant Levene's test indicated the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in PHQ-9 scores between those who have caring responsibilities (n = 58) and those who do not (n = 144). PHQ-9 scores were significantly higher amongst participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 3) (Mdn = 12; IQR = 6–15.75) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 8; IQR = 5–11),  $W = 3051$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $RBC = 0.27$ .

**Figure 3**

*Boxplot of PHQ-9 Scores by Carer Status*

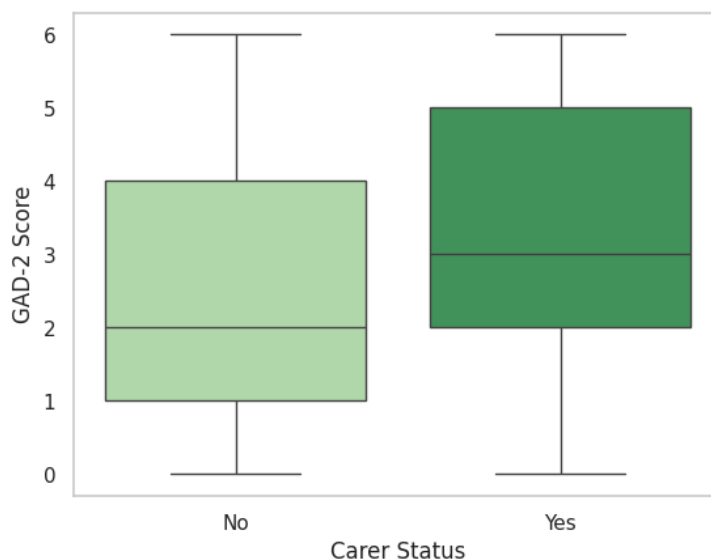


## General Anxiety Disorder 2-Item (GAD-2)

A significant Levene's test indicated the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in GAD-2 scores between those who have caring responsibilities (n = 57) and those who do not (n = 143). GAD-2 scores were significantly higher amongst participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 4) (Mdn = 3; IQR = 2–5) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 2; IQR = 1–4),  $W = 3033$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ,  $RBC = 0.26$ .

**Figure 4**

*Boxplot of GAD-2 Scores by Carer Status*

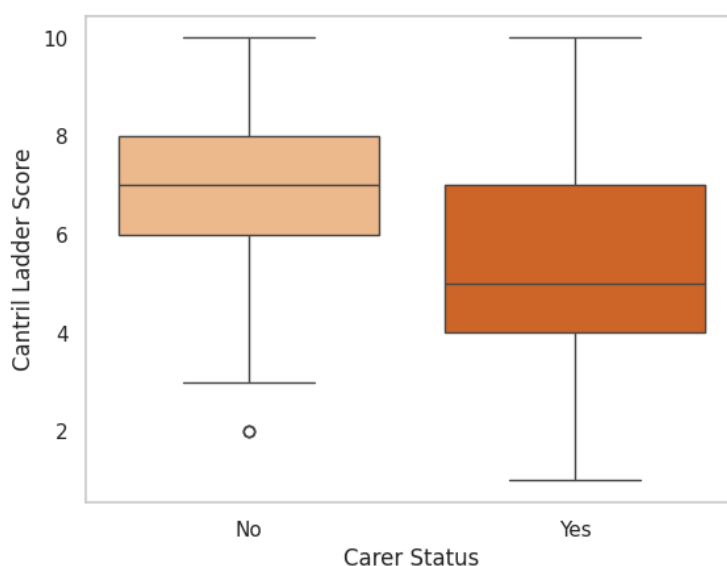


## Cantril Ladder 1-Item

A significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in Cantril Ladder scores between those who have caring responsibilities (n = 57) and those who do not (n = 143). Cantril Ladder scores were significantly lower amongst participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 5) (Mdn = 5; IQR = 4–7) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 7; IQR = 6–8),  $W = 5591$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $RBC = -0.37$ .

**Figure 5**

*Boxplot of Cantril Scores by Carer Status*

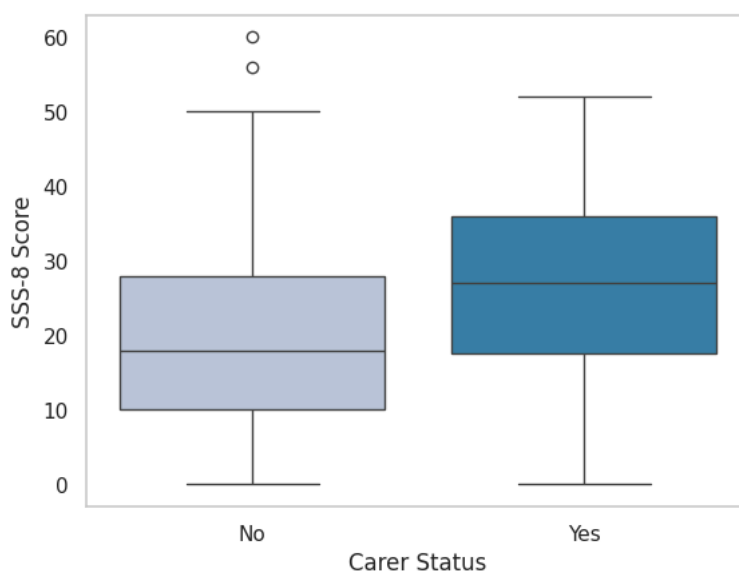


## Somatic Symptom Scale 8-Item (SSS-8)

A significant Levene's test indicated the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in SSS-8 scores between those who have caring responsibilities (n = 56) and those who do not (n = 140). SSS-8 scores were significantly higher amongst participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 6) (Mdn = 27; IQR = 17.5–36) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 18; IQR = 10–28),  $W = 2543$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $RBC = 0.35$ .

**Figure 6**

*Boxplot of SSS-8 Scores by Carer Status*

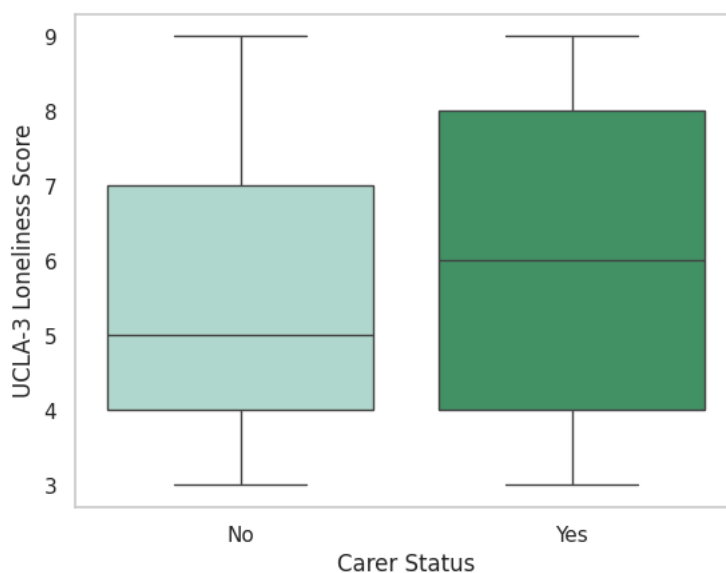


### UCLA Loneliness Scale 3-Item (UCLA-3)

A significant Levene's test indicated the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in UCLA-3 scores between those who have caring responsibilities (n = 57) and those who do not (n = 141). UCLA-3 scores were significantly higher amongst participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 7) (Mdn = 6; IQR = 4–8) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 5; IQR = 4–7),  $W = 3193.5$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ,  $RBC = 0.20$ .

**Figure 7**

*Boxplot of UCLA-3 Scores by Carer Status*

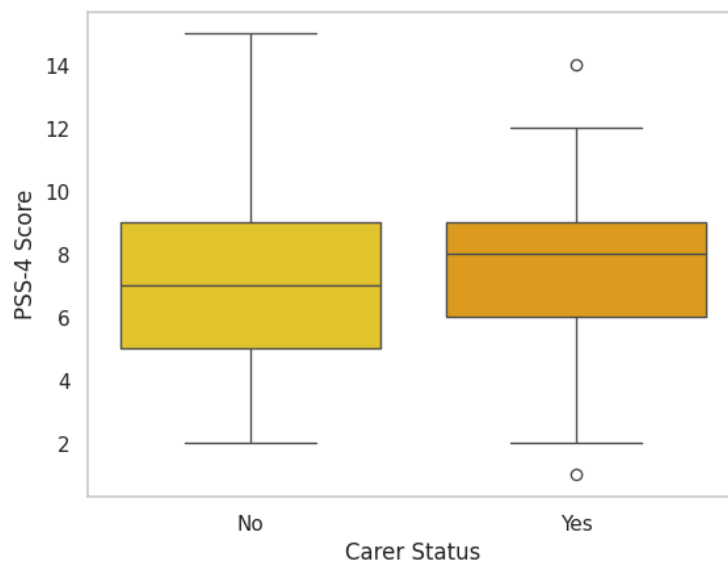


## Cohen Perceived Stress Scale 4-Item (PSS-4)

A significant Levene's test indicated the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann-Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in PSS-4 scores between those who have caring responsibilities ( $n = 57$ ) and those who do not ( $n = 141$ ). There were no significant differences between the PSS-4 scores of participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 8) (Mdn = 8; IQR = 6–9) relative to those who do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 7; IQR = 5–9),  $W = 3395$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ,  $RBC = 0.16$ .

**Figure 8**

*Boxplot of PSS-4 Scores by Carer Status*



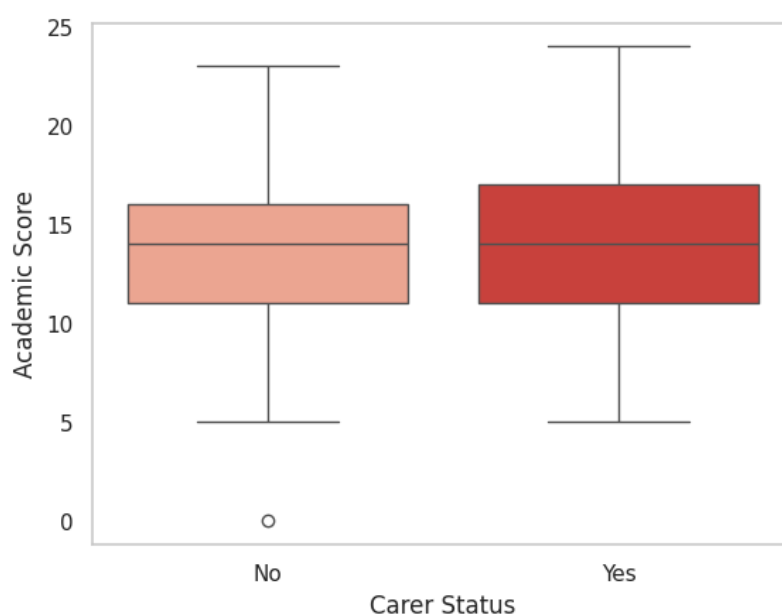


## Academic Challenges

A significant Levene's test indicated that the data did not comply with homogeneity of variance, while a significant Shapiro-Wilk confirmed the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a Mann Whitney U test was carried out to examine the difference in academic scores between those who have caring responsibilities ( $n = 63$ ) and those who do not ( $n = 123$ ). There were no significant differences between the academic scores of participants who have caring responsibilities (Figure 9) (Mdn = 14; IQR = 11–17) relative to those do not have caring responsibilities (Mdn = 14; IQR = 11–16),  $W = 3910.0$ ,  $p = 0.92$ ,  $RBC = -0.009$ .

**Figure 9**

*Boxplot of Academic Scores by Carer Status*



As eight Mann Whitney U tests were executed to compare differences between our groups, a Bonferroni correction was applied to reduce the familywise error rate. Thus, the corrected significant  $p$ -value is 0.006. Of the 6 significant tests, 5 retained significance at  $p < 0.006$ , the exception being UCLA-3 scores ( $p = 0.022$ ). However, in light of our research context and the limitations posed by our small sample size, we interpret the observed difference in loneliness scores between carers and non-carers as meaningful, despite failing to reach the adjusted significance level.

This interpretation is supported by the overall pattern of significant findings and aligns with the theoretical framework of our study.

### Financial Difficulty

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between carer status and financial difficulty. The relationship between these variables was significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 197) = 7.28, p = 0.007$ . Based on the odds ratio, the odds of a student struggling financially are 2.35 times higher if they have caring responsibilities than if they do not have caring responsibilities (Figure 10).

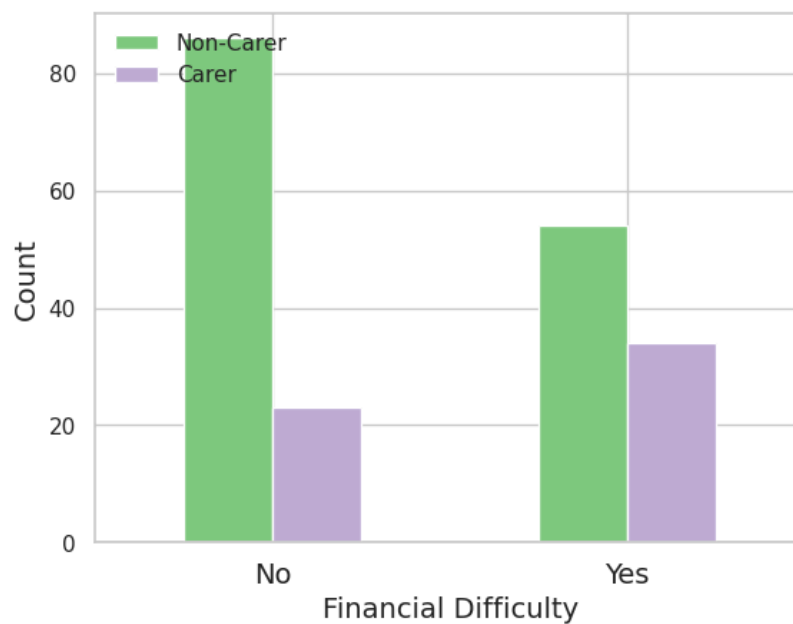
**Table 1**

*Contingency Table of Financial Difficulties by Carer Status*

Do you feel you are struggling financially?	Carer Status	
	No	Yes
No	86	23
Yes	54	34

**Figure 10**

*Financial Difficulties According to Carer Status*

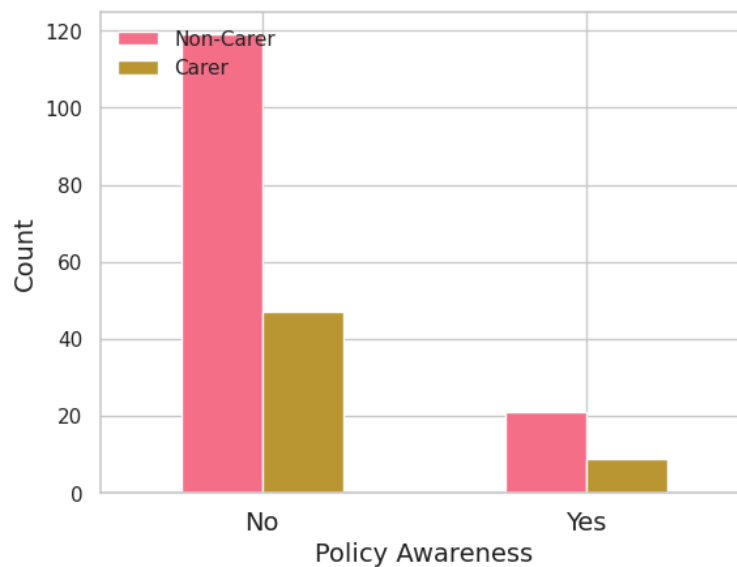


## Policy Awareness and Implementation

Of the 196 students who answered regarding policy awareness, the majority (84.69%) were not aware of the TCD's support policy for carers (Figure 11). 4.15% felt the policy is implemented correctly, while 9.33% felt it is not and 86.53% answered "Don't Know" (Figure 12).

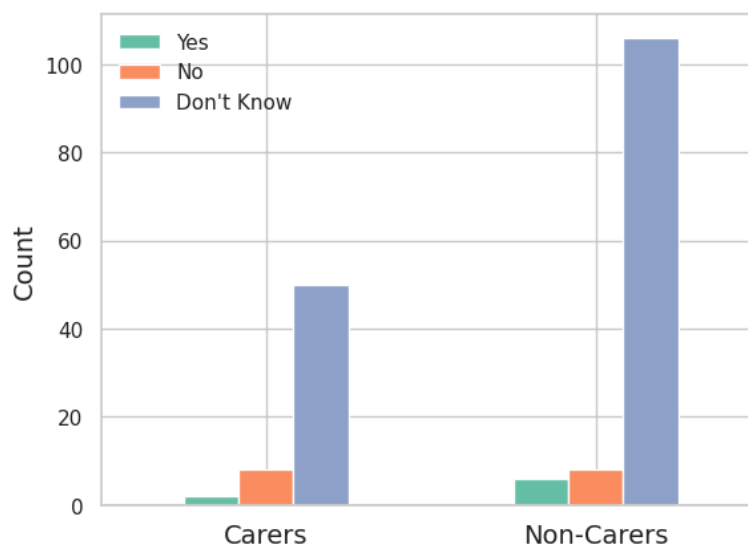
**Figure 11**

*Policy Awareness According to Carer Status*



**Figure 12**

*Perception of Adequacy of Policy Implementation*



## Interviews

For interview themes and subthemes, refer to Appendix S.2, which includes tables. Expanded quotations can be found in Appendix S.3. To view a thematic analysis map that illustrates the connections between themes, please see Appendix S.4.

### Time Management and Academic Requirements

The interviews revealed the struggle student-carers face in balancing academic responsibilities with caregiving duties, revealing an ongoing struggle to meet academic deadlines without leading to compromises in caregiving. A critical issue is the misalignment between academic and school calendars, which makes balancing these dual responsibilities even more challenging. Lecturers acknowledged the difficulty of aligning timetables but emphasised the importance of accommodating students' needs within existing constraints. Several participants, including students and staff, advocated for enhanced academic scheduling flexibility. Academic rigidity, especially strict attendance policies and rigid exam schedules, creates significant stress and frequently requires deadline extensions and exam deferrals. Timetabling options that mimic inclusive employment practices and core hours were repeatedly suggested as a viable strategy for increasing accessibility for student-carers. Additionally, the idea of a modular system allowing students to complete courses within a flexible time frame is posited as a potential solution to enhance accessibility for student-carers.

### Staff Training

A general lack of engagement in training related to supporting student-carers was evident in the interviews, indicating a gap in awareness and understanding. It was noted that engaging a diverse faculty body in specialised training sessions is challenging. A reluctance or logistical challenge is apparent, despite the acknowledged need. One lecturer expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of such training, citing,

"It's very difficult to force a whole university's worth of lecturers to attend training on something specific, like student-carers."

However, some suggested that embedding training within existing structures, like the Inclusive Curriculum, or including in induction sessions were a more effective approach.

## **Policy Implications**

One of the significant issues identified was a lack of awareness of policy among faculty, staff, and students, which hampers the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms. According to the policymaker, strengthening dissemination strategies is crucial:

"There is a policy but not all students that have caring and parenting responsibilities are even aware of the policy."

The discussion of policy implementation highlighted a gap between policy existence and its practical application, as policies don't always translate into tangible support for student-carers. The policymaker expressed a desire to see policies become more concrete and actionable, suggesting a shift towards standardised accommodations rather than ad hoc requests.

The policymaker recognises that caring responsibilities come in a variety of forms and that policies need to be flexible and adaptable to those situations.

Student-carers' participation in policy formation was emphasised as essential for policy formulation, with their voices and experiences directly influencing the creation and modification of support policies.

## **Inclusion of Students in College Community**

While inclusion aimed to welcome all students, stigmatisation presented significant barriers, with stereotypes and elitist notions making student caregivers feel marginalised. Due to this stigmatisation, student-carers experience isolation and exclusion within the college community, further exacerbated by their lack of visibility. There was a lack of visibility and data for student-carers, which indicated a broader issue of inadequate recognition and understanding of this group's size and needs.

The findings of interviews with PhD students confirm these themes, with one student-carer calling for a more flexible environment that accommodates different

commitments. One student emphasises the elitism that contributes to their feelings of isolation, noting TCD's preference for academic pursuits over personal challenges.

Disconnect from the college community manifested as feelings of isolation and exclusion, as well as absenteeism from social events.

## Support

Lack of childcare was a notable concern, with student-carers unable to find adequate childcare options. Due to this shortage, they are unable to attend classes and participate fully in academic activities.

Financial support was also identified as a key aspect of support. In addition to funding issues, caregiving and education costs pose significant challenges.

It was discussed how hybrid learning may offer flexibility, emphasising the benefits of streaming/recording lectures. There was, however, a wide range of opinions among lecturers, with some advocating that recorded lectures are essential for balancing caregiving responsibilities and academic commitments, while others expressed concern about potential impacts on in-person attendance.

Support services were acknowledged as valuable resources, however there is a need for improved communication and accessibility of these services. Empathy and sympathy from faculty was also emphasised as significant forms of support by student-carers:

"I don't care about policies, I care about human understanding and feeling like you're a person, not just a number in the university."

Capturing the desire for more personalised and empathetic support from staff.

## Student Challenges

PhD students faced numerous challenges, from managing their time and academic workload to dealing with emotional and physical strain. Adding to these challenges are financial difficulties, with students facing severe economic constraints that affect their ability to meet basic needs, as illustrated by a PhD student's admission of not being able to afford food. The dual burden of academic and caregiving

responsibilities often led to stress, anxiety, and in some cases, feelings of isolation within the college community. Participants highlighted the need for understanding and accommodations to mitigate these challenges.

### **Positive Aspects of Caring**

In spite of the myriad challenges, caregiving had a positive impact on academic understanding and research focus. One PhD student noted that caregiving experiences enrich their understanding, fostering a deeper connection to research subjects and encouraging a more active research approach.

### **External Factors Contributing to Responsibilities**

Housing and cost-of-living crises were highlighted as external factors exacerbating the challenges faced by student-carers. Due to the financial strain and logistical difficulties posed by these issues, student-carers are unable to effectively manage their dual roles.

## Focus Group

For focus group themes and subthemes, refer to Appendix T.2, which includes tables. Expanded quotations can be found in Appendix T.3. To view a thematic analysis map that illustrates the connections between themes, please see Appendix T.4.

### Time Management

Participants indicated numerous challenges with time management due to trying to balance their academic and caregiving responsibilities:

"Though I have to balance the caring responsibilities with college, and nothing else matters"

Many participants feel as though they have limited study time and end up rushing their assignments, in order to meet deadlines. The misalignment between the academic calendar and school calendar is of great concern for parents, while some participants reveal that lecturers themselves have admitted this is an issue for them too. Participants also revealed they sometimes have problems with attendance and timing of lectures, due to their caring responsibilities, and the majority of our caregivers felt that recording or streaming of lectures would improve their academic/homelife balance. Another factor which participants indicated contributes towards their challenges with managing time is commuting, with many students saying travelling takes up a lot of their time. Again, participants believed hybrid learning could relieve some of this pressure.

### Emotional Strain

Participants revealed that there is a monumental emotional strain associated with caregiving, with most participants indicating stress or anxiety to some degree. Many participants revealed there is guilt and pressure that comes with trying to balance their responsibilities:

"I feel then the pressure to be typical student and the guilt I feel then when I'm not a typical student"

Burnout and imposter syndrome were also experienced by some participants.



## Physical Strain

Participants suggested there is a physical strain associated with caregiving, with many of the conditions suffered either caused by, or exacerbated by the stress of balancing responsibilities. Additionally, some physical issues were revealed to be affected by time management challenges, such as impact on sleep and eating habits.

## Financial Pressure

Parents, in particular, experienced financial pressure due to childcare costs and a lack of financial assistance. It was suggested that this is exacerbated by work placement, as students are then unable to undertake paid work.

## Academic Performance

As previously mentioned, participants suggested challenges with attendance, limited study time and rushing assignments, all of which impacts their academic performance. Some participants indicated that interruptions while studying are common in their households:

"Then trying to study, because he is on his own all day, you're trying to study, and he's coming in trying to have a conversation"

However, most participants believed that increased flexibility for caregivers regarding assignments and exams would benefit their academic performance.

## Positive Aspects

Despite the challenges they face, many of our participants suggested there are positive aspects to being both a caregiver and a student, such as, increased ability to adapt, increased focus and becoming an inspiration for others.

## Policy Implications

It was evident from the focus groups that the majority of participants were unaware of the support policy for parents and carers. Upon being shown the policy, many felt there were issues with policy implementation, while others failed to see the relevancy of the policy, indicating it mainly covers pregnancy while day-to-day caregiving is not

advocated. Participants were very passionate about their right for equal access to support and suggested that younger caregivers are overlooked by the college.

### **Access to Supports**

Participants indicated it was difficult for them to access support due to a lack of information across faculty members, one participant divulged she had issues finding childcare, as TCD creche was full, however, no one was available to offer any assistance or advice. Many participants felt you are self-reliant when you come to TCD, with no information on available support, and no accommodations or assistance offered for those with caring responsibilities.

### **Impact on Career or Future Plans**

Participants felt that their caregiving responsibilities impacted their future plans, such as feasibility of postgraduate opportunities, while one parent was told she should have waited to enter college, which she felt would have impacted her ability to have more children.

### **Underrepresentation of Students with Caring Responsibilities**

Students indicated that they felt they are underrepresented in the college community. While many demonstrated an interest in participating in events and societies, it was evident that many of these events are inaccessible for those with caring responsibilities. Participants revealed they felt isolated and excluded from the college community, with some questioning their belonging in TCD:

"One of the things I struggle with is I don't feel like I'm included in the college community, because I miss out for, you know, for being a carer."

## Discussion

### General Discussion

Through this study, our aim was to explore the impact of caregiving responsibilities on students within the college setting by examining their personal experiences, challenges, and gathering insights from key college stakeholders for a comprehensive understanding. The overall findings provide compelling evidence that supports the hypotheses regarding the challenges student carers face within the college environment.

### Well-being (H1)

Research has consistently shown that well-being is compromised among informal carers (Areguy et al., 2019) and student-parents (Augustine et al., 2018). Our comprehensive analysis reveals that student-carers experience significantly lower well-being compared to their non-caring counterparts across various measures. Notably, the burden scores of student-carers, which averaged 8.78, indicate a high level of stress and considerable emotional strain due to caregiving responsibilities, aligning with findings by Bédard et al. (2001) that scores above 8 reflect significant stress. This is further evidenced by the WHO-5 well-being assessment results, where student-carers' median scores (40) significantly indicate diminished quality of life and an elevated risk of depressive symptoms, in agreement with Omani-Samani et al. (2019) regarding scores below 50. Becker and Sempik (2018) identified that young-adult informal carers are more likely to report mental health issues, a claim supported by 45% of carers disclosing conditions like depression and anxiety. This is mirrored in our findings, where elevated GAD-2 and PSS-4 scores among student-carers suggest a higher prevalence of these mental health issues. Despite these disparities, perceived stress levels between our student-carers and non-carers were not significantly different, yet both groups exhibited high stress levels (Arnold et al., 2012; Warttig et al., 2013). The Cantril Ladder of Life Satisfaction scores further reflect the negative impact of caregiving on mental and physical health. Consistent with previous research (Day 2019; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Kirton et al. 2012; Scharp & Dorrance Hall, 2019; Yiengprugsawan et al., 2012), our results

demonstrate significantly higher SSS-8 scores among carers, indicating more pronounced physical health challenges. The UCLA-3 loneliness scores, in line with Steptoe et al. (2013), suggest prevalent loneliness among our carers, a finding supported by young-adult carer studies (Haugland et al., 2022).

Our qualitative research, including focus groups and interviews, revealed the profound impact of caregiving on student-carers' well-being, highlighting emotional burdens such as stress, anxiety, guilt, burnout, and imposter syndrome. Participants described the pressure to meet expectations as a "typical student" while juggling caregiving duties, often leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy, a sentiment shared by student-parents in the study by Lucchini-Raies et al. (2018). Due to the juggling of caregiving and academic responsibilities, participants suffer a physical toll. Similar to the findings by Marandet and Wainwright (2010), sleep deprivation was also frequently mentioned in our focus group and interviews. In order to fulfil their dual roles, student-carers often sacrifice sleep, resulting in chronic fatigue.

Studies show that lack of adequate sleep not only impairs cognitive function and academic performance, but also increases susceptibility to stress and reduces immunity (Colten & Altevogt, 2006). The lack of adequate sleep and healthy eating habits, as well as reported physical health issues like headaches and cardiovascular conditions, underscore the stress-induced challenges faced by student-carers. Our study also found that student-carers felt excluded from campus life, similar to that reported by Moreau and Kerner (2013). The difficulty in attending in-person events or classes exacerbates a diminished sense of community and inclusion. The lack of visible support and acknowledgment by colleges, as highlighted by the Aspen Institute (2021), Kirton et al. (2012), and Saragosa et al. (2022), contributes to student-carers feeling overlooked and invisible. This impacts not only their social well-being but also their academic engagement and mental health. Overall, the survey data and participants' narratives support the hypothesis that student-carers experience lower well-being than non-carers.

## Academic Challenges (H2)

According to our analysis of student-carers' academic challenges, student-carers face more academic challenges than their non-caring peers, a conclusion that is consistent with existing research. According to our survey, there are no significant differences in academic scores between carers and non-carers. However, among student-carers, 78% believe that their caring responsibilities negatively impact their academic performance to some extent, and more than half (52.46%) miss lectures frequently or occasionally. Although the scores are not significantly different, the median score of both carers and non-carers (14) indicate academic struggles. Given the high levels of stress and academic scores reported by both groups, it implies that TCD students experience significant academic pressure. It is also evident that carers' academic experiences are vastly different, as established in previous literature. Studies indicate that caring responsibilities negatively affect academic achievement (Aspen Institute, 2021; Morgan, 2019), attendance rates (Becker & Sempik, 2018; Lyonette et al., 2015), time allocation for assignments (Day, 2019), and exam performance (Haugland et al., 2022; Taukeni, 2014). It is interesting to note that despite the high percentages of participants facing these challenges, only 60.66% have requested extensions on their assignments. This might indicate that there is a reluctance to seek accommodations, which could be interpreted as wanting to avoid "special treatment", as discussed by Kirton et al. (2012).

Moreover, the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups in our study support the quantitative findings. Participants articulated challenges related to attendance, time management, and the necessity to rush assignments due to their dual roles as students and carers. There is a profound impact of these challenges on academic performance, with participants saying that they could have achieved higher grades without the responsibilities of caregiving. Furthermore, as discussed in the interviews, the rigidity of TCD's academic structure deserves special attention. There is an assumption in university culture that students have free time to attend classes without other obligations, and students are encouraged to take higher education seriously and have set a structure that corresponds to that assumption (Levine, 1993). University policies and rules rarely reflect the needs of student-carers

(Runacres et al., 2021) and the academic society focus mainly on development, never-ending competition and success without providing any form of support to them (Behboodi Moghadam et al., 2017). Trinity's inflexible exam scheduling, strict attendance policies, and a general lack of consideration for student-carers' unique circumstances demonstrate this rigidity. The structural inflexibility of the system not only intensifies the academic challenges facing student-carers, but also makes it difficult for them to achieve a balanced and equitable education.

### **Financial Challenges (H3)**

Our third hypothesis proposed that student-carers experience more financial difficulties than non-carer peers. According to the survey results, student-carers are 2.35 times more likely to experience financial difficulties than non-carers. This statistical evidence not only supports our hypothesis but also aligns with the broader literature on the financial struggles faced by student-parents (Ajayi et al., 2022; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006) and informal carers (Haugland et al., 2020; NUS, 2013).

Discussions in focus groups provided additional insight into these financial challenges, with parents particularly vocal about the dual pressures of caregiving responsibilities and academic commitments. As seen in recent research (Navarro-Cruz et al., 2023), the cost of childcare emerged as a significant financial burden among our participants, increasing the difficulty of balancing unpaid caregiving with the inability to pursue paid employment due to academic schedules and mandatory work placements. While the demand for childcare among third-level students increases, the childcare places have not increased, as indicated by Nelson et al. (2013). In the case of TCD, childcare places had decreased until very recently; preliminary findings revealed that up until last year the creche was only running at 65% capacity, due to staff shortages (see Appendix U.2). Although this situation is currently being rectified, the manager revealed that she worries about the longevity of staff in TCD creche, as the wages are so low in childcare (Greer Murphy, 2021). Thus, with students having to put their children in childcare further afield, this often means they must undertake additional hours of childcare, due to increased proximity from TCD, which in turn precipitates increased childcare fees, further exacerbating

the financial difficulties faced by student-parents. The qualitative data were enhanced by the stories from interviews, with one PhD student's account illustrating the extreme financial difficulty faced by student-carers. According to a PhD student who provided informal care during her undergraduate degree, she repeatedly worried about affording an ambulance, if needed, and often skipped meals due to financial difficulty. This echoes the findings of Runacres et al. (2021), who noted that the majority of student-carers worry about basic living expenses such as rent, food, and transport. Based on the survey, focus groups, and interviews, we are able to build a comprehensive picture of student-carers' financial challenges, as well as validate our preliminary hypothesis.

### **Policy Dissemination and Implementation (H4)**

In the final hypothesis, we suggest that the support policy is not adequately disseminated and implemented, leading to a limited awareness of and response to student-carers' needs on the part of the college. Despite the well-intentioned policy framework designed to support student-carers, the study's findings suggest acceptance of our hypothesis regarding dissemination and implementation issues. According to our survey, 84.69% of students were unaware of TCD's policy for informal carers and student parents, suggesting a profound disconnect between the policies' existence and their dissemination. This lack of awareness is critical, as policies, no matter how well-crafted, cannot be effective if their target audience is unaware of them. Moreover, the majority's uncertainty (86.53%) about the policy's implementation effectiveness suggests a disconnect between the policy's intentions and its perceived benefits among the student body.

Focus group discussions provided deeper insights into this issue. Participants, initially unaware of the policy, were introduced to it during the sessions. While many of them recognised the policy's intent, they critiqued its scope and relevance, particularly its inability to address day-to-day caregiving beyond pregnancy-related support. This feedback resonates with the experiences documented by Lucchini-Raies et al. (2018), in which students felt overlooked by institutional

policies, lacking tangible support that acknowledged their dual status as carers and students.

There was a notably low level of awareness among faculty and staff regarding the support policy for informal carers and student-parents. The findings are concerning since faculty and staff are crucial in the dissemination of policies and in providing direct support to students. Their lack of awareness suggests that efforts to promote the policy internally have been insufficient or ineffective. The policymaker was acutely aware of these issues. There was agreement that the dissemination of the policy had not reached its intended audience, resulting in the existing support mechanisms being less effective. Furthermore, the discussions highlighted a discrepancy between the policy's existence and its practical implementation. As the policymaker noted, a policy does not automatically result in tangible support for student-carers. She expressed a desire for the policy to become more concrete and actionable, moving away from ad-hoc accommodations and toward standardised support. Standardisation could enhance the policy's effectiveness, making support more predictable and accessible to student carers. It was also emphasised that policies need to be flexible and adaptable to a variety of situations in which caregiving is performed. Student-carers come from diverse backgrounds, with varying needs that cannot be addressed through a one-size-fits-all approach. This diversity necessitates the development of policies that are responsive to the specific challenges faced by student-carers. This includes young caregivers who were noted to be particularly overlooked in our focus groups.



## **Additional Insights and Recommendations: Creating a Better Student-Carer Experience**

### **Hybrid Learning**

From our survey, 75.41% of students with caring responsibilities reported they were better able to manage their responsibilities when lectures were streamed/recorded, with similar sentiments shared during the focus group and interviews. Academic literature also suggests that blended learning improves adult learning outcomes, including improved exam scores and course rates (Deschacht & Goeman, 2015) and facilitates a better balance of responsibilities among mothers (Gokool-Ramdoos, 2005; O'Shea, 2019). Yet, there seems to be a hesitance towards blended learning in TCD, which was reflected in the interviews with lecturers. Even though some lecturers accepted recordings for students with caring responsibilities as long as they were only for those who needed them, others opposed online learning altogether.

### **Staff Training**

Our analysis reveals a significant gap in the awareness and effectiveness of existing policies designed to support caregiving students, underscoring the critical need for both improved dissemination and enhanced staff training. The survey, focus group, and interview data collectively highlight that neither students nor staff are adequately informed about the policies in place, pointing to a systemic issue in communication and implementation. In addition, over 72.68% of survey participants think staff should receive further training to support caregiving students (see Appendix U.1). This is supported in focus groups, where students unanimously agreed on the benefits of specialised training for tutors and lecturers. There is, however, an evident lack of engagement and scepticism regarding the feasibility of such training. Literature emphasises the necessity of early and ongoing support, which requires university staff to be trained to understand the issues student-carers may face when studying (Morgan, 2019). The findings of Berg and Mamhute (2013) become particularly relevant in this regard, as they demonstrate how insufficient guidance and support from lecturers can negatively affect student-carers' ability to achieve their academic

goals, negatively affecting their academic progress. Despite the acknowledged need for training, many faculty members express concerns about the practicality of mandating such comprehensive instruction for all teaching staff, citing issues like time constraints and the diverse nature of academic faculties. In contrast, some propose incorporating this specialised training into existing educational frameworks, like the Inclusive Curriculum, as a more feasible option.

### **Student-Carer Specific Service: A Proposal Fostering Inclusion, Support and Authenticity**

The findings of our research reveal a large sense of isolation and underrepresentation among our student-carers. It is difficult for these students to fully participate in college activities and societies, leading to feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging. However, when the concept of a specialised service for parents and carers was introduced, similar to the disability service, where individuals could declare their status upon enrollment, making tutors and lecturers aware of their needs, knowing the support available, the concept was unanimously supported. Furthermore, our survey data confirms this need, as only 26.23% of carers indicated they would not use such a service at all. However, the majority (37.70%) were unsure, demonstrating the need for more information on such a service. Yet, 36.07% of carers indicated they would utilise such a service (see Appendix U.1).

Despite the clear benefits of support services, as demonstrated by previous research (Day 2019; Kirton et al. 2012; Taukeni, 2014; Yeingprugsawan et al. 2012), there remains a significant barrier: many students with caring responsibilities are hesitant to disclose their status to the university. Our data shows that 82.26% of student-carers have not disclosed their responsibilities. Reasons range from fear of stigmatisation, believing it irrelevant to their academic performance, lack of awareness of available support, and insufficient contact with tutors. TCD's reputation as an "elite" institution adds to this reluctance, with students feeling pressured to hide their responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the interest in a dedicated service for carers suggests that there is a path forward. In a similar way to LENS disability services, such a service would provide carers with support and accommodations, emphasising anonymity to reduce

stigmatisation fears. By doing so, we will be able to create a more supportive and inclusive academic environment for student-carers so they can juggle their different roles and succeed at them.

### **Bridging the Gap Between Equality and Equity**

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) prides itself on being an open and inclusive institution, a sentiment echoed in their "Why Choose Trinity" webpage which states –

"Trinity is an open and inclusive university and our commitment to equality and diversity are values on which Trinity's excellence relies."

(Trinity College Dublin, 2024)

Furthermore, Dr. Linda Doyle, the provost of TCD, in her speech on October 6, 2022, emphasised the university's principles and stated –

"I want Trinity to be a good university, where everything we do is built around respect, fairness, sustainability, democracy, diversity and other core values"

(Doyle, 2022)

Although TCD has a diverse community and has made commendable efforts to remove barriers to education through initiatives such as Trinity Access Programme (TAP), Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE), focusing on fostering an environment of equality, it is important to focus primarily not only on equality, but on **equity**, to ensure those who are at a disadvantage get the support they need to succeed. Despite TCD's inclusive ethos, caring students often face mental, physical, and financial hardships, feeling isolated within the community and lacking a sense of belonging. In light of this, we advocate for the college to provide tailored support and resources to these students.

Considering the time constraints faced by carers, traditional support groups may not be feasible; instead, online events and meetings may mitigate their loneliness, while group messaging services may give them continuous support, reminding them that they are not alone.

The Eurostudent Survey VIII, as reported by the Higher Education Authority in 2023, reveals that 11% of students have children — a figure expected to rise with the ongoing elimination of educational barriers. Additionally, in 2022, Minister for Education, Simon Harris, introduced the National Access Plan for Equity in Access, Participation, and Success in Higher Education (Higher Education Authority, 2022), which committed to increasing diversity and inclusion in the student population. The plan acknowledges the unique challenges mature students and those with caring responsibilities face, aiming to gather more information about carers in higher education. It is therefore likely that in the future, the number of students with caring responsibilities will increase.

While the efforts to remove educational barriers are commendable, it is crucial to ensure that these efforts result in improved educational achievement and well-being for students with caring responsibilities. In their 2024 report, Russell and Smyth highlight that young carers face significant barriers to higher education, often due to their need to remain in close proximity to the family home. Although programs like TAP and HEAR address socioeconomic barriers, carers come from diverse backgrounds, suggesting the need for more inclusive educational pathways. This calls for a reevaluation of support mechanisms to accommodate the diverse needs of informal carers, urging both TCD and the Irish government to consider alternative educational routes for young carers.

## **Conclusion**

Our comprehensive analysis, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research, unequivocally supports our hypotheses. Although academic scores are not significantly different between our groups, our results suggest that student-carers are often overcompensating by sacrificing their well-being, such as skipping meals and sleep. It is evident that student-carers are confronted with diminished well-being, alongside significant academic and financial challenges. Moreover, our findings highlight profound concerns regarding both the awareness and the practical enactment of TCD support policy for student-carers. In order to foster equity and inclusion within the college community, targeted support mechanisms are essential.

In addition, enhancing understanding and empathy among staff and students is crucial to dismantling the stigma associated with caring responsibilities. Taking such measures, Trinity College Dublin can truly accommodate the diverse needs of its community, ensuring that no student caregiver faces undue stress in navigating their educational journey.

## **Limitations**

Although the study provides valuable insights into student caregiver experiences and captures insight from major stakeholders, it also encounters several limitations that warrant discussion.

Among the challenges we encountered was the length of the survey. Our survey was developed with various scales to meticulously assess the respondents' well-being in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. However, this intention inadvertently resulted in a lengthy survey, which may have discouraged full participation among respondents. Thus, incomplete submissions present a significant limitation, compromising our data's representativeness. The protracted nature of the survey might have led some participants to abandon it midway, affecting the overall response rate. It might be beneficial to take a more streamlined approach in future research endeavours to overcome this problem. Specific scales, such as Zarit Burden Interview, UCLA-3 and WHO-5, could be used selectively to provide a holistic assessment of well-being, while simultaneously maintaining a concise questionnaire, thereby promoting greater participation.

In retrospect, since research indicates age has a significant impact on caregiving responsibilities (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Manze et al., 2021; Vlachantoni et al., 2013), our study should have asked participants to provide their age numerically rather than categorising them. As a result, we could have obtained the mean age of all participants, particularly among caregivers and parents, allowing for more nuanced age-related analyses.

The limited representation of stakeholders further complicated our goal of gathering rich information for our study. Despite our efforts to include key stakeholders, such as policymakers, lecturers and TAP co-ordinator in our study, time constraints limited its scope, causing the omission of other key contributors, such as college administrators and healthcare professionals, who could have contributed to the study tremendously. The exclusion of these factors narrows the scope of our findings, potentially leaving gaps in understanding the complexities involved in student caregiving. By acknowledging these constraints, it becomes evident that broadening the scope of future investigations will be beneficial. It would be beneficial to utilise these additional perspectives in future efforts to develop interventions and policies in a way that more accurately reflects the diverse needs of student-carers.

Additionally, we faced challenges engaging stakeholders and focus group participants. Although we made significant efforts to reach out to them, we still encountered significant difficulties, due to non-responsiveness or refusal on the part of potential contributors. Our inability to collect a diverse set of data highlighted the need for innovative engagement strategies. The inability to secure interviews with other stakeholders, such as counselling services, and the low attendance at focus groups significantly limited the scope and depth of our study. As a result of this experience, we realise the importance of flexibility in our approach, which suggests that future endeavours might benefit from exploring alternative methods of stakeholder engagement. As well, accommodating participants' scheduling preferences could be an effective strategy for enhancing both participation rates and the richness of data collected, allowing deeper exploration of the topic.

There was a significant gender disparity in our participant demographic, reflecting societal norms regarding caregiving. Female participants constituted a majority of our study, a finding common in broader literature and population statistics, suggesting that females often bear a larger share of caregiving responsibilities (Arber & Ginn, 1995; CSO 2022; Eurostat, 2019; Gault et al., 2014). This imbalance, however, limits our understanding of the caregiving experience across genders. This emphasises the need for future research to actively pursue gender balance among participants. An equitable representation of caregiving experiences and perspectives is important, not only to ensure the universality of research findings, but also to

capture a rich diversity of caregiving experiences. The study of caregiving roles from this perspective will enhance generalisability and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of the role.

## **Research Impact**

With this study, we hope to fill a gap in the literature regarding the impacts of caring responsibilities on students in higher education, specifically at TCD. By capturing the experiences and perspectives of these students, we shed light on their challenges and identified several key findings that have the potential to drive significant impact.

The core objective of our research is to inform and shape support policies and mechanisms. Our research sheds light on the diverse range of challenges encountered by student-carers, including issues related to well-being, academic pursuits, financial struggles, and awareness of support policies. These insights provide policymakers and institutional stakeholders with valuable information to develop tailored support mechanisms that address the specific needs of student-carers, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment within TCD.

A significant outcome of our research is the identification of actionable solutions to support student-carers. For example, the establishment of specialised service tailored specifically for student-carers has emerged as a promising strategy. These services, offering counselling, academic advising and resources aim to provide targeted support to help student-carers navigate their dual roles effectively. Additionally, our research underscores the importance of implementing hybrid learning models to address the time constraints faced by student-carers. By incorporating both in-person and online learning, the hybrid system provides flexibility and enables student-carers to balance their caregiving responsibilities with their academic pursuits more effectively. These initiatives have the potential to enhance the overall well-being and academic success of student-carers, ultimately contributing to their overall educational experience and outcomes.

Through dissemination of our findings, we raise awareness within the broader community about the challenges faced by student-carers and advocate for their support. Presentations to lecturers, employees from TAP, tutors and policymakers provide an opportunity to share our research insights directly with key stakeholders who have the power to provide support, influence and implement policies and mechanisms within the academic community. Furthermore, we will also be sharing and presenting our findings to TrinityINC, who have generously sponsored our focus groups. Through this we aim to contribute to their ongoing efforts to improve inclusivity within TCD. Our findings provide a critical perspective for identifying areas where the college can enhance its efforts to foster a more inclusive and supportive campus environment.

Moreover, integrating insights from our research into professional development initiatives, faculty and staff can gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by student-carers. Majority of our student-carer participants agreed that dedicated training sessions for lecturers aimed at understanding carers' experiences and providing support would greatly benefit them. This understanding can inform their teaching practices, allowing them to provide appropriate support and accommodations to help student-carers succeed academically. By fostering empathy and awareness among educators, these programs can contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

Our research findings have the potential to contribute to the removal of barriers to education for student-carers. For instance, a significant number of our participants revealed that they gained access to degree programs through TAP. However, it's worth noting that not all students with caring responsibilities meet the socioeconomic requirements for these programs. In our interview with a TAP coordinator (see Appendix S.1), we explored alternative access pathways for student-carers. By identifying and addressing these barriers, our research strives to ensure that all carers have equitable access to education.

By shedding light on the challenges faced by student-carers and identifying areas for improvement in support policies and practices, the research has the potential to drive positive change within Trinity College Dublin and beyond. Our findings can inform



support policies and practices at other institutions, making a significant impact beyond our campus. Furthermore, by advocating for student-carers' needs and raising awareness among stakeholders, our study contributes to a broader conversation about inclusivity and support for diverse student populations in higher education.

Overall, the research findings allow collaboration and knowledge exchange among researchers, policymakers, employees and students. By combining our efforts, we can develop best practices and evidence-based strategies to support student-carers in higher education. By sharing our insights, experiences, and recommendations, we contribute to the creation of a supportive environment that encourages and supports student-carers.

## **Future Research**

From our study, we can conclude that research on support and well-being for student-carers is important and a broad field. There is an opportunity to explore strategies that can significantly enhance the academic and personal lives of student-carers, as research into their well-being and support continues. To address the unique challenges faced by student-carers in educational institutions, it becomes imperative to evaluate and refine the support mechanisms.

The rigorous evaluation of various support interventions is one of the key areas for future research. This includes assessing the effectiveness of having a student-carer-specific service and hybrid learning models in meeting the needs of students, as well as assessing the impact of flexible scheduling for student-carers. Additionally, the assessment of current mental health services and financial assistance programs designed for student-carers can provide insight into comprehensive support strategies that reduce some of the burdens these students bear. The substantial emotional strain experienced by student-carers also emphasises the need for mental health interventions tailored to their specific needs. Testing targeted mental health interventions, such as peer support groups, online counselling services, and stress management workshops, could provide valuable

resources for managing the stress and anxiety that are often associated with caregiving.

Another essential consideration is the representation of diverse experiences within the student-carer population. A gendered dimension to caregiving responsibilities is revealed by the predominance of female participants in our study. Because of this imbalance, we do not have a deep understanding of caregiving roles across genders. It would be beneficial for future research to include a gender balance among participants, to ensure that caregiving experiences are comprehensively represented. A gender inclusive approach to caregiving will not only validate research findings, but also enrich our understanding of diverse caregiving narratives. Other identity factors, including race and socioeconomic status, are also relevant to caregiving intersectionality. By exploring how these intersecting identities influence student-carers' experiences and challenges, more nuanced support strategies can be developed. With such an approach, the college can provide services that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of their student populations.

Lastly, a comparison of support services and policy implementations for student-carers across different educational settings in Ireland may reveal some variability. By comparing experiences and support across different institutions, researchers can identify best practices and pinpoint areas where improvements can be made to support student-carers in diverse situations. Studying how different educational environments affect the well-being and academic success of student-carers could provide a framework to improve support across institutions.

The incorporation of these directions into future research will not only expand our knowledge of student-carers' needs, but also help develop more effective support structures for them.

## Group Processes

Our academic journey, where challenges and additional responsibilities often intersect, brought us all together with a common goal and purpose. Some of us carried the weight of caregiving responsibilities, while others were motivated by a strong desire to advocate on behalf of student-carers. With our collective passion on this topic, we formed a cohesive team committed to ensure that every student-carer has access to equitable opportunities and the necessary support to thrive in their dual roles. As a team, we navigated various challenges and utilised our strengths. The experiences we encountered during this journey have been varied and have contributed greatly to our growth and development.

During the project, communication and discussion were facilitated through a variety of platforms. Generally, WhatsApp was used for quick communication, informal discussions, and task coordination. Additionally, the shared drive was used to store project documents, resources, and meeting agendas, so all team members had easy access to them. We also held regular team meetings, which were conducted both in person and via Zoom, in which we were able to discuss project progress, obstacles, and decision-making processes. Using these channels of communication enabled a collaborative environment where ideas could be exchanged easily.

Understanding the importance of effective task distribution, our team strategically divided the work to leverage member's unique abilities and strengths. We organised ourselves into specialised subgroups tasked with managing different components of the project – namely, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. These groups were carefully formed, taking into account the skills, strengths, and levels of confidence of each team member. By doing so, we ensured that those best suited to each task could take full ownership, guaranteeing a meticulous approach to data collection. Furthermore, data analysis was assigned to individuals who demonstrated both confidence and competence in their analytical skills, ensuring that our results were not only accurate but also met the high standards we set for our work.

Collaborative writing techniques facilitated the integration of our collective ideas and insights into a cohesive final report. With Google Docs, we facilitated collaboration and continuous refinement of our work based on the input from team members. The 'comments' and 'suggest edits' feature within the Google Docs was extremely helpful as it enabled us to create a more efficient and effective way to collaborate and complete the project. It also allowed us to quickly adjust our work in real-time, ensuring that the team was on the same page.

Establishing internal deadlines and reviewing processes also played a crucial role in maintaining project progress. We established different deadlines for both the subgroups and the group as a whole. This helped us stay organised and focused on our goals. Regular check-ins and reviews of work allowed us to track our progress, offer feedback, and make any needed improvements to ensure we met the project's goals and quality standards. This structured approach helped us stay on course and manage our time effectively to meet project deadlines.

Our journey, however, was not without its challenges. As a result of unforeseen circumstances, one of our team members could not continue with the project after the first semester, resulting in the loss of a valuable team member. Additionally, another team member encountered a medical emergency during the data collection, analysis and writing phase. This significantly limited their ability to contribute to the project. The challenge tested our team's adaptability and resilience. To address this challenge, the other members stepped up and volunteered to take on the additional workload left by the missing team members. This allowed us to effectively redistribute tasks and maintain momentum in the project, despite the unexpected setback. Throughout this process, members' flexibility remained key to ensuring project continuity and meeting our timelines.

Additionally, achieving survey participation targets proved to be a significant challenge. Despite our extensive advertising efforts, there was a decline in participation rates, the number lagging significantly behind the target numbers determined by G\*Power calculations. To overcome this challenge, we divided ourselves into teams, each tasked with implementing targeted outreach efforts aimed at recruiting participants for the survey. One team engaged in direct, in-person

outreach by approaching students verbally to promote the survey. Simultaneously, another team attended various events organised by the Mature Student Society and Student Union Student-Parent Officer to engage with potential participants. Additionally, we expanded our outreach efforts by sending emails to various schools within TCD and our research sponsors. Through collaborative efforts, we tried to optimise participation rates.

In recognition of the diversity in our team, many of our members were carers, while others balance work and project commitments. However, these additional responsibilities often posed challenges for our team. Due to our limited team size, this often resulted in unequal workload distribution, with certain periods where the burden was particularly heavy for a few members. Despite these obstacles, our passion for the research topic served as a powerful motivator, enabling us to maintain focus and complete the project successfully.

As a result of this project, we gained a deeper understanding of each other's skills and perspectives. This enabled us to work efficiently and productively, and we achieved more than we thought possible. In spite of challenges along the way, we were able to overcome obstacles and reach our goals by leveraging our strengths and benefiting from the guidance and support provided by our supervisors. This project provided us with skills and experiences that will prove valuable in our future endeavours and remind us of the importance of effective communication, collaboration, and adaptability in achieving shared goals.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Ethics Approval



Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
Trinity College Dublin  
Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin

F.A.O. Anchal Sharma

**Approval ID: SPREC012024-21**

**School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee**

January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Dear Anchal,

The School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application entitled “The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin”, and I am pleased to inform you that it was approved.

Adverse events associated with the conduct of this research must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Ethics Committee.

Please note that you must also liaise with the Trinity College Dublin Data Protection Office to update your DPIA given the addition of any new materials or procedures. This is in order to ensure that your project remains compliant with data-protection regulations. The approval given here only pertains to the School of Psychology ethics protocols.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Whelan".

Prof. Robert Whelan  
Chair  
School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

**TCD Security: 01 896 1317**

**Scoil na Siceolaíochta**  
Dámh na nEolaíochtaí Sóisialta agus Daonna,  
Áras an Phiarsaigh,  
Coláiste na Tríonóide,  
Baile Átha Cliath,  
Ollscoil Átha Cliath,  
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire.

**School of Psychology**  
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Trinity College Dublin,  
The University of Dublin,  
Dublin 2, Ireland.

+353 1 896 1886  
psychology@tcd.ie  
www.tcd.ie/psychology

## Appendix B – Participant Information Leaflet (Survey)

### Participant Information Leaflet – Survey

**Name of Study:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

Site	<b>Trinity College Dublin</b>
Principal Investigator(s) and Co Investigator(s) (insert names, titles and contact details)	Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton  sharmaa1@tcd.ie, kcosgrav@tcd.ie, bradye6@tcd.ie, gigliobe@tcd.ie, wottonj@tcd.ie
Study Organiser/Sponsor (if applicable)	Study Supervisors: Dr. Siobhán Corrigan (scorrig@tcd.ie) and Dr. Samuel Cromie (sdcromie@tcd.ie)  Survey Sponsors: Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) (grimsos@tcd.ie)
Data Controllers	<b>Trinity College Dublin (for research data)</b>
Data Protection Officer	<b>Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2</b>

You are being invited to take part in this online survey which is being conducted as a component of the psychology undergraduate course by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please read this information sheet carefully. You should understand the risks and benefits of taking part in this study so that you can make a decision that is right for you.

This leaflet has five main parts:

Part 1 – The Study

Part 2 – Data Protection

Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval

Part 4 – Future Research

Part 5 – Further Information

## Part 1 – The Study

### **Why is this study being done?**

This study examines how caring responsibilities affect Trinity College Dublin students. By investigating this topic, we hope to inform policymakers about ways to ease student-carer challenges.

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You were invited to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate Trinity student above the age of 18 with or without caring responsibilities. We intend to recruit 300 or more participants that fit these characteristics.

### **Do I have to take part? Can I withdraw?**

The study is completely voluntary. You are not required to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you choose to opt-out. You can withdraw your consent at any time throughout the survey, and your data will not be utilised. However, because your data will be submitted anonymously, you will not be able to withdraw once you have submitted the survey.

### **What happens if I change my mind?**

If you change your mind, you can opt to withdraw from the study up until the survey is submitted. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be removed and destroyed and not used in the study. However, it will not be possible to destroy samples of data once the survey has been submitted.

### **How will the study be carried out?**

Before participating in the study, you will be asked to provide explicit consent. After this is completed, you will be able to complete the online survey, which will include questions about your caregiving responsibilities, wellbeing, awareness of TCD's support policy, perceptions of its effectiveness and overall university experience.

### **What will happen to me if I decide to take part?**

After reading this information form you will be asked to complete the consent form. Once the consent form is signed, you will be sent directly to the online survey. There will be a list of questions throughout the survey. You are required to answer every question. We advise that you finish the survey in one sitting and respond to each question in the correct sequence. Once all the questions in the survey are answered, you will be directed to a page where you will have the option to register for a prize draw and focus groups. You will then be debriefed. Following the debriefing, you will have one more chance to opt out or submit. You will no longer be able to withdraw from the research when you choose to submit your responses.

### **What will happen to my Samples and Data?**

Data collected from you and other participants will be analysed and compiled into a report. Your data will be fully anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose than the present study. Your data will be kept until the study is completed, after which it will be destroyed since its primary purpose is to be used in the present project. After this point, all data gathered will be destroyed by the supervisors, Samuel Cromie and Siobhán Corrigan.

**Are there any benefits to taking part in this research?**

You might not directly benefit from participating in this study. The study's findings, however, will help us understand the difficulties faced by dual-role students who have caring responsibilities. This might help to direct future research and policies. If you are a Psychology student accessing this study via the Trinity College Sona System, you will be able to earn 1 research credit. Additionally, upon completion of the survey, you will have an opportunity to enter a draw for one of three €25 Eason vouchers by entering your email at the end of the survey.

**Are there any risks to me or others if I take part?**

All data collected are anonymous and therefore there are no risks associated with filling out this survey.

**Will I be told the outcome of the study? Will I be told the results of any tests or investigations performed as part of this study that relate to me?**

The study's findings will be presented to faculty and students at the School of Psychology and might be published. There will be no information published that might be used to identify you. If you would like to be kept updated on the results of the study, please email the Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie).

## **Part 2 – Data Protection**

**What information about me (personal data) will be used as part of this study? Will my medical records be accessed?**

In this survey, you will not be required to provide your name or any other identifying information. If you want to participate in the prize draw or focus group associated with this research project, you may provide your email address, but this information will not be stored or connected to your data.

**What will happen to my personal data?**

The information you provide in the survey will be kept anonymous. The survey information will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file. If you agree to provide your email address to be contacted in the future to participate in a survey draw or focus group, this information will be stored in a password protected encrypted file on TCD's one drive, where only members of the research team and supervisors can access these files. Upon completion of the study, it will be destroyed. As per TCD requirements, your

signed consent form will be kept in file for ten years.

### **Who will access and use my personal data as part of this study?**

The data will be accessed by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos, Eva Brady and Jake Wootton. The Supervisors: Dr Samuel Cromie and Dr Siobhán Corrigan might also require access to the data. Your data will at no time leave Ireland.

### **Will my personal data be kept confidential? How will my data be kept safe?**

We value your privacy, and we take several precautions to guarantee that your privacy is maintained and that your data is secure. Your data will be kept in a password-protected computer in an encrypted file that only researchers have access. The information in respect of consent obtained by ticking a box will be kept on a different computer that is password-protected. After conducting a Risk Assessment, it was determined that the study's level of data security was appropriate. Every researcher has completed several ethical data protection lessons and will continue to be closely supervised during the whole project.

### **What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?**

We are permitted by law to use your personal data for scientific research that is in the public interest. In accordance with the Irish Health Research Regulations, we will also need your explicit consent to use your data.

### **What are my rights?**

At all times you retain

- The right to access to your data and receive a copy of it
- The right to restrict or object to processing of your data
- The right to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified)
- The right to have inaccurate information about you corrected or deleted
- The right to receive your data in a portable format and to have it transferred to another data controller
- The right to request deletion of your data

By law you can exercise the following rights in relation to your personal data unless the request would make it impossible or very difficult to conduct the research. You can exercise these rights by contacting your study Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma, [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

## **Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval**

**Has this study been approved by a research ethics committee?**



Yes, this study has been authorised by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College Dublin. Approval was granted on 26th January 2024. If you have any further queries, you can contact the committee by email: [PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE](mailto:PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE)

### **Who is organising and funding this study? Will the results be used for commercial purposes?**

The research team is in charge of organising this research. We are doing this research project to satisfy the prerequisites for undergraduate Psychology degree at Trinity College Dublin. No payment will be received for this research study, and it will not be used for any commercial endeavours.

### **Is there any payment for taking part? Will it cost me anything if I agree to take part?**

There is no cost or compensation of any kind for you to participate in this research. However, upon completion of the survey you are entitled to enter a prize draw if you choose so. If you accessed the survey through Sona System, you would receive 1 credit upon completion.

## **Part 4 – Future Research**

### **Will my personal data be used in future studies?**

No, your data will not be used for any additional studies. Once the present project is completed, your data will be destroyed.

## **Part 5 – Further Information**

### **Who should I contact for information or complaints?**

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact:

- Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie)).
- Study Supervisors: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sd Cromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sd Cromie@tcd.ie)) and Dr. Siobhán Corrigan ([scorrig@tcd.ie](mailto:scorrig@tcd.ie)).
- Data Protection Officer, Trinity College Dublin: Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie) . Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

Under GDPR, if you are not satisfied with how your data is being processed, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commission, 21 Fitzwilliam Square South, Dublin 2, Ireland. Website: [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie).

### **Will I be contacted again?**

You will be contacted to participate in future research only if you registered your interest to take part in the focus group by leaving your email address or if you win the prize draw.

## Appendix C – Consent Form (Survey)



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

**STUDY NAME:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

**Centre ID:**

**Identification Number for study:**

### Survey Consent Form

There are 2 sections in this form (General and Data Processing). Each section has a statement and asks you to initial if you agree. The end of this form is for the researchers to complete.

Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements.

Thank you for participating.

Please Initial the box if you agree with the statement. Please feel free to ask questions if there is something you do not understand.

General	Initial Box
I confirm I have read and understood the Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study <b>is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.</b>	
I understand that my responses may be viewed by the research team and supervisors involved in this study where it is relevant to the research. I agree that these individuals can access my data. I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I will be offered the chance to enter a draw to win one of three €25 Eason vouchers. Psychology undergraduates will be offered 1 research credit for their participation.	
I know how to contact the research team if I need to.	
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the risks, benefits, and alternatives which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	



## Appendix D – Debriefing Form (Survey)

Thank you for taking part in the study!

Many thanks for participation in this study and for your contribution. This sheet is intended to serve as a reminder that participation in this research is voluntary. However, once the survey has been submitted, all information will be anonymous from this point. Thus, your data cannot be removed following the submission of the survey answers.

As explained in the information sheet, any information you provide is confidential and anonymous. As a reminder, please note that while the data will be confidential, this confidentiality can only be protected within the limitations of the law. For example, it may be possible for data to be requested legally (subpoenaed) or under the freedom of information claim. In this case information may be provided to third parties without permission being sought.

Consent forms, containing personal information, are collected and retained as part of this research. This information will be stored in a secure location at all times and encrypted to protect the identity of the participant. Access to this information will be limited to the researchers and supervisors.

If you have submitted your contact details for the purposes of either the prize draw or to register your interest in the focus group, you may be contacted by a member of the research team. If you have not submitted contact details, you will not be contacted again in relation to this study.

**Note:** You are not required to share any personal information, or information that is distressing.

If information divulged during this study causes prolonged distress to participants, TCD counselling is on hand to help you with this. Please contact TCD counselling at [student-counselling@tcd.ie](mailto:student-counselling@tcd.ie)

Additionally, Niteline is a free, confidential service to support students with their mental health. You can contact Niteline on [1800 793 793](tel:1800793793). Spunout is an alternative confidential messaging service for in-the-moment anonymous support. Text: SPUNOUT or TALK to [086 1800 280](tel:0861800280). For those parenting alone, sharing parenting or separating, AskFamily provides information and support on [0818 662 212](tel:0818662212) or [01 662 9212](tel:016629212). For those caring for someone with addiction issues, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics anonymous can provide you with a support group for loved ones of addicts at [gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie) and [nfo@na-ireland.org](mailto:nfo@na-ireland.org)

### **Study Contact Details:**

Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie))

Supervisor: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sdcromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sdcromie@tcd.ie); [018962425](tel:018962425))

## Appendix E – Survey Questions

### Demographic Information

\* 1. What age are you?

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 66+

2. What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Non–Binary
- Other
- Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following categories best describes your current student status?

- EU Student (Irish)
- EU Student (Non–Irish)
- Non–EU Student

4. Did you or your family immigrate to Ireland?

- Yes
- No

### Caring Responsibilities

#### **Preface:**

Student Parent – Anyone who shoulders the responsibility of raising and providing for a child. In this study, we are focusing on parents who have a child who is either below the age of 18 or, if 18 and above, necessitates ongoing support due to factors such as disability, mental health conditions, addiction, or any other circumstances that demand additional caregiving responsibilities.

Informal Carer – Anyone who provides assistance to a friend, family member, partner, or others, perhaps due to factors such as illness, age, disability, mental health conditions, language barriers, illiteracy, or addiction. Importantly, these individuals are not engaged in a professional caregiving capacity. The scope of informal caregiving extends to aiding younger siblings as well. In the context of our research, we define an informal carer as someone dedicating 3

hours or more per week to tasks such as shopping, cleaning, translating, reading, and writing, among others.

\* 5. Do you have caring responsibilities? (parent/informal carer)

- Yes
- No<sup>2</sup>

\* 6. What type of carer are you?

- Student Parent<sup>3</sup>
- Informal Carer
- Both Student Parent and Informal Carer

### Informal Carer

7. For whom do you provide informal care? (tick all that are applicable)

- Parent/Grandparent
- Partner
- Friend
- Sibling
- Other

8. What kind of informal care do you provide? (tick all that are applicable)

- Household Tasks
- Translation
- Supervision
- Transportation
- Personal Care
- Emotional Support
- Reading/Writing
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many hours of care do you provide on average per week?

- 3–6
- 6–9
- 9–12
- 12–24
- 24+

---

<sup>2</sup> Participants who answer 'No' to the question will automatically skip through the questions related to caring responsibilities and will be directed to the 'Student Wellbeing' section

<sup>3</sup> Participants who answer 'Student Parent' to the question will automatically skip through the questions related to 'Informal Carers' and will be directed to the 'Support from Tutors and Lecturers' section

## Support from Tutors and Lecturers

10. Is your tutor aware of your caregiving responsibilities?

- Yes  
 No

11. Have you received support from your tutor for your caregiving responsibilities?

- Yes  
 No

12. If you answered yes to receiving support from your tutor, how would you rate this support?

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	N/A
					<input type="checkbox"/>

13. If you have caring responsibilities, yet, have not disclosed this to your tutor, can you please give a brief explanation as to why?

Text Box
----------

14. How often do you feel your caring responsibilities impact your academic performance?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. How often do you miss lectures due to your caring responsibilities?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. How often do you have to request extensions for assignments?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





I have felt active and vigorous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I woke up feeling fresh and rested	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

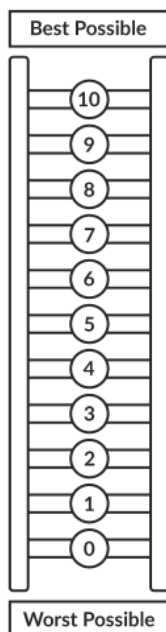
20. Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems? (**Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item**)

	Not at All	Several Days	More than Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
Little interest or pleasure in doing things?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling tired or having little energy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poor appetite or overeating?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself in some way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? (**Generalised Anxiety Disorder 2-item**)

	Not at All	Several Days	More than Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not being able to stop or control worrying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. Here is a picture of a ladder. The top of the ladder "10" is the best possible life for you and the bottom "0" is the worst possible life for you. In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment? (**Cantril Ladder 1-item**)



Select the number that best describes where you stand –

- 10
- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1
- 0

23. During the past 7 days, how much have you been bothered by any of the following problems? (**The Somatic Symptom Scale 8-item**)

	Not at All	A Little Bit	Somewhat	Quite a Bit	Very Much
Stomach or Bowel Problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Back Pain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pain in your Arms, Legs, or Joints	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Dizziness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chest Pain or Shortness of Breath	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling Tired or Having Low Energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trouble Sleeping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 24. Assessing Loneliness (UCLA Loneliness Scale 3-item)

	Hardly Ever	Some of the Time	Often
How often do you feel that you lack companionship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel left out?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel isolated from others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 25. In the last month – (Cohen Perceived Stress Scale 4-item)

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often have you felt that things were going your way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Academic Performance

26. Reflecting on your academic experience, please rate your general sentiments by considering the following statements. Choose the option that best aligns with your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find it easy to stay focused while studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that I am performing well academically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often feel stressed about my academic performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with my current study habits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident in my ability to succeed academically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Assessing Financial Burden

27. Do you feel as though you are struggling financially?

- Yes  
 No

28. Did you receive financial support from your university last year?

- Yes  
 No

29. From which personal sources did you fund your participation in higher education last year? (please tick all that apply)

- Money from family or friends that you don't have to repay  
 Money from family or friends that you do have to repay  
 Personal Savings  
 Earnings from work during term time  
 Earnings from work during holidays  
 From borrowings e.g. loans/overdraft

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

30. From which other sources did you fund your participation in higher education last year? (please tick all that apply)

- Government Financial Support (SUSI maintenance grants; childcare grants; back to education allowance etc)
- University Hardship or Access Funds
- Bursary or Scholarship
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the Above

### TCD Policy

31. Are you aware of TCD's support policy for student-parents and caregivers?

- Yes
- No

32. What are your views on TCD's support policies for caregiving students –

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you feel TCD's support policy is implemented effectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think tutors and lecturers should be trained to ensure they can support caregiving students?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If there were a specific service set up for students with caring responsibilities, like the disability services, would you use this service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix F – Email Invites (Survey)

Dear Trinity Students,

We are reaching out to you on behalf of a dedicated group of students from Trinity College Dublin's JS Psychology program. As part of our group project, we are conducting a vital research study focused on the Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin.

### Survey Details

- Eligibility: Need to be a Trinity undergraduate student (18 and above). Both **carers** and **non-carers** are welcome to participate.
- Duration: The survey is estimated to take approximately **15-20 mins** of your time.

### Incentives

As a token of our appreciation for your participation, you will have the opportunity to enter a draw for one of three **€25 Eason vouchers** (Sponsored by Trinity Access Programme) by entering your email address after the survey. Psychology students accessing the survey through SONA will receive **1 credit**.

If you are interested in participating click [here](#). If you would wish to access the study through SONA click [here](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to us at [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie).

Thank you for considering our invitation and for contributing to this important research project. Your involvement is greatly appreciated!

Kind Regards,  
Anchal  
On behalf of the research team

## Appendix G – Poster (Survey)

WANTED: PARTICIPANTS FOR  
15-20 MINUTE SURVEY

Win  
€25 for  
Easons



sponsored by



# SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF CARING RESPONSIBILITIES ON STUDENTS

OPEN TO ALL TCD STUDENTS, WITH OR  
**WITHOUT** CARING  
RESPONSIBILITIES

PARTICIPANTS WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO  
ENTER A DRAW FOR 1 OF 3 €25 EASONS  
VOUCHERS

SCAN  
ME 

for more info contact: [kcosgravetcd.ie](mailto:kcosgravetcd.ie)

## Appendix H – Participant Information Leaflet (Interview)

### Participant Information Leaflet – Interview

**Name of Study:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

Site	<b>Trinity College Dublin</b>
Principal Investigator(s) and Co Investigator(s) (insert names, titles and contact details)	Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton  sharmaa1@tcd.ie, kcosgrav@tcd.ie, bradye6@tcd.ie, gigliobe@tcd.ie, wottonj@tcd.ie
Study Organiser/Sponsor (if applicable)	Study Supervisors: Dr. Siobhán Corrigan (scorrig@tcd.ie) and Dr. Samuel Cromie (sdcromie@tcd.ie)
Data Controllers	<b>Trinity College Dublin (for research data)</b>
Data Protection Officer	<b>Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2</b>

You are being invited to take part in this online survey which is being conducted as a component of the psychology undergraduate course by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please read this information sheet carefully. You should understand the risks and benefits of taking part in this study so that you can make a decision that is right for you.

This leaflet has five main parts:

Part 1 – The Study

Part 2 – Data Protection

Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval

Part 4 – Future Research

Part 5 – Further Information



## Part 1 – The Study

### **Why is this study being done?**

This study examines how caring responsibilities affect Trinity College Dublin students. By investigating this topic, we hope to inform policymakers about ways to ease student–carer challenges.

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You were invited to participate in this interview because you were identified as a key stakeholder in TCD's student-carer policy. We intend to recruit 8 or more participants that fit these characteristics.

### **Do I have to take part? Can I withdraw?**

This is a completely voluntary study. You are not required to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you choose to opt–out. You can withdraw your consent at any time throughout the interview, and your data will not be utilised. You can request to have your data removed up to two weeks after the interview. However, after this stage the recordings will have been transcribed and subsequently deleted, any identifying information will have been redacted. You will not be able to withdraw after this stage as data will have been anonymised.

### **What happens if I change my mind?**

If you change your mind, you can opt to withdraw from the study up until the transcription process. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be removed and destroyed and not used in the study. However, it will not be possible to identify your data once the recordings have been transcribed and anonymised.

### **How will the study be carried out?**

Before participating in the study, you will be asked to provide explicit consent by signing a hard/digital copy of the consent form. After this is completed, you will be asked to partake in an interview, which will include questions about awareness of the challenges of student caregivers, dissemination and awareness of TCD's support policy, perceptions of its effectiveness and possible improvements that could be made to the policy.

### **What will happen to me if I decide to take part?**

After reading this information form you will be asked to complete the consent form. Once the consent form is signed, you will be asked to share information about your perspectives regarding student caregivers and TCD's support policy. The interview will be recorded to ensure reliability. You are not required to share any personal information, however, any identifying information that is shared will be redacted during the transcription process. Recordings will be deleted once transcribed. After the interview has ended, you will be debriefed. After two weeks, you will no longer be able to withdraw

from the research as data is anonymised during the transcription process.

### **What will happen to my Samples and Data?**

Your data, along with the data of the other participants, will be analysed and written up in a report. Your data will be fully anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose than the present study. Your data will be kept until the study is completed, after which it will be destroyed since its primary purpose is to be used in the present project. After this point, all data gathered will be destroyed by the supervisors, Samuel Cromie and Siobhán Corrigan.

### **Are there any benefits to taking part in this research?**

Taking part in this study might not directly benefit you. However, the study's findings will help us comprehend the difficulties that dual-role students with care responsibilities face. This might help to direct future research and policies.

### **Are there any risks to me or others if I take part?**

All data collected are anonymous and therefore there are no risks associated with partaking in this interview.

### **Will I be told the outcome of the study? Will I be told the results of any tests or investigations performed as part of this study that relate to me?**

The study's findings will be presented to faculty and students at a school of psychology and might be published. There will be no information published that might be used to identify you. If you would like to be kept updated on the results of the study, please email the Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie).

## **Part 2 – Data Protection**

### **What information about me (personal data) will be used as part of this study? Will my medical records be accessed?**

During the interview you will not be required to provide your name or any other identifying information. Any identifying information will be redacted during the transcription process and recordings will be deleted.

### **What will happen to my personal data?**

The information you provide in the interview will be kept anonymous. The data will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file on TCD's OneDrive, where only members of the research team and supervisors can access these files. Upon completion of the study, all data will be destroyed. As per TCD requirements, your signed consent form will be kept on file for ten years.

### **Who will access and use my personal data as part of this study?**

The data will be accessed by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton. The

Supervisors: Dr Samuel Cromie and Dr Siobhán Corrigan might also require access to the data. Your data will at no time leave Ireland.

### **Will my personal data be kept confidential? How will my data be kept safe?**

We value your privacy, and we take several precautions to guarantee that your privacy is maintained and that your data is secure. Your data will be kept on a password-protected computer in an encrypted file that only researchers may access. The information in respect of consent obtained by ticking a box will be kept on a different computer that is password-protected. After conducting a Risk Assessment, it was determined that the study's level of data security was appropriate. Every researcher has completed several ethical data protection lessons and will continue to be closely supervised during the project.

### **What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?**

We are permitted by law to use your personal data for scientific research that is in the public interest. In accordance with the Irish Health Research Regulations, we will also need your explicit consent to use your data.

### **What are my rights?**

At all times you retain

- The right to access to your data and receive a copy of it
- The right to restrict or object to processing of your data
- The right to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified)
- The right to have inaccurate information about you corrected or deleted
- The right to receive your data in a portable format and to have it transferred to another data controller
- The right to request deletion of your data

By law you can exercise the following rights in relation to your personal data unless the request would make it impossible or very difficult to conduct the research. You can exercise these rights by contacting your study Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma, [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

## **Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval**

### **Has this study been approved by a research ethics committee?**

Yes, this study has been authorised by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College Dublin. Approval was granted on 26th January 2024. If you have any further queries, you can contact the committee by email: [PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE](mailto:PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE)

**Who is organising and funding this study? Will the results be used for commercial purposes?**

The research team oversees the organising of this research. We are conducting this research project to satisfy the prerequisites for undergraduate Psychology degree at Trinity College Dublin. No payment will be received for this research study, and it will not be used for any commercial endeavours.

**Is there any payment for taking part? Will it cost me anything if I agree to take part?**

No, we are not paying participants to take part in the study, nor will it cost you anything to take part in this study.

**Part 4 – Future Research****Will my personal data be used in future studies?**

No, your data will not be used for any additional studies. Once the present project is completed, your data will be destroyed.

**Part 5 – Further Information****Who should I contact for information or complaints?**

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact:

- Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie)).
- Study Supervisors: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sdcromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sdcromie@tcd.ie)) and Dr. Siobhán Corrigan ([scorrig@tcd.ie](mailto:scorrig@tcd.ie)).
- Data Protection Officer, Trinity College Dublin: Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

Under GDPR, if you are not satisfied with how your data is being processed, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commission, 21 Fitzwilliam Square South, Dublin 2, Ireland. Website: [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie).

**Will I be contacted again?**

Following the completion of our survey and focus groups, you may be contacted to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss the findings and the implications it may have on TCD's student-carer policy.

## Appendix I – Consent Form (Interview)



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

**STUDY NAME:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

**Centre ID:**

**Identification Number for study:**

### Interview Consent Form

There are 2 sections in this form (General and Data Processing). Each section has a statement and asks you to initial if you agree. The end of this form is for the researchers to complete.

Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements.

Thank you for participating.

Please Initial the box if you agree with the statement. Please feel free to ask questions if there is something you do not understand.

General	Initial box
I confirm I have read and understood the <b>Information Leaflet</b> for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study <b>is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.</b>	
I understand that recordings of this interview and transcripts of these recordings may be viewed by the research team and supervisors involved in this study where it is relevant to the research. I agree that these individuals can access my data. I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I <b>will not be paid for taking part in this study</b> <sup>1</sup> . I am aware that my considerations concerning TCD's support policy for student-carers/parents, my experiences in implementing this policy, my suggestions for improvement, and any possible changes I may initiate will have no impact on my employment at this institution.	
I know how to contact the research team if I need to.	
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the <b>risks, benefits and alternatives</b> which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	

<b>Data processing</b>	<b>Initial box</b>
I agree to allow personal information about me to be shared with Trinity College Dublin for the purpose of research, as described in the Information leaflet <sup>4</sup> .	
I understand that personal information about me will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.	
I understand that there are <b>no direct benefits to me</b> from participating in this study. I understand that <b>results from analysis of my personal information will not be given to me.</b>	
I understand that <b>I can stop taking part in this study</b> up until the transcription process (up to two weeks after interview). Once the recordings have been transcribed, they will be deleted. The data will be anonymised during transcription, and it will be impossible to deduce my data from that of other participants. I understand that once transcribed, I will be unable to request that my data be removed from the study.	

-----  
 Tick \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ Consent

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
**To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.**

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above patient the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contacts of the study team

Researcher name:

Title and qualifications:

Signature:

Date:

| | |

**3 copies are to be made: 1 for the participant, 1 for PI and 1 for Trinity College Dublin records.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>4</sup> This section of the consent should be amended in accordance with the information leaflet to detail those third parties that data will be shared with.

## Appendix J – Debriefing Form (Interview)

Thank You for taking part in the study.

Many thanks for participation in this study and for your contribution. This sheet is intended to serve as a reminder that participation in this research is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw at any moment without explanation, penalty or consequence up to such a point that the research report will be finalised. If you withdraw all data collected from you will be destroyed and not included in this analysis. However, once the recordings have been transcribed, any identifying information will be redacted, and all information will be anonymous from this point. Transcription will take place two weeks after the interview. Thus, your data can only be removed up to two weeks after the interview.

As explained in the information sheet, any information you provide is confidential and anonymous. As a reminder, please note that while the data will be confidential to my research this confidentiality can only be protected within the limitations of the law. For example, it may be possible for data to be requested legally (subpoenaed) or under the freedom of information claim. In this case information may be provided to third parties without permission being sought.

Consent forms, containing personal information, are collected and retained as part of this research. This information will be stored in a secure location at all times and encrypted to protect the identity of the participant. Access to this information will be limited to the researcher and supervisors.

You will not be contacted again following this study, however, if you have any concerns, you may contact the PI or Supervisor (details below).

**Note:** You are not obligated to disclose any personal or distressing information during this interview. If, at any point, you experience distress, please inform a member of our research team. You will be provided with a brief break from questions until you are ready to resume.

### **Study Contact Details:**

Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie))

Supervisor: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sdcromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sdcromie@tcd.ie); 018962425)

## Appendix K – Interview Questions

### Appendix K.1 – Policymakers

#### Introduction and Icebreaker: Have you visited the new book of Kells experience?

1. If someone were to ask you to define the role of an informal carer, how would you describe this?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ How familiar are you with the number of student-parents or those with other caring responsibilities in TCD?
- ♥ How do you perceive TCD's recognition of individuals who provide care for someone who is not classified as a direct dependent, such as those with parents facing addiction issues or those who take responsibility for younger siblings?
- ♥ Are there any specific resources or assistance do you believe could help these students balance caring responsibilities with their academics?

2. What factors do you think contribute towards students having to take on caring responsibilities?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ What about the current housing crisis, do you feel this may influence students taking on more responsibilities?

3. From your perspective, do you see any areas where the current policy might have gaps? If so, can you elaborate?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ What do you believe to be the strengths and potential limitations of the current policy
- ♥ How would you describe the implementation of the policy? In your view, what measures or actions could be considered to enhance the effectiveness of the policy?
- ♥ In your opinion, could the policy be more accessible and clearer for students?
- ♥ From your observations, do you think all staff members are adequately trained about the active policies within the college?
- ♥ I know that the policy has recently been updated, how do you perceive the communication around policy updates or changes within the college? Do you think people are aware that the policy has been updated?



## Appendix K.2 – Lecturers

### Introduction and Icebreaker: Have you visited the new Book of Kells experience?

1. How familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ If familiar, do you feel the policy is enough to support these students or could more be done to ensure this?
- ♥ Do you have a good understanding of all Trinity's policies and how to implement them, as a lecturer?
- ♥ Do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experiences of carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent a policy?

2. Have you personally had to make accommodations for students with caring responsibilities?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ If not, how do you feel you could best accommodate these students, should the situation arise?
- ♥ Some parents have disclosed that having access to recordings helped them balance their responsibilities and college, what are your opinions on this?

## Appendix K.3 – PhD Students

### Introduction and Icebreaker: Have you visited the new Book of Kells experience?

#### 1. Academic Engagement and Student Life

##### Prompts:

- ♥ Can you explain what it was like being an undergraduate and a carer, what were the challenges you faced?
- ♥ Do you feel as though there is a physical and mental burden that comes with being a student and a carer?
- ♥ Do you feel as though it is easier to be a carer in postgraduate?
- ♥ Are there any advantages you can think of regarding being a carer and a student?
- ♥ Can you tell us a little about your academic performance, do you think being a carer affects your grades?
- ♥ Are there any specific resources or assistance do you believe would have helped you balance your home responsibilities with your academics?
- ♥ Do you feel like the college experience was different for you and how did this make you feel? Were you able to partake in the social aspects of college, such as societies?
- ♥ Do you have any advice for undergraduate students with caring responsibilities, having experienced this yourself?

#### 2. TCD Policy

##### Prompts:

- ♥ How familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?  
Do you feel the policy is enough to support you as a carer or could more be done to ensure this?
- ♥ Do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experiences of carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent a policy?

#### 3. Experience with lecturers and tutors

##### Prompts:

- ♥ Did you disclose your carer status with lecturers or your tutor during your undergraduate? If so, how did this make you feel? Did you feel as though they were understanding?
- ♥ What about lectures, were there ever times that you had to miss lectures and how does this make you feel? Did you feel like your lecturers were understanding?

## Appendix K.4 – Trinity Access Programme (TAP) Coordinator

### Introduction and Icebreaker: Have you visited the new Book of Kells experience?

1. Can you briefly describe the support that TAP offers to students with caring responsibilities?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ Can you describe the challenges that may arise for these students when transitioning from the access programme to a degree?
- ♥ What support do you think could help alleviate some of these challenges?
- ♥ A recent report using data from Growing up in Ireland stipulated that young adults who have additional caring responsibilities get lower Leaving Cert points, regardless of socioeconomic standing. Do you feel that the Trinity Access Programme takes the needs of these students into account? Could the entry requirements be altered slightly for this highly diverse cohort?

2. Have you personally had to make accommodations for students with caring responsibilities?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ If not, how do you feel you could best accommodate these students, should the situation arise?
- ♥ Some parents have disclosed that having access to recordings helped them balance their responsibilities and college, what are your opinions on this?
- ♥ The current college timetable does not align with school timetables, how do you feel about parents bringing children into lectures?

3. How familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?

**Prompts:**

- ♥ If familiar, do you feel the policy is enough to support these students or could more be done to ensure this?
- ♥ Do you have a good understanding of all Trinity's policies and how to implement them, as a lecturer?
- ♥ Do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experiences of carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent a policy?

## Appendix L – Email Invites (Interview)

Dear XYZ,

We hope this message finds you well. I am reaching out to you on behalf of a dedicated group of students from Trinity's JS Psychology program. As part of our group project, we are conducting a vital research study focused on the **challenges faced by student-carers and how we can enhance the support provided by TCD**. As part of this research, we would like to interview you to get your insights regarding the support policy and your experiences.

### Interview Details

- Duration: The interview will last for approximately **30 minutes**.
- Flexibility: Interviews can be conducted **in person** or **via video conferencing**, based on your preferences and availability.
- Content: During the interview, we will discuss various aspects related to TCD's support policy, including your knowledge, experiences in implementing the policy, challenges you have encountered and your suggestions for improving the policy's effectiveness.
- Confidentiality: With your consent, the interview discussions will be **audio-recorded** to accurately capture responses. These recordings will be transcribed for analysis. Any identifying information will be redacted from the transcriptions to ensure privacy.

Please let us know if you are interested in participating in the interview by replying to this email.

Your participation is greatly appreciated, and your insights can lead to positive changes that benefit our student-carers.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

Kind Regards,  
Anchal  
On behalf of the research team.

## Appendix M – Participant Information Leaflet (Focus Groups)

### Participant Information Leaflet – Focus Group (In Person)

**Name of Study:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

Site	<b>Trinity College Dublin</b>
Principal Investigator(s) and Co Investigator(s) (insert names, titles and contact details)	Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton  sharmaa1@tcd.ie, kcosgrav@tcd.ie, bradye6@tcd.ie, gigliobe@tcd.ie, wottonj@tcd.ie
Study Organiser/Sponsor (if applicable)	Study Supervisors: Dr. Siobhán Corrigan (scorrig@tcd.ie) and Dr. Samuel Cromie (sdcromie@tcd.ie) Focus Group Sponsor: Trinity College Dublin Inclusive Curriculum Project (TrinityINC) (trinityinc@tcd.ie)
Data Controllers	<b>Trinity College Dublin (for research data)</b>
Data Protection Officer	<b>Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2</b>

You are being invited to take part in this online survey which is being conducted as a component of the psychology undergraduate course by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please read this information sheet carefully. You should understand the risks and benefits of taking part in this study so that you can make a decision that is right for you.

This leaflet has five main parts:

Part 1 – The Study

Part 2 – Data Protection

Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval

Part 4 – Future Research

Part 5 – Further Information

## Part 1 – The Study

### **Why is this study being done?**

This study examines how caring responsibilities affect Trinity College Dublin students. By investigating this topic, we hope to inform policymakers about ways to ease student–carer challenges.

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You were invited to participate in this focus group because you are an undergraduate university student with caring responsibilities. We intend to recruit 4 or more participants that fit these characteristics.

### **Do I have to take part? Can I withdraw?**

This is a completely voluntary study. You are not required to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you choose to opt–out. You can withdraw your consent at any time throughout the focus group, and your data will not be utilised. You can request to have your data removed up to two weeks after the focus group. However, after this stage the recordings will have been transcribed and subsequently deleted, any identifying information will have been redacted. You will not be able to withdraw after this stage as data will have been anonymised.

### **What happens if I change my mind?**

If you change your mind, you can opt to withdraw from the study up until the transcription process. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be removed and destroyed and not used in the study. However, it will not be possible to identify your data once the recordings have been transcribed and anonymised.

### **How will the study be carried out?**

Before participating in the study, you will be asked to provide explicit consent by signing a hard copy consent form. After this is completed, you will be asked to partake in a focus group, which will include questions about your personal experiences as a student caregiver, awareness of TCD's support policy, perceptions of its effectiveness and overall university experience.

### **What will happen to me if I decide to take part?**

After reading this information form you will be asked to complete the consent form. Once the consent form is signed, you, alongside three or more others, will be asked to share information about your experience as a caregiving student, to two members of the research team. The focus group will be recorded to ensure all opinions of participants are retained reliably. You are not required to share any sensitive information regarding your caregiving, rather the effect it has on you as a student. We advise that you keep this in mind while taking part in this focus group. However, any sensitive information that is shared will be redacted during the transcription process. Recordings

will be deleted once transcribed. After the focus group has ended, you will be debriefed. After two weeks, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research as data is anonymised during the transcription process. Following completion, you will be paid a €20 one–4–all gift card for your valuable contribution to our research. .

### **What will happen to my Samples and Data?**

Your data, along with the data of the other participants, will be analysed and written up in a report. Your data will be fully anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose than the present study. Your data will be kept until the study is completed, after which it will be destroyed since its primary purpose is to be used in the present project. After this point, all data gathered will be destroyed by the supervisors, Samuel Cromie and Siobhán Corrigan.

### **Are there any benefits to taking part in this research?**

Taking part in this study might not directly benefit you. However, the study's findings will help us comprehend the difficulties that dual-role students with care responsibilities face. This might help to direct future research and policies. If you access this study via the Trinity College Sona System, you will be able to earn 2 research credits if this applies to you. Additionally, upon completion you will be paid €20 one–4–all gift cards for your contribution to our research.

### **Are there any risks to me or others if I take part?**

All data collected are anonymous and therefore there are no risks associated with partaking in this focus group.

### **Will I be told the outcome of the study? Will I be told the results of any tests or investigations performed as part of this study that relate to me?**

The study's findings will be presented to faculty and students at a school of psychology and might be published. There will be no information published that might be used to identify you. If you would like to be kept updated on the results of the study, please email the Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie).

## **Part 2 – Data Protection**

### **What information about me (personal data) will be used as part of this study? Will my medical records be accessed?**

During the focus group, you will not be required to provide your name or any other identifying information. Any identifying information will be redacted during the transcription process and recordings will be deleted.

### **What will happen to my personal data?**

The information you provide in the focus group will be kept anonymous. The data will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file on TCD's OneDrive,

where only members of the research team and supervisors can access these files. Upon completion of the study, all data will be destroyed. As per TCD requirements, your signed consent form will be kept on file for ten years.

### **Who will access and use my personal data as part of this study?**

The data will be accessed by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton. The Supervisors: Dr Samuel Cromie and Dr Siobhán Corrigan might also require access to the data. Your data will at no time leave Ireland.

### **Will my personal data be kept confidential? How will my data be kept safe?**

We value your privacy, and we take several precautions to guarantee that your privacy is maintained and that your data is secure. Your data will be kept on a password-protected computer in an encrypted file that only researchers may access. The information in respect of consent obtained by ticking a box will be kept on a different computer that is password-protected. After conducting a Risk Assessment, it was determined that the study's level of data security was appropriate. Every researcher has completed several ethical data protection lessons and will continue to be closely supervised during the project.

### **What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?**

We are permitted by law to use your personal data for scientific research that is in the public interest. In accordance with the Irish Health Research Regulations, we will also need your explicit consent to use your data.

### **What are my rights?**

At all times you retain

- The right to access to your data and receive a copy of it
- The right to restrict or object to processing of your data
- The right to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified)
- The right to have inaccurate information about you corrected or deleted
- The right to receive your data in a portable format and to have it transferred to another data controller
- The right to request deletion of your data

By law you can exercise the following rights in relation to your personal data unless the request would make it impossible or very difficult to conduct the research. You can exercise these rights by contacting your study Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma, [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).



## Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval

### Has this study been approved by a research ethics committee?

Yes, this study has been authorised by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College Dublin. Approval was granted on 26th January 2024. If you have any further queries, you can contact the committee by email: [PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE](mailto:PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE).

### Who is organising and funding this study? Will the results be used for commercial purposes?

The research team oversees the organising of this research. We are conducting this research project to satisfy the prerequisites for undergraduate Psychology degree at Trinity College Dublin. No payment will be received for this research study, and it will not be used for any commercial endeavours.

### Is there any payment for taking part? Will it cost me anything if I agree to take part?

Upon completion of the focus group, you will be given €20 one–4–all gift cards for your valuable contribution to our research. If you accessed the survey through SONA System, you would receive 2 research credits upon completion.

## Part 4 – Future Research

### Will my personal data be used in future studies?

No, your data will not be used for any additional studies. Once the present project is completed, your data will be destroyed.

## Part 5 – Further Information

### Who should I contact for information or complaints?

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact:

- Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie)).
- Study Supervisors: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sd Cromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sd Cromie@tcd.ie)) and Dr. Siobhán Corrigan ([scorrig@tcd.ie](mailto:scorrig@tcd.ie)).
- Data Protection Officer, Trinity College Dublin: Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

Under GDPR, if you are not satisfied with how your data is being processed, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commission, 21 Fitzwilliam Square South, Dublin 2, Ireland. Website: [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie).

### Will I be contacted again?

No, you will not be contacted following the focus group.

## Participant Information Leaflet – Focus Group (Online)

**Name of Study:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

Site	<b>Trinity College Dublin</b>
Principal Investigator(s) and Co Investigator(s) (insert names, titles and contact details)	Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton  sharmaa1@tcd.ie, kcosgrav@tcd.ie, bradye6@tcd.ie, gigliobe@tcd.ie, wottonj@tcd.ie
Study Organiser/Sponsor (if applicable)	Study Supervisors: Dr. Siobhán Corrigan (scorrig@tcd.ie) and Dr. Samuel Cromie (sdcromie@tcd.ie)  Focus Group Sponsor: Trinity College Dublin Inclusive Curriculum Project (TrinityINC) (trinityinc@tcd.ie)
Data Controllers	<b>Trinity College Dublin (for research data)</b>
Data Protection Officer	<b>Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2</b>

You are being invited to take part in this online survey which is being conducted as a component of the psychology undergraduate course by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please read this information sheet carefully. You should understand the risks and benefits of taking part in this study so that you can make a decision that is right for you.

This leaflet has five main parts:

Part 1 – The Study

Part 2 – Data Protection

Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval

Part 4 – Future Research

Part 5 – Further Information

## Part 1 – The Study

### **Why is this study being done?**

This study examines how caring responsibilities affect Trinity College Dublin students. By investigating this topic, we hope to inform policymakers about ways to ease student–carer challenges.

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You were invited to participate in this focus group because you are an undergraduate university student with caring responsibilities. We intend to recruit 4 or more participants that fit these characteristics.

### **Do I have to take part? Can I withdraw?**

This is a completely voluntary study. You are not required to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you choose to opt–out. You can withdraw your consent at any time throughout the focus group, and your data will not be utilised. You can request to have your data removed up to two weeks after the focus group. However, after this stage the recordings will have been transcribed and subsequently deleted, any identifying information will have been redacted. You will not be able to withdraw after this stage as data will have been anonymised.

### **What happens if I change my mind?**

If you change your mind, you can opt to withdraw from the study up until the transcription process. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be removed and destroyed and not used in the study. However, it will not be possible to identify your data once the recordings have been transcribed and anonymised.

### **How will the study be carried out?**

Before participating in the study, you will be asked to provide explicit consent by signing a consent form digitally via doc hub. After this is completed, you will be asked to partake in a focus group, which will include questions about your personal experiences as a student caregiver, awareness of TCD's support policy, perceptions of its effectiveness and overall university experience.

### **What will happen to me if I decide to take part?**

After reading this information form you will be asked to complete the consent form. Once the consent form is signed, you, alongside three or more others, will be asked to share information about your experience as a caregiving student, to two members of the research team. The focus group will be recorded to ensure all opinions of participants are retained reliably. You are not required to share any sensitive information regarding your caregiving, rather the effect it has on you as a student. We advise that you keep this in mind while taking part in this focus group. However, any sensitive information

that is shared will be redacted during the transcription process. Recordings will be deleted once transcribed. After the focus group has ended, you will be debriefed. After two weeks, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research as data is anonymised during the transcription process. Following completion, you will be paid a €20 one–4–all gift card for your valuable contribution to our research. .

### **What will happen to my Samples and Data?**

Your data, along with the data of the other participants, will be analysed and written up in a report. Your data will be fully anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose than the present study. Your data will be kept until the study is completed, after which it will be destroyed since its primary purpose is to be used in the present project. After this point, all data gathered will be destroyed by the supervisors, Samuel Cromie and Siobhán Corrigan.

### **Are there any benefits to taking part in this research?**

Taking part in this study might not directly benefit you. However, the study's findings will help us comprehend the difficulties that dual-role students with care responsibilities face. This might help to direct future research and policies. If you access this study via the Trinity College Sona System, you will be able to earn 2 research credits if this applies to you. Additionally, upon completion you will be paid €20 one–4–all gift cards for your contribution to our research.

### **Are there any risks to me or others if I take part?**

All data collected are anonymous and therefore there are no risks associated with partaking in this focus group.

### **Will I be told the outcome of the study? Will I be told the results of any tests or investigations performed as part of this study that relate to me?**

The study's findings will be presented to faculty and students at a school of psychology and might be published. There will be no information published that might be used to identify you. If you would like to be kept updated on the results of the study, please email the Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie).

## **Part 2 – Data Protection**

### **What information about me (personal data) will be used as part of this study? Will my medical records be accessed?**

During the focus group, you will not be required to provide your name or any other identifying information. Any identifying information will be redacted during the transcription process and recordings will be deleted.

### **What will happen to my personal data?**

The information you provide in the focus group will be kept anonymous. The

data will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file on TCD's OneDrive, where only members of the research team and supervisors can access these files. Upon completion of the study, all data will be destroyed. As per TCD requirements, your signed consent form will be kept on file for ten years.

### **Who will access and use my personal data as part of this study?**

The data will be accessed by the research team: Anchal Sharma, Kathleen Cosgrave, Eva Brady, Evelin Giglio Barbosa Santos and Jake Wootton. The Supervisors: Dr Samuel Cromie and Dr Siobhán Corrigan might also require access to the data. Your data will at no time leave Ireland.

### **Will my personal data be kept confidential? How will my data be kept safe?**

We value your privacy, and we take several precautions to guarantee that your privacy is maintained and that your data is secure. Your data will be kept on a password-protected computer in an encrypted file that only researchers may access. The information in respect of consent obtained by ticking a box will be kept on a different computer that is password-protected. After conducting a Risk Assessment, it was determined that the study's level of data security was appropriate. Every researcher has completed several ethical data protection lessons and will continue to be closely supervised during the project.

### **What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?**

We are permitted by law to use your personal data for scientific research that is in the public interest. In accordance with the Irish Health Research Regulations, we will also need your explicit consent to use your data.

### **What are my rights?**

At all times you retain

- The right to access to your data and receive a copy of it
- The right to restrict or object to processing of your data
- The right to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified)
- The right to have inaccurate information about you corrected or deleted
- The right to receive your data in a portable format and to have it transferred to another data controller
- The right to request deletion of your data

By law you can exercise the following rights in relation to your personal data unless the request would make it impossible or very difficult to conduct the research. You can exercise these rights by contacting your study Principal Investigator Anchal Sharma, [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

## Part 3 – Costs, Funding and Approval

### Has this study been approved by a research ethics committee?

Yes, this study has been authorised by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College Dublin. Approval was granted on 26th January 2024. If you have any further queries, you can contact the committee by email: [PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE](mailto:PSYCH.ETHICS@TCD.IE).

### Who is organising and funding this study? Will the results be used for commercial purposes?

The research team oversees the organising of this research. We are conducting this research project to satisfy the prerequisites for undergraduate Psychology degree at Trinity College Dublin. No payment will be received for this research study, and it will not be used for any commercial endeavours.

### Is there any payment for taking part? Will it cost me anything if I agree to take part?

Upon completion of the focus group, you will be given €20 one–4–all gift cards for your valuable contribution to our research. If you accessed the survey through SONA System, you would receive 2 research credits upon completion.

## Part 4 – Future Research

### Will my personal data be used in future studies?

No, your data will not be used for any additional studies. Once the present project is completed, your data will be destroyed.

## Part 5 – Further Information

### Who should I contact for information or complaints?

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact:

- Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie)).
- Study Supervisors: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sd Cromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sd Cromie@tcd.ie)) and Dr. Siobhán Corrigan ([scorrigan@tcd.ie](mailto:scorrigan@tcd.ie)).
- Data Protection Officer, Trinity College Dublin: Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: [dataprotection@tcd.ie](mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie). Website: [www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy).

Under GDPR, if you are not satisfied with how your data is being processed, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commission, 21 Fitzwilliam Square South, Dublin 2, Ireland. Website: [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie).

**Will I be contacted again?**

You will only be contacted after the focus group to collect the €20 one–4–all vouchers.

## Appendix N – Consent Form (Focus Group)



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

**STUDY NAME:** The Effects of Caring Responsibilities on Students at Trinity College Dublin

**Centre ID:**

**Identification Number for study:**

### Focus Group Consent Form

There are 2 sections in this form (General and Data Processing). Each section has a statement and asks you to initial if you agree. The end of this form is for the researchers to complete.

Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements.

Thank you for participating.

Please Initial the box if you agree with the statement. Please feel free to ask questions if there is something you do not understand.

General	Initial box
I confirm I have read and understood the <b>Information Leaflet</b> for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study is <b>entirely voluntary</b> , and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that recordings of this focus group and transcripts of these recordings may be viewed by the research team and supervisors involved in this study where it is relevant to the research. I agree that these individuals can access my data. I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I will receive a €20 one-4-all gift card for my contribution to this study. Psychology undergraduates will be offered 2 research credits for their participation.	
I know how to contact the research team if I need to.	
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the <b>risks, benefits and alternatives</b> which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	



Data processing	Initial box
I agree to allow personal information about me to be shared with Trinity College Dublin for the purpose of research, as described in the Information leaflet <sup>5</sup> .	
I understand that personal information about me will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.	
I understand that there are <b>no direct benefits to me</b> from participating in this study. I understand that <b>results from analysis of my personal information will not be given to me.</b>	
I understand that <b>I can stop taking part in this study</b> up until the transcription process (up to two weeks after the focus group). Once the recordings have been transcribed, they will be deleted. The data will be anonymised during transcription, and it will be impossible to deduce my data from that of other participants. I understand that once transcribed, I will be unable to request that my data be removed from the study.	

-----  
Tick for Consent

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
**To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.**

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above patient the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contacts of the study team.

Researcher name:

Title and qualifications:

Signature:

Date:

|

|

|

**3 copies are to be made: 1 for the participant, 1 for PI and 1 for Trinity College Dublin records.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>5</sup> This section of the consent should be amended in accordance with the information leaflet to detail those third parties that data will be shared with.

## Appendix O – Debriefing Form (Focus Group)

Thank you for taking part in the study.

Many thanks for participation in this study and for your contribution. This sheet is intended to serve as a reminder that participation in this research is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw at any moment without explanation, penalty or consequence up to such a point that the research report will be finalised. If you withdraw all data collected from you will be destroyed and not included in this analysis. However, once the recordings have been transcribed, any identifying information will be redacted, and all information will be anonymous from this point. Transcription will take place two weeks after the focus group. Thus, your data can only be removed up to two weeks after the focus group.

As explained in the information sheet, any information you provide is confidential and anonymous. As a reminder, please note that while the data will be confidential to my research this confidentiality can only be protected within the limitations of the law. For example, it may be possible for data to be requested legally (subpoenaed) or under the freedom of information claim. In this case information may be provided to third parties without permission being sought.

Consent forms, containing personal information, are collected and retained as part of this research. This information will be stored in a secure location at all times and encrypted to protect the identity of the participant. Access to this information will be limited to the researcher and supervisors.

You will not be contacted again following this study, however, if you have any concerns, you may contact the PI or Supervisor (details below).

**Note:** You are not required to share any personal information. We do not intend to cause any distress to participants, however, some of the topics broached in this study are of a sensitive and personal nature. While participants may be asked about personal, sensitive, and vulnerable experiences, we wish you to talk about it only insofar as you can without becoming upset. However, if you feel distressed at any point in the focus group, please address a member of our research team and you will be removed for a brief period. Should you wish to do so, you can choose not to answer questions or withdraw from the study.

If information divulged during this study causes prolonged distress to participants, TCD counselling is on hand to help you with this. Please contact TCD counselling at [student-counselling@tcd.ie](mailto:student-counselling@tcd.ie)

Additionally, Niteline is a free, confidential service to support students with their mental health. You can contact Niteline on [1800 793 793](tel:1800793793).

Spunout is an alternative confidential messaging service for in-the-moment anonymous support. Text: SPUNOUT or TALK to [086 1800 280](tel:0861800280). For those parenting alone, sharing parenting or separating, AskFamily provides information and support on [0818 662 212](tel:0818662212) or [01 662 9212](tel:016629212). For those caring for someone with addiction issues, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics anonymous can provide you with a support group for loved ones of addicts at [gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie) and [nfo@na-ireland.org](mailto:nfo@na-ireland.org)

**Study Contact Details:**

Principal Investigator: Anchal Sharma ([sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie))

Supervisor: Dr. Samuel Cromie ([sd Cromie@tcd.ie](mailto:sd Cromie@tcd.ie); 018962425)

## Appendix P – Focus Group Questions

### Appendix P.1 – Student Parents

**Introduction and Icebreaker: tell us your first name, what you study and a fact about you!**

#### 1. Academic Engagement and Student Life

##### Prompts:

- ♥ Can you explain what it's like being a parent and a student, what are the challenges you face?
- ♥ Do you feel as though there is a physical and mental burden that comes with being a student and a parent?
- ♥ Are there any advantages you can think of regarding being a parent and a student?
- ♥ Can you tell us a little about your academic performance, do you think being a parent affects your grades?
- ♥ Are there any specific resources or assistance do you believe could help you balance your home responsibilities with your academics?
- ♥ Do you feel like the college experience is different for you and how does this make you feel? Are you able to partake in the social aspects of college, such as societies?
- ♥ The current college timetable does not align with school timetables, how do you feel about parents bringing children into lectures?

#### 2. TCD Policy and Support

##### Prompts:

- ♥ How familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?  
Do you feel the policy is enough to support you as a parent or could more be done to ensure this?
- ♥ Do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experiences of carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent a policy?
- ♥ If there were a service for parents and carers, like disability service wherein you sign up on enrolment so tutors and lecturers can see your parental and carer status, and you are aware of the available supports, what are your thoughts on this?

#### 3. Experience with lecturers and tutors

##### Prompts:

- ♥ Have you disclosed your parent status with lecturers or your tutor? If so, how did this make you feel? Did you feel as though they were understanding?
- ♥ What about lectures, are there ever times that you have had to miss lectures and how does this make you feel? Do you feel like your lecturers are understanding?

## Appendix P.2 – Informal Carers

### Introduction and Icebreaker: tell us your first name, what you study and a fact about you!

#### 1. Academic Engagement and Student Life

##### Prompts:

- ♥ Can you explain what it's like being a student and a carer, what are the challenges you face?
- ♥ Do you feel as though there is a physical and mental burden that comes with being a student and a carer?
- ♥ Are there any advantages you can think of regarding being a carer and a student?
- ♥ Can you tell us a little about your academic performance, do you think being a carer affects your grades?
- ♥ Are there any specific resources or assistance do you believe could help you balance your home responsibilities with your academics?
- ♥ Do you feel like the college experience is different for you and how does this make you feel? Are you able to partake in the social aspects of college, such as societies?
- ♥ Are there any concerns or challenges you face with regard to timetabling, especially in balancing your caring responsibilities?

#### 2. TCD Policy and Support

##### Prompts:

- ♥ How familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?  
Do you feel the policy is enough to support you as a carer or could more be done to ensure this?
- ♥ Do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experiences of carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent a policy?
- ♥ If there were a service for parents and carers, like disability service wherein you sign up on enrolment so tutors and lecturers can see your parental and carer status, and you are aware of the available supports, what are your thoughts on this?

#### 3. Experience with lecturers and tutors

##### Prompts:

- ♥ Have you disclosed your carer status with lecturers or your tutor? If so, how did this make you feel? Did you feel as though they were understanding?
- ♥ What about lectures, are there ever times that you have had to miss lectures and how does this make you feel? Do you feel like your lecturers are understanding?

## Appendix Q – Email Invites (Focus Group)

Dear Trinity Students,

We are reaching out to you on behalf of a dedicated group of students from Trinity College Dublin's JS Psychology program. As part of our group project, we are conducting a vital research study focused on the challenges faced by student-carers and how we can enhance the support provided by TCD. Your valuable input can make a real difference in improving the lives of student-carers within our university community.

### Focus Group Details

- Duration: **1 hour**
- Eligibility Requirements: Need to be a **Student Parent/Carer**
- Formation: Two separate focus groups will be created – one for **students with children** and another for **students with other caregiving responsibilities**.
- Flexibility: To accommodate your preferences and the value of your time, we offer a **hybrid system**, allowing participation **in person** or **online**, based on what you prefer.
- Confidentiality: With your consent, the focus group discussions will be **audio-recorded** to accurately capture responses. These recordings will be **transcribed** for analysis. Your **identity and individual responses will remain confidential**, and any identifying information will be redacted from the transcriptions to ensure privacy.

### Incentives

To show our appreciation for your valuable input, each participant will receive a payment of **€20 one-4-all voucher** (Sponsored by Trinity-INC). Psychology students signing up for the focus group through SONA will also receive **2 credits**.

If you are interested in signing up for the focus group, click [here](#). If you wish to sign up for the focus group through SONA, click [here](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to us at [sharmaa1@tcd.ie](mailto:sharmaa1@tcd.ie).

Thank you for considering our invitation and for contributing to this important research project. Your involvement is greatly appreciated!

Kind Regards,

Anchal

On behalf of the research team

## Appendix R – Poster (Focus Group)

**WANTED: PARTICIPANTS FOR  
PAID RESEARCH**

**Earn  
€20**

Sponsored by  
Trinity-INC  
#InclusiveTrinity



**FOCUS  
GROUP**

STUDENTS WITH CARING  
RESPONSIBILITIES AND STUDENT  
PARENTS

ARÁS AN PHIARSAIGH  
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

**ALTERNATIVE GROUPS AVAILABLE ONLINE**

PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A €20 VOUCHER  
FOR CONTRIBUTION

**SCAN  
ME**



for more info contact: [kcosgravetcd.ie](mailto:kcosgravetcd.ie)

## Appendix S – Analysis (Interviews)

### Appendix S.1 – Coding of the Transcripts

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#### Overall Themes

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Theme 1: Time Management and Academic Requirements

Theme 2: Staff Training

Theme 3: Policy Implications

Theme 4: Inclusion of Students in College Community

Theme 5: Support

Theme 6: Student Challenges

Theme 7: Positive Aspects of Caring

Theme 8: External Factors Contributing to Responsibilities

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#### Interview with Policymaker

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JW: So let's begin there and firstly, if someone was asked you to define the role of an informal carer, how would you describe this?

PM: Just by virtue of what I would say as a lay person, I would think about a person who has the responsibility to care for another human being or more than one.

JW: And how familiar are you with a number of student-parents and those with other caring responsibilities in TCD?

PM: A duty is a goodwill in terms of account and consideration of such people. And I believe that the general definition of students that just have the student responsibility so that only to turn up to lectures and study is a little bit of thing of the past not, you know. In addition to people who have other responsibilities in terms of caring or parenting, their students who need to work the student to have greater source of obligations in terms of placements and other stuff that is involved around college borders around personal and life. So, it is a concept that has moved quicker than sort of normative component has been able to adapt it as it often happens in life.

**Codes: Work Placement, Balancing Responsibilities, Diversity of College Community**



JW: Okay, and are there any specific resources or assistance do you believe could help these students by bands carrying responsibilities with their academics?

PM: So I think there should be information put out to them as to what resources are available. And I think there is more than what people think and what people are aware of that is available. And for instance, there is a policy but not all students that have caring and parenting responsibilities are even aware of the policy. There are accommodations that can be made or that can be requested by the tutor or by us in the senior tutors office. And most students are not aware of those doors. There's financial assistance that is available, and I'm not sure that many students are aware of that right and the supports provided. Come, for example, comes first for children and there's a nursery and then everybody's aware of that. And, and there's a disability service that can also help define reasonable condition to students in specific needs.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Awareness of Supports, Support, Disability Services, Financial Support**

JW: Okay. And what factors do you think contributes towards students having to take on caring responsibilities?

PM: Difficult to answer that question, because it goes a little bit outside of the jurisdiction of what we do. Could be many, many things could be not having, you know, having children with specific needs that require extra older parents. Or, like you said, younger siblings or difficult situations that require extra input from the student.

**Codes: Recipients of Care, Parenting Responsibilities**

JW: And from your perspective, do you see any areas where the current policy might have gaps?

PM: It's a good policy in principle. I think it could fit a lot. But we need to use it. And we need to make tutors and various schools aware of it for search, and then we have to start making requests so that the students inform us, we actually put out what the students are requiring. And I knew from my personal experience, and from having been in contact with various people involved in the process, that there are different things that could be done better, and they could become a part of a general policy rather than on an ad hoc requests. So what I would like to see as an involvement or from where we are at the moment, is are certain accommodations become standard, rather than having to be requested, specifically.

### **Codes: Policy Gaps, Input from Carers, Automatic Accommodations, Policy Implementation**

JM: Okay, and what do you believe to be the strengths and potential limitations of the current policy?

PM: So their strengths I probably have said it already in in the previous reply is I think it could fit a lot into it. And so essentially, there isn't anything that cannot be asked. Under the policy to accommodate the students. But that doesn't mean that everything that can be asked is given and which is, I suppose, a potential limitation because there are certain things that could be very specific to students. Or general requirements that are more broad to everyone in certain situations. And like I said, I would like to see it evolving into something more tangible for students and something that gives a little bit more of a scope for them. To adhere to and to become part of it.

### **Codes: Practicalities of Policy, Accommodations, Broadness of Policy, Policy Implementation, Policy Gaps**

JW: And how would you describe the implementation of the policy?

PM: Yeah, and it needs some work, and that's what I've been trying to push. And we are working closely with the Students Union and with the seniors future with the Dean of Students, so everyone and with the students live community, so everyone is slowly but surely made aware of the existence of the policy. And I think we will try to incorporate some mention in the tutor training. And my idea would be to also extend training on the policy to do tools and academics of various schools so that I know that it is exists and they they are sort of made aware of the requirements that are the most that are common, more and more often from students.

### **Codes: Policy Dissention, Collaboration, Staff Training**

JW: So in relation to your mock. Do you think that all staff members are adequately trained about the policies at the moment?

PM: I don't think anyway, it's my perception.

### **Codes: Perceived Training Gaps**

JW: And I know that policy has recently been updated, how do you perceive the communication around policy updates or changes within the college?

PM: You need to kind of be involved in the process to become aware of it. And I know obviously, if you go to higher level, you're part of a committee and it goes

through all the different stages of committee approval up to council level, so but that doesn't necessarily mean that everybody speaks about it. And everybody's made aware, by virtue of the fact that it goes to council it doesn't necessarily mean that everybody knows about it, I think.

### **Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

JW: And could the policy be more accessible or clearer for students or do you believe it's presently accessible?

PM: Probably yes. And there's my email address on it and any time that I contacted about it, I more than welcome students to come and have a chat so that that we can understand what the needs and requirements are, and we can tailor our approach to best suit the person so but he probably know a lot of people only find out by word of mouth. So obviously, there must be some crossing the gap between the policy existing and students being aware of

### **Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Practicalities of Policy, Navigating the Policy**

JW: Okay, and finally, what about the current housing crisis? Do you feel this may influence students taking on more responsibilities?

PM: Certainly, in terms of having funds available to them? Yes. Certainly, probably not being able to leave their home and maybe having to commute and this is just probably the best side of the coin. The worst is getting into scams or leaving in completely not safe and healthy accommodation or staying into situations that are not conducive for wellbeing. I find from my personal experience, anyway, dealing with students who come to see us.

### **Codes: Financial Difficulties, Housing Crisis, Living Conditions**

JW: That concludes the interview questions. Thank you very much for your time. I thought it was good.

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## **Interview with TAP Co-ordinator**

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KC: Can you briefly describe the supports the TAP students receive regarding caring responsibilities?

TAP: Okay, so all TAP students who are student-parents of children who aren't primary school age and have things like creche fees, receive an extra bursary and

extra payments each semester. And then if they have children with aftercare costs, you know, primary school age, there's also a bursary for that. And then anyone with a child, under the age of 18, there's a payment for that. So there's kind of three tiers of payments. And then if a student is in financial difficulty, there's a hardship fund that they can apply for. So the biggest support is in terms of financial support, but we do encourage them to go to things like the student-parent society events, and network with other student-parents. Certainly on the foundation course, there will always be an element of flexibility, because we understand that if you have to drop someone to school, you might not be able to get into class until 10 past nine. So there's this kind of case by case flexibility.

**Codes: Financial Support, Flexibility, Balancing Responsibilities, Participation in Events, Support**

KC: With college and schools, the timetables don't always align. The school midterm and then the College Reading Week, they're not at the same time. How do you feel about that? Are you opposed to students bringing their children to class if necessary?

TAP: For the alignment of the timetables on the foundation course, we actually in the first semester, do align the timetable. That has been very, very helpful for staff and students alike. In the second semester, we can't, because of various things like our information mornings, other conflicting things that make it very difficult. Children can't come to class, we can't do that, you know, you have to have certain like child protection in place, insurance, various reasons why they can't. But I know from time to time, from case to case, there has been small people in the back of classrooms for an hour when people are stuck.

**Codes: Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Flexibility, Support**

KC: in TAP it seems they get a lot of support, like you said, they're very flexible. Do you think it's challenging them for these students when they have to transition to a degree program, which may not have the same flexibility?

TAP: I think it's challenging both on the foundation and on a degree program. I think what we do is kind of tinkering around the edges, that makes it marginally easier. But still students have to be there for all their classes. So I think the inflexibility of Trinity, and full time degrees is an issue. And I'm not sure what we're doing is making a massive difference on the foundation course to be truthful.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Lack of Support, Academic Requirements, Attendance, Course Specific Understanding**

KC: So you think the transition isn't too tough then?

TAP: I mean, it's things like the creche, until recently, I think it's changed it now but they were still operating on COVID hours, which meant when students had exams on our exams, in the RDS they physically could not get to the exams and drop their child to creche, it wasn't possible. So in those circumstances, we would have worked with students to get permission from a senior lecturer for them to sit their exams on campus. I mean, there's just no joint thinking there.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Support, Lack of Childcare, Flexibility of Exams/Assignments**

KC: Do you think there's any additional supports that like Trinity could provide to help these students?

TAP: Yeah, I think there is. I don't know how it would work in terms of logistics and timetable. But I think there is a case for inclusivity to look at timetabling between the hours of 10 and four. If you look at employers that have very inclusive work practices, meetings have to take place between certain hours and Trinity has that policy for work meetings, they have to take place between core hours, and you really shouldn't be scheduling them out of that. Yeah, I think there's a case to be made that that could be done timetable wise.

**Codes: Timetabling, Support, Inclusivity, Balancing Responsibilities, Advocacy for Change, Policy**

KC: What do you think about a hybrid model of learning. When we were conducting our literature review, we found places like Australia, New Zealand, offer hybrid or online options to students with caring responsibilities, which has been shown to make a difference. What do you think of this?

TAP: Honestly, my gut reaction is on things like the foundation course it's problematic because it's so much about the confidence and the community building and the personal interactions. However, I think when you have big lecture spaces where you know you're one of 100 or 200 in the room, there is 100% scope for that to happen. And again, that could be a really exciting way to timetable that, all tutorials could have to be held within the hours of you know, 10 and three and then the big lectures can take place at other times, but they can be recorded and accessed. I think students should have to apply for permission to get access. I don't think it should be just blanket I think if they're in person, ideally, people should attend in person, but 100% of students can't. And there's reasons why they should be allowed to access recordings.

**Codes: Recording/Streaming of Lectures, Flexibility, Policy, Timetabling, Accommodations, Permission to Access Recordings, Importance of Community Building**

KC: I don't know if you've seen, there was a recent report using growing up in Ireland data. It showed that students who have caring responsibilities, tend to get lower leaving cert points than typical students. I know that the Trinity Access Program and the entry requirements are socioeconomic, whereas it's like it's a very heterogeneous group, these people caring responsibilities. Do you think there's space for these students on the TAP program, regardless of income? Is there something that could be done there, do you think?

TAP: Okay, that's interesting, actually, because it shows I have been I've been waffling on. And when I think about carrying responsibility that I think about parents primarily, yeah. But of course, it's much more complicated than that. And it comes down from people that don't have caring responsibilities. So young people do know, leaving cert, I think there is a case to be made, because that is a forum that definitely they would experience elements of educational disadvantage. Young people could be caring for siblings, they could be caring for parents or grandparents. Yeah, absolutely. It's interesting, you know, the DARE scheme, that relies very heavily on like, personal impact statements of how the disability or specific learning difficulty has impacted on the student. That could be an interesting approach for young people who have caring responsibilities in terms of giving them admission to an alternative or reduced point of entry scheme.

**Codes: Barriers to Education, Balancing Responsibilities, Diversity of College Community, Alternative Admission, Inclusivity, Educational Disadvantage**

KC: Are you familiar with Trinity's policy for carers and student-parents?

TAP: No. I have read it but if you asked me questions, I don't know.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

KC: Regarding dissemination, it's just emailed to the lecturers, and they read it, but then they may not know how to put it into practice. Do you think, a specific training day where the lecturers come in, and student-parents and student-carers make their case and it's more personal would work better?

TAP: Honestly, I think anything that involves student impact, yes, but I think I'm asking people to attend to day training, it won't happen, you'll get hardly any come. So I think the best way would be to embed it within something like the Inclusive Curriculum. Yes. So there's already really existing library projects in Trinity to try and make Trinity more inclusive and a better place. And I think, instead of having multiple different avenues of training people in different ways it should be implanted with them. Yes. Yeah.

**Codes: Staff Training, Limited Awareness of Policy, Inclusivity, Utilisation of Existing Projects**

KC: Do you think there's anything specifically that Trinity could do to promote inclusivity amongst this cohort of students?

TAP: I think training, but not a day. I think the Inclusive Curriculum, people should embed it in their existing training, because they have already got the badge. Many, many people have done it, so it should be added to that badge. But then I think something that can be a quick bite sized training session that could be emailed out to everyone, and I don't know if they make it mandatory, like we have to do training on GDPR, we have to do training on child protection. I would make it a mandatory Blackboard, like 15 minutes with an exam at the end. If you don't pass the exam. You don't get the badge. I think people should have to renew it every like two to three years just like you do for your garda vetting. That sounds very strict, doesn't it? But I think otherwise policies get buried.

**Codes: Staff Training, Limited Awareness of Policy, Mandatory Training, Utilisation of Existing Projects, Training Renewal Requirements, Policy Dissemination**

KC: Often these students are invisible. When students have disabilities, they can sign up with a disability service and lecturers know that students have disabilities. However, they don't actually know if people have caring responsibilities, what's your opinion on this?

TAP: Students don't have a whole lot of time to be able to build a relationship with the lecturer, or tutor and explain what the situation is. Because I know years from students I've worked with who have had really complicated caring responsibilities. There is a lot people are guarded about sharing that kind of information. Yeah, for many reasons. And it takes trust and time to build up a relationship where they can say, well, this is what's going on. I think if there was something where students could opt in to make people aware of their caring responsibilities. Yeah, it'd be so valuable.

**Codes: Reluctance to Disclose, Privacy Concerns, Trust between Lecturers and Students, Automatic Identification of Caring Responsibilities**

TAP: student-parents may be more visible. Because if you're a parent, you're a parent, and you tell people. Whereas if you're a carer, I think there is a degree of privacy that often comes with that. Not everybody wants to divulge that. What do you think of this?

TAP: I have had parents, student-parents, who have had kids with additional needs and disabilities. And that's like, a really complicated and because the services in this country are so bad. Yeah. They're struggling, massively

**Codes: Systemic Issues, Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: And is there anything else you would like to add or anything you would like to ask?

TAP: I hope you can campaign for this, I think it would be interesting to develop an infographic with the findings, about caring responsibilities. These students often don't get to socialise, which is really important like to engage in college societies. There's another category of carers. I'm sure you thought about it, but it's children, students, so like the younger cohorts, who are carers for their parents, because their parents don't speak English as a first language. Yes, we do have a lot of that. So they're translate, they bring them tasks and appointments to translate.

**Codes: Language Barriers, Balancing Responsibilities, Disconnect from College Community, Absence from Social Events, Diversity of College Community**

KC: We have asked the question in our survey, if, if you're EU, if you're a non EU, and what kind of caring responsibilities you do, and we do have translation as one of the options. Obviously, it's a very diverse group, it's hard for, for a survey or for interviews or focus group to take a snapshot because it's hard to show exactly what a carer looks like or even what a parent looks like, it depends on so many factors. But it's a start.

TAP: Yeah, yeah. And it is desperately desperately something that needs to be brought forward more. Because I would imagine COVID made lives in so many ways locked down apart from people had to we're stuck in it probably made it easy.

**Codes: Lack of Support, Impact of COVID**

## Interview with Lecturer 1

EB: Are you aware of the Policy for parents and procedure?

L1: Yes, I am aware of the policy.

EB: If a student comes to you with a problem have there been any situations where you didn't know how to help?

L1: I actually haven't had to refer to as much, or no student has actually ever come to me in relation to the policy, but perhaps it is that the students aren't aware that the policy is there, and I, you know, I'm one of the lectures and our program is a professional program. So it leads to professional qualification, and that means that our students have to attend a certain, you know, we have to have attendance



policies and things like that, that might be different to students who are, for example, within any of the other faculties or schools down on the main campus, but for our students, they do. But I also a tutor, so you're probably familiar with the college tutor system. And I know certainly in terms of the policy refers to students talking to their tutors. So I would have a lot of my kind of one to one contact in relation to the tutees that I work with and support and but again, nobody has ever come for support in relation to this and I would have a number of postgraduate students as well as obviously my children chamber is most is is undergraduate students apart from my own postgraduate students.

### **Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Attendance, Academic Requirements, Tutor Service, Support**

EB: Do you think that there could be any changes made to the policy to make it easier for students with responsibilities? Have any students ever approached you with personal problems resulting in them been unable to attend because of their situation?

L1: Yeah. I mean the thing about it is like I know certainly from some of my undergraduate students as a lecturer that will email me say my child is sick. And I'm sorry, I'm not going to make it. And then those kind of circumstances, we will always try to, you know, support the student and and you know, make notes available if it's something that's compulsory, try to reorganise and so that they can do it. But it's not something that happens in relation to the policy, if you know what I mean. Like I and I'm not sure that there's a wide and a widespread understanding or actually knowledge that there is such a policy. I mean, I knew of it, but I hadn't really looked at it in in any kind of great detail. But I think. You know, in terms of those kind of things, I know certainly there are parts of the policy that talks about sort of family friendly and Timetables. You know timetables and I know the timetable doesn't coincide with the children being on their midterm breaks and things like that. Like e a lot of the timetable, is kind of out of our control as such in that our our students would have a large number of lectures every week, which might be different to some of the arts and they all have to do them at the same time. So like for example we would have first years and they do certain things in the first semester. Second things, in the second semester our second years would have the same and then go out and placement in our third year. So they only have one semester here with us. The other semesters on placement and that's the same with the fourth years, so it can be challenging to say like. I have had, you know requests from two teams of mine around or can I, you know perhaps do some of the modules in semester two instead of semester one, but that's not possible because they're only run once in the year. So it does become a little tricky and I think that's a bit trickier. Maybe in a professional, of course, because we have to do with thousand hours of placement and we also have to do and you know I I certain amount of in contact hours as well around different subjects and things like that and so and so on a one to one level

absolutely we do work with students if they're missing things but like so far when our students are on placements and they. They you know, they they have to work like they're working. So they have to do certain hours. Now I know. Certainly from speaking to our practice education coordinator, there's, you know, in circumstances where parents are caring for a child who has additional needs or, you know, a parent or things like that, that they will try to arrange accommodation, some placement that they start later or, you know, so that they can drop their child off or they're, you know, somebody's taking over the care or whatever. So we're on a one to one basis, absolutely, we will do that. I don't think, I suppose, that it is entirely student friendly by any stretch of the imagination. Like how Trinity would work and I think part of it is like that within hours. It's like a professional course and I think for our if you're talking about undergraduate students or postgraduate students or both.

**Codes: Limitations in Addressing Specific Needs, Accommodations, Attendance, Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Academic Requirements, Support, Understanding, Work Placement, Timetabling, Conflicting Priorities, Parenting Responsibilities**

EB: Our research survey and focus groups is focusing on undergraduate students but we are interviewing PhD students and lectures about policy, problems faced, supports it effects both.

L1: But because I yeah, I think for the postgraduate students it can be very challenging because like and you know how it works, it doesn't really accommodate for people on maternity leaves and things like that. So that can be particularly challenging with ours. We have had circumstances where we have students who have had babies and we have supported them to, you know, to go and and then come back and just have to repeat the second semester if they've done the first semester. So you know that certainly anything that we can do to support the students to get through, we will, but we are confined by the fact that it's a professional course.

**Codes: Academic Requirements, Support, Practicalities of Policy, Limitations in Addressing Specific Needs**

EB: It sounds like, you're understanding and have been helpful to your students. I've come across a few lectures that have been helpful but can't be said for everyone, in my experience not all lecturers understand or implement the policy a student can be left going to individual lectures and explaining their circumstances and then it is down to individual discretion.

L1: I do, And no, I agree with you. And I actually think if you surveyed all of the academic staff within Trinity and just ask them without them going off and looking at it, I would imagine that they wouldn't be that familiar. I'd say the majority of academic staff may not be familiar with the detail in the policy or doesn't exist, so I think it

would be helpful to, you know, for academic staff to be reminded of the policy. And I think that and in terms of what you talked about there, I'm going to individual staff. I mean, I think there are positives to the tutor system in that the tutor system is their independent advocate and I work as a, you know, I am a tutor as well but it does. It also does kind of complicate things a little because you have to go and explain to somebody else and then they have to go and you know it. It doesn't entirely. Not entirely seamless. The other thing is. Like in a way, with our courses like we only have 40 students per year and we only have the obviously the four years of students. So we get to know our students quite well. So I think that's a bit of a different situation for maybe larger class groups where there are 200 students or larger groups of students and that that it's not the same. Whereas we, we and because our students go on placement, our practice education coordinator would meet with all our students individually as well. So we would be aware of students needs and we will try to facilitate around that. But as I said, I have never. I have never been asked for an extension on an assignment because of a student being a carer and like you know that's never been given as the reason and that they need an extension again I don't know if it's that the students aren't aware themselves that they're, you know, that they're that there is this policy and I have been, you know like that in class I've had students email today. I can't come in. My child is sick and and I'll say OK, you know, hope they're feeling better soon. Just to watch your attendance rate, because we have to keep attendance up or whatever. So, and I think if you probably asked our students, they would probably and you know, because our handbook is very strict on on the attendance policy and all of that. So they may not feel we're we're as open as we are, but generally when anybody comes to us, if at all possible, but like there we are tied by the fact that they have to do certain things at certain times and they you know, and that that can't change. I think myself, as a parent, it would be great if Trinity was in line with me with the school holidays, and that would certainly make my life a lot easier. You know, like for example, this week mid term break, I'm teaching now all day Thursday and it's fine. You know, my children are older now and can start to fend for themselves, but like it is, it would have been trickier back in, you know, back when they were younger and another point, particularly the two weeks at least.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Attendance, Tutor Service, Parenting Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Balancing Responsibilities, Understanding, Support, Personal Responsibilities of Lecturers, Misalignment of School and Academic Calendar, Academic Requirements, Work Placement, Course Specific Understanding**

EB: Are you so understanding as a lecturer being a parent yourself

L1: Yeah. And I mean, I think it does help, I think it helps if , you know I I have a lived experience of it myself. So, but as a professor, as I said, as our course we try to boot but like so for example if a student misses a particular practical class, they will be

called in to redo that and it's not you know it's not always easy to do that and it's then getting a lecture to do it twice if you know what I mean, which is also then time of the lecturers time to have to redo something with some a student that misses it. But we work around us as much as we can, but it's I I think it's more just what we've developed rather than necessarily being particularly following the policy and you know like so for example like within the policy where it talks about you know having been given the lecture notes well in advance of lectures and things like that we would be doing that more because of the disability services policies around students. That has lens reports. Excuse me, who requires reasonable accommodations?, rather than specifically for the students who are carers.

### **Codes: Understanding, Empathy, Attendance, Academic Requirements, Disability Services, Policy, Support, Policy Implementation**

EB: As part of our research, we are examining the need to increase awareness regarding the population of parents/caregivers within Trinity. Being a caregiver is not considered in terms of support, and our focus is raising awareness of policies to ensure that their implementation is not solely dependent on individual personalities. The availability of recorded lectures would be beneficial where feasible, allowing parents to access them. Given their commitment to completing the course and putting in their best effort, providing such support can be particularly helpful in certain circumstances.

L1: I mean, that's a really good point. And I know certainly even within our discipline, we would have, you know it's a lot more we could be doing in terms of recording the lectures. We don't actually record our lectures because a lot of them require, like their group discussion and things like that, we would have very few that are straightforward, just kind of lectures. You know what I mean? And the challenge is that I know certainly there was one point where I was going to put something and just she was partially, but actually then it had a knock on effect for the lectures coming after me. They couldn't do that. So then the students had to be in for that and so didn't, you know, didn't start to work for that. But I know certainly that, you know, perhaps if Trinity had a more clear guidance in terms of what you know, like recording or not recording lectures, it's sort of open to individual lectures or schools or disciplines to make those decisions. And just in terms of the facility, sorry, I know what the policy also covers the facilities for, for parents, I know certainly in back in the day my oldest son would have been in the creche here, but it was really hard to get him into the creche and and I know certainly in terms of like breastfeeding and things like that where you know, I'm where I'm just so you know as well like we're up in the Trinity Center for Health Sciences, which is away from the main campus. So whatever about having some services down on the main campuses for our students up here, there wouldn't be a, you know, like so somewhere for breast, you know, for breastfeeding kind of room or whatever and for expressing milk like, there's no room for, for for students for that that I'm aware of are the same would like there's no

creche up here. I mean, when my oldest son was in the creche, I would not drive him to Trinity. And then I'd come up here and then I go down and collect him. But it wasn't really, you know, so I think also just in terms of your research, there are different campuses on college and perhaps something that might be available to some students won't be available to other students if they're more up here, like, so up here we have the physiotherapy OT speak and some of the the radiation therapy allowed the medicine, some of the nursing, you know, happens up here. So, and I think our students don't have any of the those kind of supports that might be down on main main campus also and let me see what's this. And it's a small pressure anyway, from my recollection, I mean you know. We have access to a room down the main campus and at one point they were trying to turn it into the room where people could go and breastfeed. But like it's up five floors in at the bottom of the hammocks, and they're taking so I actually don't know what supports there are for parents now around those things and then just that's parents. But I know certainly we would also have students particularly mature students who are also caring for parents and that can be quite a struggle again and we have had situations where like as you said often these are the students who really want to do well and want to support but it can be quite challenging for them. So we do try to support that as much as possible, but again, and you know with our attendance regulations and our we could we lead to registration where students are registered and or are what's the words and they can register, they have a professional degree. So it does put some more restrictions on us, but I'm sure there are even within that other things that we could do and I think more awareness of the policy and more awareness amongst all of the academic staff would be helpful.

**Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Lack of Facilities, Limited Awareness of Policy, Parenting Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Balancing Responsibilities, Attendance, Academic Requirements, Support, Practicalities of Policy, Heterogeneity of Caring Responsibilities**

EB: Yeah, both. Within college policy procedures and more awareness among the parents themselves.

L1: And with the policies around equality, diversity and inclusion, you know the EDI policies that Trinity have, I mean, and there is a big move towards that in Trinity. So I think if this was linked in with this and this became like this, you know the you know this area became part of that as well because it is also very relevant to that I think partially it's the Trinity system of not being, you know, semesterised or not semester used but like so you know, in other universities you can do a module and then if you do a certain other number of modules within a certain number of years, you can build up credits and then you can get a degree.

Trinity isn't set up in that way, and we've I've been really. You know, we're really welcome that because I think that's very prohibitive to people. Whereas if you felt as a student-carer that you could do X number of modules this year, and as long as

them you did them within a time frame, I know other universities do it, certainly abroad. That would be much more accessible then for students than the way it is now, where you have to do, you know, our students have to do semester wall and then semester. Yes, we you know we have had circumstances where we have had students and I've had two teams who've done the same thing that have gone off books. But it's not like you can get credits for the modules.

You've done that. You could then go. So I think that a modular system like that I can't remember the term for it would be very helpful and for student cares also.

### **Codes: Utilisation of Existing Projects, Lack of Flexibility, Balancing Responsibilities, Modular System, Academic Requirements**

EB: Yeah, that would be great. And actually, I never thought about that it would be a great solution.

L1: Yeah, because it then it just means that you're doing, you know, you're doing it at your own pace and you know, and yes, there I know certainly there has to be some rules around within a certain number of years or whatever. But but like, I just think that actually it would just give so much more freedom and be much more inclusive for people who can't commit, who are not 18 and with no commitment, and everything going well and to programs and to degrees, you know. But every so often it feels like Trinity are going down that road. But at the moment I don't know of any move towards that. So it will be interesting to explore that a bit further.

### **Codes: Inclusivity, Flexibility, Advocacy for Change, Modular System**

EB: Yeah, the population is changing and a lot of students now have to work outside.

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## **Interview with Lecturer 2**

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EGBS: I am not sure if you are familiar with Trinity's support policy, for carer parents and students with caring responsibilities so I just would like to ask you that. Are you aware that it exists like there is a policy in place for these types of students?

L2: I am not specifically so we receive lens reports. And that's to do with disability? Yes, we don't get any information regarding any other sort of duty. So, it would be, a student reaching out and explaining their situation. And, obviously, I understand, but there isn't anything that I ever received from the administrative side. That would inform me that there are students in my group who might have this kind of responsibility or any sort of instructions for how to provide special care for them. So yes, I had students in the past that approached me with kind of duties, and yeah, obviously I understand sometimes it goes through a tutor.

### **Codes: Disability Services, Limited Awareness of Policy, Support**

EGBS: In this kind of situation, if there is any instruction or if you need to, kind of to ask someone if there is like an office or someone that, you know, you ask for help. How is the procedure or something like that?

L2: They will be more on a case-by-case basis. Okay. Tutor service is not really a service it's more to have someone you know yourself to be able to contact and talk and maybe sometimes act on your behalf. But personally, I haven't had a student that would approach me about that. We would meet and talk about what the issues are and what the needs are and then I could contact module leads on behalf of my tutee.

### **Codes: Support, Tutor Service**

EGBS: Okay, and do you mind like to give me an example of anything like. Have you ever needed to record a lecture or maybe push a deadline or something?

L2: So yeah, it happened before that I gave an extension because of this kind of needs, and the way it would work would be that a student contacts their tutor, tutor reviews the case and the tutor approaches me to explain and if there was no problem with getting an extension and then in my own class, there were students contacting me saying that this morning for I don't know that they had to, it was actually I think it was a parent. There was an issue with getting children to school and the student was late and obviously that's not a problem for me either. I wouldn't record the entire lecture. And as far as I know, there isn't anything like that's required of a lot of lectures to record.

### **Codes: Extensions, Conflicting Priorities, Attendance, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Parenting Responsibilities, Accommodations**

EGBS: Do you think that a specific training day for lectures on the experience of students carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than just sending a policy?

L2: No, I think that the circulating policy is probably enough because we deal with all sorts of students. So that's, I suppose another kind of issue that students can face. The lecturers normally don't get this kind of training. A bit of this kind of content should be included in the tutor.

### **Codes: Tutor Training, Policy**

EGBS: Have you ever received a specific policy for care or not relearn how to implement it or something similar?

L2: No. Okay. No, no. It was at a very general level, okay. With the approach it's very much case to case. And when we're dealing with your tutee, you have to find out what the background is to collect information and based on that, you decide how to proceed.

### **Codes: Tutor Service, Support**

EGBS: And as a lecturer do you receive a specific policy or something similar as well, if someone comes to you in your class then?

L2: Not really. You don't really. You get an induction okay, but the induction is at the very general level, it would include information about the lens reports and disability, because that's quite formalised. But we don't really get this kind of training. This is covered more than in the tutor/tutee training and that training is quite extensive. But other than that, no.

### **Codes: Disability Services, Staff Training, Tutor Training**

EGBS: Okay, so if a student come to you it is up to you to accommodate or try to help somehow but not based in a policy or something.

L2: So, I actually am not sure. Okay, I'm not familiar.

### **Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy,**

EGBS: Have you ever had to make accommodations for students with caring responsibilities apart from student-parents.

L2: I have never come across something, any case. Now, I'm trying to remember. But possibly, you know, I am generally very accommodating, when it comes to students. And also I'm trying not to interfere. So if they ... I would not try to find out what the issue is in detail. Because it is out of my field. That's none of my business. My business is to understand that the student needs some kind of accommodation, and then what they can offer but I would not, you know. It's tricky because it's very private. So, in a tutor to the tutee relationship, there is more of a personalised relation there. So maybe in that situation, but I haven't had a case like that.

### **Codes: Accommodations, Support, Privacy, Understanding, Tutor Service**

EGBS: Okay, thank you, so you never have had this experience with caring students?

L2: Maybe I don't remember specific cases, but I'm generally very understanding, so if I had a case like that, I would be as understanding as if someone came to me and had parental responsibilities.



EGBS: Thank you. Another question. Some parents have disclosed that having access to recording lectures would help them balance their responsibilities and college. What's your opinion about this?

L2: So I wouldn't be a huge fan of that, because the lectures are dynamic, and I like to have input from the group as well. So then there could be privacy issues. And then, I guess, I think worst-case scenario is that people don't show up to the lecture, and I know that sometimes it's just not possible in a situation like the one that you're describing. Yeah, I don't know. I will be open to a conversation about that. These recordings are often very bad quality as well. And things can get out of context and it's a bit tricky. Thankfully we're approaching lecturing online and this is the mode that the lecture is delivered in, then it's different because you prepare it for this. But when you're in a lecture hall, it becomes something different that is more dynamic and more unpredictable. So yeah, yeah, that's more tricky.

**Codes: Recording/Streaming of Lectures, Technology Issues, Privacy, Attendance**

EGBS: Thank you. Another question. The current college timetable does not align with school timetables. How do you feel about parents bringing children into the lectures?

L2: I wouldn't have a problem with that. There should be a way to make sure that other students are not distracted. And if it's small children, I think that could be difficult. But I think what would make more sense and I would love to see that. If there was a nursery in college, where parents could leave the children for the duration of a lecture and go do the class and I collect the children, something on the premises of the university that is accessible, ideally free of charge. I think parents need this kind of support.

**Codes: Childcare, Misalignment of School and Academic Calendar, Understanding**

EGBS: That is a great suggestion. Thank you.

L2: Yeah, I think that sounds like that would be great. I think that will be a great support. And obviously there will be challenges there. Because you never know how many children are going to show up on a day. But I'm sure someone is doing it somewhere. So this could be researched. What's the best way of managing this kind of thing, but yeah, I think that'd be great.

**Codes: Childcare, Misalignment of School and Academic Calendar, Understanding**

EGBS: Thank you. Do you think that it would be useful to have training or something for the lectures? Do you think it will be a good idea, like for all the lectures, should

know the policy like, for example, one-day training or something like that? For dealing with students with caring responsibilities the same as for lens?

L2: Saying about the lens that we have this is very long and it's structured. But organising a separate one would be necessary and I don't think many people would turn up, but I think including it in the induction sessions, for lecturers, and then I don't know maybe having mentions of it in the committee meetings, somewhere where people have to be anyway, because I just can't see it happening, that they would show up. Unless this is obligatory, and most of these things are not, but I think it could be useful. It would be. Maybe to have training available on one of the platforms. There is training available for staff on LinkedIn. I remember doing, I think unconscious bias training from there, and that was obligatory and it's not that long. You can do it in your own time. But to make people come to a live meeting, I think that will be difficult.

**Codes: Online Training, Staff Training, Mandatory Training, Lack of Engagement**

EGBS: Okay.

L2: I think induction days, including it in maybe committee meetings or departmental meetings, and maybe have some kind of online content that people can access.

EGBS: Okay, thank you. Do you have any other comments or anything you would like to add? Regarding this matter that you think that's interesting?

L2: I think that's pretty much it. Okay. Okay. think that's it.

EGBS: Thank you so much for your time.

L2: You're welcome. It's a pleasure.

### Interview with Lecturer 3

EGBS: So, we have a few questions. The first one is, how familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for students' parents, and carers?

L3: I know it exists. I have read to at some point. Yes. I know where it is if I need it. Okay. As opposed to being familiar, with respect to being able to tell you what exactly you need at the moment, no.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

EGBS: So do you have an understanding, so maybe I'm not going to ask the next question, because it's about the policy. I'm going to jump and go to... Do you think

specific training for the lecturers on experiences of care and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than being sent a policy?

L3: My experience is it comes up in chemistry very infrequently. So I would question whether that's a valuable use of time. Everyone should be aware that there is a policy in my opinion and should know how to access it if it becomes relevant. There are so many things you could train staff on, that you could be training them the entire time. So, you know, I'm not sure training on this specific thing is necessarily a particularly valuable use of time. I don't remember the last time it was relevant to me, for instance. So it's obviously good that the policy exists, that we have those guidelines for when it is relevant, but as I said, I don't think it's a particularly good use of time. To be training people on policies that infrequently come up.

**Codes: Staff Training, Relevance of Training, Lack of Engagement, Time Consuming**

EGBS: Okay. Have you personally had to make accommodations for students with caring responsibilities?

L3: Personally, I don't remember doing it. I've been here 24 years, so a while, I don't remember doing it. But we have had instances that didn't directly influence me. So one of the issues we would come up with is if anyone gets pregnant we need to know for the experimental labs. Okay, because we would have to do a risk assessment on what they were doing in the labs. Now, one of the things I am aware of the policy is that it's a little bit vague on whether you declare it or not. Whereas, you know, for something like us, we had needed them to declare it as soon even as suspicion because I think if I remember rightly because this one has come up, but not personally for me. I think the policy says something along the lines of if you think you're pregnant, the first thing to do is get confirmation. We would say if you think you're pregnant, tell us a bit because if you are and there's a risk, you're going to be exposed to that risk before you get the confirmation, which is not what we want. Okay, so I know there are some things like that in there. And that has come up we have had students that become pregnant and then we have to assess what practicals they are doing in the lab, and whether there is in any risk in that.

**Codes: Pregnancy, Disclosure of Pregnancy, Risks to Pregnancy**

EGBS: Thank you. So how do you feel you could best accommodate these kinds of students with care responsibilities should the situation arise?

L3: I mean, the obvious thing is to be flexible with assignments and lab reports and things like that. The other obvious thing is to provide additional material for them. I mean, not everyone does this step now, but obviously, over COVID we had a lot of recorded lectures. And for most of my courses, if I have recorded a lecture and I

provide them even if I'm doing them in person, but not everyone does. I know that not everyone across the college does. But obviously, those sorts of resources would be beneficial to people who, for whatever reason, can't attend lectures at particular times or something happens, and they can't attend. I think obviously I mean, it's all about flexibility there. I guess the issues come down to you know, we could look at timetables and be somewhat flexible or, you know, center all the things in the middle of the day or something like that. So they're not first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Travellers to college are just short teaching basis. And our timetable is certainly not ideal for anybody including the lecturers. We don't have enough rooms of the right size. We don't have enough computer rooms of a decent size. We don't have the facilities to have almost program a sensible timetable.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Lack of Facilities, Flexibility of Exams/Assignments, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Accommodations, Timetabling, Attendance**

EGBS: Okay, thank you. So, speaking about timetables, the current college timetable does not align with the school timetable. How do you feel about parents bringing children into lectures?

L3: I did not think about that. That's the first thing I will say on that. I guess I mean, there are some obvious issues with it in terms of disturbing the lectures and things like that. How the rest of the student body would respond, it is obviously something and you know, a baby is asleep. Probably no problem. Can't really bring a toddler if that's not going to work. I mean, I've had kids, toddlers, do all sorts of things. So that I can't see that working and I guess the problem with babies has been wiped out. You've got an issue. I guess the person could take the baby out and try and calm them down. Would I personally have a problem with that? Probably not. I can see people having a problem with that.

**Codes: Accommodations, Childcare**

EGBS: Thank you. Do you have any suggestions about that?

L3: I mean, the obvious suggestion is to have a lot more childcare places within the university for students. Okay. I mean, that's the obvious thing to do. You know, but I you know, resources are tight everywhere. That is my answer. Is my counter to my own suggestion. Because the university is running on fumes in terms of finding fund. It's just quite appalling, actually. But, you know, the obvious thing is for there to be childcare available. For the students. Now, there are some places that I don't think it's very many.

**Codes: Lack of Childcare, Funding**

EGBS: Thank you. Do you have anything that you would like to add, comment or that you think is relevant?

L4: I think you know, one of the things that I always think the university could look at, but resources but the issue is being more flexible in delivery. I guess what I mean by that is being able to deliver part-time courses a lot more. Because however you look at it if you try to do a full-time course point. When caring, it's gonna be very difficult simply to have enough time to do everything, irrespective of whether you can do it at the same time as everybody. Yes. You know, a full-time course is supposed to be full time and so if you are spending a significant amount of your time engaged in caring, then it's going to be difficult to fulfill the requirements of the course. I sort of see this a lot already. Not just with carers, but with people who are self-funding their way through college. It's so expensive now, that they are working really considerable time. And you can see that in the work that they have to do outside the lectures on the labs in chemistry is the case that they're not really putting in the time. And when they repeat a year, it's even worse because they're paying the full fees at that point. I've had students say I missed your lecture because I was working and that's sad. To hear that. People are struggling or have to struggle that part to do, to try and meet the requirements of the course. Now whether those people want to do it part-time is another matter, you know, because it will extend your time. And it's not trivial to term a full-time course, that you can then provide part-time either. So it's not an easy thing to do. But I think that type of flexibility would probably be the most useful for people who have to spend a significant amount of time outside college or another school or other activities, just because it doesn't matter whether it's caring, whether it's having to work, whether it's that you know, it's the time commitment that involves.

**Codes: Flexibility, Part-Time Education, Working, Understanding, Balancing Responsibilities, Attendance, Financial Difficulties, Education Costs, Cost-of-Living Crisis**

EGBS: Okay, thank you.

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#### Interview with Lecturer 4

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EGBS: So, we are going to start. So, how familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?

L4: So, I would say I am probably not as familiar as I should be, as a college tutor, obviously, I would do a lot with supporting students and having previously been the undergraduate director of the psych program as well. There is a lot of work involved in supporting students through their degrees. So, I would not be familiar with the

services that are available or that students can be referred to throughout college. But I guess in my head, I do not think of them specifically in terms of student-parents or students' carers, because students can need support for a variety of reasons, you know, so I do not have them separated in my head.

**Codes: Support, Limited Awareness of Policy, Diversity of College Community**

EGBS: Do you think a specific training day for lectures on the experience of carers and parents and how to support them would be beneficial, instead of just sending a policy?

L4: Yeah. I mean, that I think the challenge is, there are a lot of college policies which are ... obviously, you need to have good policies if you're a university. I think the challenge is to get people to engage with them and to kind of read them I suppose. And I guess you may have a similar challenge in terms of, you know, getting people to access training. Now as tutors, we do have to attend training sessions, that could be on a whole range of topics of relevance. You know, if the senior lectures after subs have new procedures in place, we might get a training day on that. I think a couple of years ago or last year there was training around providing mental health support to people with eating disorders or something like that, you know, sometimes it can be quite specific. So perhaps I think tutors are a more engaged audience. Where and we are expected to avail of training twice a year and the different things are offered. So perhaps using that existing mechanism might be a way but it's very difficult to force a whole university's worth of lecturers to attend training on something specific, like student-carers.

**Codes: Lack of Engagement, Tutor Training, Utilisation of Existing Projects, Mandatory Training**

EGBS: Thank you. And so have you personally, I think you've said before, how to make accommodations for students, but in this case is specifically with caring responsibilities.

L4: Well, I mean, I like I just tend to be quite flexible, if students need extensions, I will usually give them a kind of a couple of days or whatever, and then obviously, if it's more extreme, you might send them over to their tutor. So that their tutor is in the loop about what has happened or is happening, as I am. For example, last term I am sure some students emailed me and said, my child is sick, I cannot come to class or I know there was one student email to say, she had to bring her child to class because it was the child's midterm break, and I said, that is absolutely fine. In the end, she did not, because I went up to her and I was like, well, you never brought your little girl to class, you know. So, I have a student as a college tutor at the moment, who came to see me whose mother is very, very sick. And again, she

frequently emails me and asks, can you liaise with the school looking for extensions and stuff? So, you just kind of do that. So, yes, I would have specific experience of that. Yeah. And, sometimes students do not tell you why they are looking for additional support or why they need extra time but they might say I am behind or something but they might not go into the reasons why. So, it may be helping to address students with those concerns, but you may not actually know it as well if that makes sense.

**Codes: Accommodations, Misalignment of School and Academic Calendar, Tutor Service, Extensions, Parenting Responsibilities**

EGBS: It does. Yes. Thank you. Some parents have disclosed that having access to recordings helped them balance their responsibilities in college and at home. What's your opinion on this?

L4: Yeah, I mean, I feel quite strongly that recordings of lectures should not be made available to students because then they just do not come into college. And it's not the same, you do not get the same experience, listening to recordings as you do sitting in a lecture theatre. So, from what I understand where parents are coming from, I think that is quite a different university experience. And yes, I would not really support the movement towards everything being made available because essentially, the university or the nature of the education provided will change. We will have empty lecture theatres, and despite what anyone says, people will not want to come in, they will not socialise with each other. They will miss out on all other opportunities that are associated with physically being on campus and me physically being in the classroom with them. So yes, no, I do not. I would not like to see things going that way.

**Codes: Importance of Socialisation, Streaming/Recording of Lectures**

EGBS: Thank you. So, the last one is about the timetables, but I guess you already commented about the difference between college and school timetables and that you would not have a problem bringing the children to your lectures. Is that right?

L4: Yeah, no, but I mean, I appreciate that. Just like if you could, you know, this mother could bring her nine-year-old child and the child would sit quietly, and that it's a little more challenging than if you have got an infant. I am not unsympathetic to the challenges of having a small child, but I guess, when somebody is embarking on a university degree like that, you know, at the end of the day, the learning outcomes have to be achieved in the same way as they do for everybody else. So, we can facilitate things up to a certain point or as much as possible. But at the end of the day, the expectation is that you are there and that your presence and that you are available, and you have the time to learn, because that is what we value I suppose,

within the university and the degree itself has currency outside the university. So, we have to be able to stand over our, you know, hope, hold up to our standards and that kind of thing. So, I think, you know, people do have to, you know, I suppose, think quite carefully about whether they have sufficient support in place and is this the best time for me to be undertaking a degree. For example, I do not know when you just had a newborn or something like that ... you know. Now, I know people find themselves in these situations, but I think people also have to be realistic about the demands of doing a degree and that it is not easy. So, there is only so much I suppose the university can do because we are still like we still have to follow. You know, we have to follow the timetable. We have to try and squish in all the teaching hours within these 12 weeks. For example, I know, I have students email me and say, I can't attend a tutorial group from five to six, for example, because in sociology they have so many in their class, they often have tutorials, like at 5pm in the evenings, and there is a particular tutorial on Friday evening, at 5pm. Now, I understand I mean, I'm not going to want to go to a tutorial at 5pm. But technically, the timetable is from nine to six. So you're sort of implicitly entering into a contract that says that you will be available between those hours. Having said that, students might say "look, I have to work I need a job, you know, I need my job to pay my bills", and so, psychology are really accommodating of these students who want to switch out of that tutorial. Now they, I mean, there's no doubt they didn't want to schedule their tutorial for five o'clock on Friday. They were probably limited by the availability of rooms, or you know, so everyone is kind of following their own kind of fulfill, their own agenda. And, but I mean, I have had four or three students I have requested in psychology that these students are not able to attend these tutorials and the college is always able to facilitate them. So. Yeah, I think the college I mean, I'm sure you've heard people complaining about the college and so on. But I do find them quite facilitating, you know, of students that it is quite student-centred, I think. Yeah.

**Codes: Understanding, Support, Flexibility, Balancing Responsibilities, Working, Academic Requirements, Time Management, Financial Difficulties**

EGBS: Thank you. Would you like to comment? Something or add something that you think is relevant about this topic?

L4: No, I mean, I suppose I didn't think I had a whole lot to say about it. And then obviously, once I start talking, I can kind of go on a bit but no, I mean, I think you know, anybody I ever approached around the college on behalf of my tutees looking for additional support, you know, people do tend to be understanding and, like, there are rules and regulations that we have to kind of stick to, but I think they are, you know, flexibility is applied where students have genuine kind of causes and stuff and then on the side of the students, I think they have to be realistic about, you know, what is being expected of them. And yeah, I'm quite anti to making recordings available. Yeah. Okay.



**Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Flexibility, Accommodations, Tutor Services, Understanding, Academic Requirements**

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**Interview with Lecturer 5**

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EB: How familiar are you with Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?

L5: Not aware of the policy, I should have checked before the interview.

EB: Do you have a good understanding of all Trinity's policies and how to implement them, as a lecturer?

L5: No I am not familiar with all the policies but as a tutor I know the procedures to follow.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

EB: Do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experiences of carers and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent a policy?

L5: Yes there are a lot of policy/s I think would be beneficial.

**Codes: Staff Training**

EB: Have you personally had to make accommodations for students with caring responsibilities?

L5: Yes as a tutor I have had carers take time off college and went through their disciplines to get extensions.

EB: How do you feel you could best accommodate these students, should the situation arise?

L5: On a case by case if a student comes to me and says they can't make it I would offer support.

**Codes: Accommodations, Support**

EB: Some parents have disclosed that having access to recordings helped them balance their responsibilities and college, what are your opinions on this?

L5: I would do a live zoom or record the lecture if it was something that was requested if a situation arose, but I don't feel like it should be something provided I think this would be unfair to the other student population equality and from past experience I feel like if lectures where recorded people would not attend in person lectures they would opt for the recording and they would miss out on college experiences. It is hard to give one group access to recorded lectures I feel this would be unfair.

**Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Impact on Academic Engagement, Attendance, Importance of Socialisation, Unfair Advantage**

EB: Have you noticed any effects on student-carers well being ?

L5: Hard to gauge.

**Codes: Student Wellbeing**

EB: Do you feel trinity could improve services for parents/informal carers?

L5: Yes in terms of the creche I feel like there could be improvements made doesn't seem to be a priority

**Codes: Lack of Childcare**

EB: The current college timetable does not align with school timetables, how do you feel about parents bringing children into lectures?

L5: If not aligning holidays I think there should be camps and such offered. Yes I would allow children to attend lectures but in terms of policy I'm not sure if this is allowed.

**Codes: Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Limited Awareness of Policy, Lack of Facilities**

EB: It feels like this group of individuals are invisible as trinity do not record students with parents and carers, a lot of these students are struggling and are not aware of policy that could help with support?

L5: Yes, I have requested information on numbers for a recent project and I was unable to get the answer.

### Codes: Lack of Visibility and Data

EB: From talking to students awareness that they exist and understanding that there is support if needed would benefit them, what do you think if when they start college that this is said to

them as a group at induction into their course that the college understands some individuals have responsibility and there are measures in place if needed?

L5: I think this is a good idea. I think it is worth discussing with the head of discipline in psychology.

### Codes: Proactive Support Communication

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#### Interview with PhD Student 1

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EB: In relation to your experience in Trinity could you explain what it's like being an undergraduate and a carer and what were the main challenges you faced?

PhD1: Yeah. When I was in my undergraduate, I had a few different caring responsibilities, primarily with my parent, my mom. So for context, I don't have other family here, so I was the only caregiver and didn't really have a network of support, so it was just the two of us really. And my experience of being a caregiver and a student, it was also complicated by the fact that I have some of my own chronic health issues, which you know were up and down during my undergrad, so I had that side of things. So, you know, it was kind of a difficult situation for me from the start. But when it came to just the caregiving aspect?

I think, like, the main challenges were trying to stay on top of work and trying to maintain some kind of social life, you know, relationships with others in college.

When you're

in your undergraduate you know, you start meeting new people. You're supposed to be thriving, you're supposed to be the new community. But I was limited by that because I had to go home, you know, I couldn't really go out with friends. I was always worried about what was going on at home, you know, if there would be some kind of an issue when I came home, if my mom needed me. I was always a little bit on edge while trying to do well in college and while trying to, you know, have some kind of relationship, social life and which ended pretty much at, 9 or 10 PM, which was when I had to get the train home because I couldn't stay out, you know, I couldn't go out, and that was the latest I could be out. The challenge of that was, is that of the friends that knew, they were saying "oh, you shouldn't be doing that, you should be living your life and enjoying your life." "Stay out with us." "Come." "You know you can stay over". But for the majority of the other people, they just didn't know. So the challenge was mainly because I was trying to juggle that responsibility

without actually telling anyone about it if that makes sense. So I didn't. I was always a little bit of ashamed of it, to be honest, and I felt like it wasn't something that I should, or could, tell anyone about apart from, you know, maybe therapy. I went to group therapy and individual therapy in college. It wasn't something that I could maybe bring up and justify that I had some kind of struggles. Or maybe if I wasn't doing so well in college, I was, you know, getting extensions, I couldn't really say. "Oh, that's because I have so much stuff going on at home" and I felt like that was nobody's business. Not even that nobody understood it, it was more like it felt like nobody cared. It's like you have to get things done. You have to get on with it. You have to pass your year. You have to get your degree. And what happens in the background? It's your own business. It's your own problem. Maybe that was just, you know, my interpretation of the situation but I didn't feel like anyone was talking about these things, and you know, this was a good ten years ago, so maybe things have changed, but I didn't know anyone with caring responsibilities. I'm pretty sure there would have been people with caregiving responsibilities, they just didn't really talk about it.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Shame, Lack of Personal Time, Health Issues, Lack of Support, Worry, Balancing Workload, Guilt, Reluctance to Disclose, Academic Requirements, Absence from Social Events, Lack of Care, Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Desire to Participate, Self-Reliance**

EB: Yeah, it just feels like a silly question, but do you feel as though there is a physical and mental burden that comes with being a student-carer? You've touched on this already with previous answers

PHD: Yeah, there is, you know, cause in your head you're always wondering what's going on and, you know, you're trying to be there for the person you're caring for, but you're trying to also live your own life. And you know, with that comes the guilt of "Ohh well, what if something happens?" "Am I being selfish?" "Was I selfish?" "What if I didn't see something happening?" And you know if, especially in my context where I'm the only person that could help, it was always like you're a little bit on edge and then, you know. You have your own needs as well, like I have my own health and mental health needs and I was trying to manage those without letting them impact my college life and my college work because I always really wanted to do well and I always really focused on, you know, on college as a way, I guess, of escaping the situation as well. And it was kind of my main focus, to do really well and get the most I could out of learning. But at the same time I felt that, you know, maybe I was being selfish by doing that. So I had to ignore my own needs in order to, you know, college is stressful for most people who don't have additional issues like, you know, caring situations or don't have additional health issues. It's usually stressful when you have exams, deadlines, you know so much going on but I was trying to, you

know, do that while ignoring my own health issues and while also being there for my mom. So I think it was both a physical and a mental health for sure and challenge.

**Codes: Selfishness, Anxiety, Health Issues, Balancing Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Academic Requirements, Stress, Guilt, Deadlines, Impact on Academic Performance**

EB: Yeah. Sounds tough especially when you're young, you don't know who to turn to, who understands, Sounds really hard. I'm a parent too, I find it really tough, so I can just imagine with other complications, it must have been really tough for you. Do you feel as if it's easier when doing your postgrad?

PhD1: It is, but as a result of, I guess, my mom's health. is better now, you know? And I am older. And to be completely honest with you, I feel like the postgrad is easier than the undergrad because you are doing, you know, what you want to be doing. You don't have so many assignments, so many exams, so many classes. So I'm able to, even though it's stressful and it's really difficult and you don't have time for anything, I'm able to manage that a bit better. I don't feel like I'm always, you know, on edge because I have an assignment or because I have an exam or because I have a project or a lecture to go to, so it's a little bit different in that regard. And also I guess what time you become more at peace with the fact that you can't be everywhere and do everything. And that you have to also mind yourself.

Even though I still feel that guilt sometimes when I make a decision for myself without, you know, maybe taking everything else into account, I feel that guilt. But, I guess with with maturity you also see that well, if I don't I'm going to regret it

**Codes: Stress, Time Management, Regret, Flexibility, Guilt, Academic Requirements, Self-Care**

EB: Yeah, you have to look after yourself first because that's the most important thing.

If you're not good , you can't really perform your best.

PhD1: And do you know it's not even that I hate when people say "look after yourself first" or "your health" is most important, because I don't agree with that. Personally, I agree with it for other people, but not for me. I don't want to look after myself first, I just want it not to impact anything else. So I'm just kinda like if I could just keep it up, if I could keep it quiet and do everything else and I'll be fine. And during my undergrad I didn't really seek help for the caregiving. You know, I sought help from counselling and for my own health issues and to kind of cope with the stress of college and in that I did, you know, discuss the caring responsibilities. But in terms of

academic supports, no, not really, nobody knew and even now people are surprised when I tell them they're like "ohh really" and "you did well" and "you didn't tell anyone else" like, no because I don't think I could and I mean, who do you tell?

**Codes: Reluctance to Disclose, Self-Reliance, Impact on Academic Performance, Health Issues, Stress, Balancing Responsibilities**

EB: Yeah, exactly.

PhD1: In first and second year you're going to your lectures, you have no idea what's going on half the time, you just know you have deadlines. Who are you supposed to talk to?

**Codes: Lack of Support, Deadlines, Academic Requirements**

EB: Yeah, it's tough to know exactly where to go. It's hard enough finding classes, never mind anything else

PhD1: Yeah, exactly.

EB: Did you think your role of being a carer affected any of your grades and your performance academically?

PhD1: I feel like maybe it didn't affect it in the sense of the grades themselves because they compensated. So I did everything I could to do well, so I just didn't sleep, I just studied all night, you know. But in terms of getting my assignments in on time, absolutely. I think in my undergraduate I had an extension for every assignment that I had and when I got those extensions, I used my own health as the reason for it, so not that I lied, but I did. You know, say I was unwell or, you know, I had issues with my health, which was true. But that probably wasn't the core reason. The core reason was that I had those issues that I had no support, so I went home and I had to be a carer without getting support myself. So I had extensions for every assignment, and I've always felt so ashamed because, you know, at the time the policy, I don't know if it was a policy, but it was always said you need to ask a week before or you know it's not something that's just assumed to be given, you should plan your time better. But it was always the situation that something happened. And so I felt really ashamed, even though I was granted the extensions, I felt that maybe I don't know if I didn't think that the lectures care that much, but I felt like I was sticking out because I was always asking for extensions and I felt like maybe they thought I was a bit dumb or lazy.

**Codes: Extensions, Academic Requirements, Lack of Care, Shame, Lack of Support, Impact on Academic Performance, Health Issues, Sleep Deprivation**

EB: yeah or less committed

PhD1: Yeah. Or like you know, why is she so disorganized? Why can't she just get it done? I always felt, I don't think it affected the grades I got in the end, but I think it affected the process of getting those grades.

**Codes: Impact on Academic Performance, Shame**

EB: On your experience as well of college life, I suppose.

PhD1: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

EB: And then do you think there should have been any specific resources or assistance that would have helped you balance your home responsibilities with your academics?

PhD1: I don't think they would have helped because unless someone went to my home and dealt with my mum's mental and physical health and the pain she within mentally that she was kind of projecting onto me when I came home and I don't think unless someone was in my skin and doing the work I was doing, it wouldn't have helped. What could they have done is my question? I could have told someone and they could have said. "Ohh, that's really tough". Great, I was already doing that in therapy, you know. In terms of the actual practicalities of it? I just don't know if any policy or any situation would have helped because also I probably wouldn't have disclosed it if there was, you know, support. That said, if you were a carer, you know, you have to disclose it, and then we'll grant you some extensions or we'll grant you some leeway, I probably would not have done it because I was ashamed of needing that support. In terms of maybe like if there was a young carer support group, I probably didn't have time to go to them anyway.

**Codes: Lack of Support, Self-Reliance, Reluctance to Disclose**

EB: Yeah, that was an issue.

PHD: Yeah, trying to do everything I was doing while going home earlier than my peers and then dealing with whatever was at home, which I never knew what was gonna be the situation at home. So I don't think I would have even availed of that because I would have struggled to find the time to do it.

**Codes: Lack of Personal Time, Balancing Responsibilities**

EB: Yeah, I was just gonna ask you, were you able to partake? You've answered me in the social aspects and in different college experience, obviously your college experience was different to most of the undergraduates.

PhD1: I mean, I didn't move out and I always saw my friends, you know, going out, partying and living in halls and, you know, staying out and, you know, doing the things that undergraduates do, which is going to parties, drinking, going out together, going on holidays together. And I didn't do that. I came to my classes and I studied in the library as much as I could, and then I went home, finish my work at home and then went back to college in the morning, studied and went home you know. That was my experience and then work as well on top of that. Sometimes I did some part time work depending on if I actually had the energy and the time and the health of my own. So it was kind of this cycle and people always said "Ohh stay out" or "come out and out to stay". I would use having to do an assignment or having this study as the excuse when in reality I was just exhausted and I had the worry of going home, being there on time and being there to support my mum. An added issue with that was that because I was completely alone out of myself and my mom, no extended family, no siblings, no long term family friends, if an emergency happened I had to figure out how to get to a hospital, how to get help. I don't come from a very wealthy background, so money was an issue of like "Will I get a taxi? I can't afford a taxi", "If I call for an ambulance, I can't afford an ambulance". I had to get a referral from the GP, you know, and then, my mom being her stubborn self would change her mind halfway through, you know, and say "no, I'm not going anywhere". I really didn't feel like I had anyone at all.

**Codes: Academic Requirements, Financial Difficulties, Conflicting Priorities, Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Personal Time, Exhaustion, Health Issues, Absence from Social Events, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community**

EB: It sounded like it was really tough for you. You're amazing. Like that you got through it and continued with your studies

PhD1: Thank you. It was tough. It was tough, but I think. I think my personality is quite stubborn. And my approach to it was I will get it done no matter how you know and no matter what, I will do it but I will do well and it was just this kind of stubbornness that I'm not going to let anything affect me. And it was insane.

Like I was crazy. Like if I look back now, you know, ten years later, I don't think I'd be able to do the things I did, which was survive on energy drinks, survive on coffee and cigarettes and you know, that's it. Because I wasn't buying food either because we didn't have money,



So all I had was coffee and the library. I don't think I would be able to do it right now health wise and then go home and deal with that like you know it was just, it's crazy.

### **Codes: Eating Habits, Sleep Deprivation, Stubbornness, Determination**

EB: That takes a lot of determination like you must be really resilient to keep going

PhD1: I don't know if it's resilient or if it's stubbornness. So yeah, it's not easy, not easy.

EB: it sounds as if it was really tough.

PhD1: It was. It was.

EB: Do you have any advice for undergraduate students with caring responsibilities? Having experienced it yourself like.

PhD1: Yeah, I think that's a really good question and I think the first thing would be is to work on your own self, like on your sense of self, because it's not something to be ashamed of and I know that it might have been my experience where I didn't talk about it. I didn't bring it to attention. I didn't want to use the caregiving as an excuse for anything that I didn't, you know, do myself. I just kept it quiet because I felt like it was my own responsibility to get things done. So I think if that is an issue, work on that because if I had a friend living that, you know, living my life, I would have told them not to be ashamed of it. Then not to not to be quiet, not to be loud about it, not to bring it up to everyone and tell everyone about how hard your life is, that's not the point. But also to be able to say, "look, I have a lot going on" and it's genuine and not to feel like it's going to make you look like a liar or like you're making something up because that's what I was worried about. I worried that people would finally say you're just using this as an excuse. Not to do that and to actually seek support, you know, within the possibilities. Like one thing I found really frustrating was that counselling was quite limited in college. You had your sessions and then you had your group and what actually happened in my case is that I was in Group therapy for so long that they had to kick me out so that other students could avail of it. I don't know. I think there are limits on now on how long you can be in Group therapy, but I think I was in there for like a year and a half or two years and it was a hard process because they actually said "look, we have to like let you go because the time has run out even though you still need this". So I think avail of the services that are there and fight for more, ask for more. It's frustrating because it's likely that there won't be more, but you can try and you I know I met some amazing people there. But like, I had an amazing group therapist at the time and I don't think I could have coped with everything I did without her. So it was actually the counselling service and that one group therapist at the time that really got me through it. I wasn't aware of any like carer groups and when I do think of care groups even now I think of it more like a

parent with a child, with caregiving responsibilities or someone with, you know, maybe a disabled child or maybe a disabled parent. I don't think of myself as fitting in that you know, group, so I would definitely advise others students and undergraduates, to really reconsider what kind of support they might need? And and it might not be enough like, I mean, like I said at the beginning, I probably would have wanted practical support, it would have been the only way to help, but I wouldn't have been able to avail of it at all. I would have not wanted people to actually go and see what my life was like. I preferred them to not know about it, so I think, yeah, work on your own therapy and your own support. **And definitely when needed, ask for help, ask for extensions.** If you feel comfortable to make it known to the faculty that you have these caregiving responsibilities, like, you know, on the Trinity portal, the student portal, when you register, there's a drop down menu that says, do you have any kind of disabilities or special needs and you can select if you have mental health issues or physical health issues. And you know, this is meant to be confidential, just for your tutor. Well, I'm pretty sure anyone who looks at your profile can see that in terms of your academic profile. I don't know if that's the best way of disclosing a need for support and you know you can use the disability services for practical supports. Occupational therapy is what I used as well, just for managing my own time and and thank God it was all free because I would have not been able to afford it otherwise. But I still didn't feel comfortable using that drop down menu as a way of signalling, you know that? I feel like still, I just can't imagine what the support could have done for me. All they'd tell me "Oh, that's really tough".

**Codes: Reluctance to Disclose, Lack of Support, Support Services, Counselling Limits, Extensions, Accommodations, Self-Reliance, Shame, Sense of Self, Disability Services**

EB: Well, yeah, we were kind of looking at maybe suggesting like more recorded lectures and just maybe funding for people that need money and carers and just the policy that you don't have to explain your business, but there will be you know you'll get extensions without going into your private business.

PhD1: Yeah. That would have been helpful for sure without having to really like I don't see it ever being a case where you don't have to explain it, because then everyone who wants an extension would avail of it, right? So I understand that there needs to be some kind of process there, but in terms of funding, I guess what would have been more helpful I think would be like transport to hospitals, you know, not from Dublin because like I lived in North County Dublin and the nearest hospital was quite a bit away. So you know, things like the practicalities of how do I get there and then, you know, my mom is difficult when it comes to medical care. So it's like I couldn't even do that, I couldn't convince her to do that. So practical things like funding would have helped to some extent. I think I would have probably needed funding for myself to maybe get more help. Like, you know, counselling and recorded lectures, I'm not sure because this was, you know, this was ten years ago. We were

lucky to get slides, to be honest from our lectures. I don't know if it would have helped much because the issue was time management. I don't think I had time to listen to recorded lectures and I didn't have, you know, home Internet to do it with. So it would have been difficult and my laptop was about 10 years old. So you know, things like that were kind of the barriers for using technology. I guess I think definitely some kind of maybe a waiver of, you know, the student has caring responsibilities so that I could have extensions without having to ask for them every time. I could just say this is the situation, I have this responsibility and I need an extension and that's it. So as an example I was applying for the schols exams. I don't know if they're still a thing, you know the kind of in first and second years where you can get a scholarship if you do really well. And so I applied for it the first time, and right before the exams I got really sick myself, so I asked them to defer them for the second year. They deferred them, you know, after some time, it was a little bit with my tutor and it's a bit challenging, but they defer. Then they said fine, you can sit them next year, the year after that, my mom got meningitis right before the exams, so I had to not take them because I had to be home. I had to try and get her to hospital, from hospital to care for her where she didn't know what was going on. Like she wasn't speaking, she was barely like sitting up, and I had assignments do. I had to say "look, I can't do this my mom has..." like, I remember emailing the tutor "my mom has meningitis. I don't have any other family, she's literally in hospital right now and I am trying to manage the best I can" and that was kind of, I felt like the point at which I was like, I don't care what they think, what they say. I'm going to tell them what the situation actually is right now because it was an emergency. It was medical emergency at that point, so I knew that I couldn't, like, I didn't take the exams. I didn't take the schols exams. I had to ask for extensions. A similar thing happened during exams and I just remember the frustration of I think it was third or fourth year exams and you know they're exams that matter for your degree. I remember having to ask them could I defer them, could I take the exam and August or whatever. Because in between exams I got some bad news and I had to, you know, I couldn't continue the next exams and they kind of said to me "well, it should be fine", but they didn't give me the clarity of "Yeah, we will definitely sort this out, you can do them in August". They said "it should be fine", but in my head it was like "should" does not tell me that I'm going to be able to sit this exam and get my degree. I can't afford to spend an extra year because I didn't do the exams, but I had no choice, you know? And it was just that point of I've worked so hard up until this point and they were telling me it should be fine, but we don't know yet. Well, for me that was like I need to know right now if it will be fine and so some certainty would be good in terms of policy and for that to be very clear that it's not this mystery of what will happen if or what. If I don't, you know, submit or do the exam, am I going to fail? Am I going to have to repeat the year? It needs to be very, very clear and there needs to be no like "ohh it should be fine, we'll ask about that.". It needs to be a yes or no, so that you can prepare yourself and do what you need to do.

**Codes: Lack of Clarity, Lack of Information, Extensions, Deferral of Exams, Accommodations, Funding, Financial Support, Support, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Flexibility of Exams/Assignments, Lack of Personal Time, Academic Requirements, Technology, Reluctance to Disclose, Frustration**

EB: You don't need added stress in your life either, worrying about it, no.

PhD1: Yeah, and that's the reason I brought that experience up. It was because there was no certainty and it took and you know, I was in hospital for a few days myself, then with my own health. And I was just emailing saying "hey, can you just clarify if this is OK? Am I going to be able to sit these exams in August" and the email reply I got to that was kind of annoyed from the tutor saying like "I said to you, it should be fine" But I was like but you didn't say it would be fine, you didn't say it was definitely going to be the case. I remember sitting on edge for that whole week while everyone else sat the exams, I couldn't do the exams, I was sick and my mom was sick. You know, wondering, am I going to have to repeat the entire year just because of these three exams that I had to miss? Like that was the worst experience I could have had, not even just healthwise and, you know, care responsibility wise, it felt like my whole degree was, you know, under the question of, "oh, this is 4th year and you're not doing 3 exams and you don't have a reason not to be doing them because nobody knows about your situation"

**Codes: Frustration, Anxiety, Stress, Health Issues, Deferral of Exams, Lack of Information, Lack of Clarity, Lack of Support**

EB: Waste of time like, yeah.

PhD1: yeah, it was just they always said you need to get like a week's advance notice or something else. And I was like, I don't have the advance notice it's happening right now.

**Codes: Lack of Information, Stress, Advance Notice**

EB: Yeah, that's impossible, the week notice. Yeah, I get that completely, like if something comes up, it comes up. There's no like, it's out of control, yeah.

PhD1: Yeah, you can't prepare yourself. So that was definitely the experience I had was it wasn't very clear and it felt like maybe if I made it clear myself to the department that, you know, this was going on in my life, but I didn't want to. I did not want them to pity me or see me as this charity case.

**Codes: Reluctance to Disclose, Sympathy, Lack of Clarity**

EB: Yeah, like I couldn't say with 100% certainty, but I would say it wouldn't have mattered if they knew, they'd still have left you waiting a week. I'd say everything is probably case by case.

PhD1: I feel like the tutor was not...It wasn't their fault, it was that they had asked about it and they didn't get a response. Then I was at them and I was stressed and I was frustrated and, you know, worried about other stuff and I was like "come on, I need an answer. I need a yes or no" and it turned out that they actually let me do the exams a week later, you know they had the second exam, which was great. It was tough because it was in such a short time span, but I was so grateful, like, you know, it's unbelievable how grateful I was that they let me do exams. I don't think anyone should ever be grateful for an exam, you know, but I was just like, thank God it was such a relief. I'm pretty sure I got the notice that the exam would be tomorrow, you know, it wasn't like, here's the timetable. It's like the exam will be tomorrow and the day after, you know. So I don't know what would have happened if I couldn't have made those dates.

**Codes: Accommodations, Flexibility of Exams/Assignments, Deferral of Exams, Academic Requirements, Stress, Frustration, Anxiety, Gratitude**

EB: Yeah, that was one of the things that I was discussing with a lecturer last week to say, like for carers, our parents like, maybe you could take it over a longer term. You know the 12 modules, maybe if you could take it over time you know if things come up that you could do it like in the evening or you know you could do it over two years

PhD1: Yeah and the thing is, I think now you have exams at Christmas time, right?

EB: Yeah it's different now.

PhD1: We didn't at the time, all of our exams from the whole year were in one go. So you had what, like, 8 modules in a row for one week? Like that was pretty bad and I think they did the right thing by separating them out. At least that takes a little bit of the pressure off, but you know the reality is that no matter how much they would spread it out, no matter how many you know, opportunities, they would have four different assessments. Like if it wasn't an exam, if it was an assignment, I still would have struggled because this was an ongoing thing. It wasn't something that just happened once and interrupted my exams once. If the exam was a month later, I can guarantee there would have been an issue with it as well.

**Codes: Flexibility of Exams, Balancing Responsibilities, Academic Requirements**

EB: And do you think a specific training day for lecturers on experience of carers and parents would help? Would you see it as beneficial to understanding regarding policies?

PhD1: I don't think so. I think that they understand it. I think most lecturers are parents. Most of the older lectures would have seen a lot and experienced a lot themselves with students and in their own lives. So I think people are aware and especially in our department like psychology, you know they're aware of the complexities of life. I don't think training them into ohh your students might need extra support or extra time would actually change anything. I think the bigger issue is the culture and the culture of the university and it's changing now. It's meant to be more inclusive, et cetera, but there are still people who believe that, you know, Trinity is the elite, it's the best university. We only have intellectuals, you know, you need to be dedicated to your intellectual growth, and everything else doesn't matter. I think those voices that disregard life like health, mental health, caring responsibilities, illness, other circumstances and say, "well, if you really want it, you'll just focus on your academics". Those are the voices that impact how a person with caregiving responsibility is able to get support or get a sense of understanding from others. So you know, if you are in that context, no matter how much training you give to the other staff, when the culture is that it's academics and performance first, it's not going to help. So I don't think putting more pressure on staff to do training and learn about caring is going to change anything because I can guarantee you the ones that have kids know that sometimes they can't lecture because the kid is sick. If they have a partner, that's great because maybe they're partner can help. But what if they're single parents? You know, like they can't lecture and they can't do something because of other things. They know what it's like and maybe there needs to be more of an explicit recognition of carers on any of the orientation days and you know in the college perhaps there needs to be a session for everyone, not just "ohh if you're OK, come to this session". But for everyone saying we recognise that some of you may have caring responsibilities, some of you may have your own health issues, mental, physical. You don't have to disclose them, but you know, be aware that we understand.

**Codes: Parenting Responsibilities, Responsibilities of Lecturers, Balancing Responsibilities, Staff Training, Support, Reluctance to Disclose, Health Issues, Inclusivity, Elitism, Diversity of College Community,**

EB: There is and there is policies in place or something, but yeah.

PHD; We understand not even that it's not even the policies. I don't think I would have cared if they told me about policies. I would have cared if lectures said "I know it can be really difficult for you", like just that human aspect of it. I don't care about policies, I care about human understanding and feeling like you're a person, not just a number in the

University. And while I think that a lot of the staff do understand, and they do know that students struggle with various things, I feel like it just needs to be said in the open that "we know and we understand and it can be really difficult for you, so you can talk to us if you need to", and staff definitely needs support with that as well. You can't just say "ohh, come talk to us" and then not give the staff support when a student does talk to them about it. But it's about making it more human, less policy oriented, more human interest in my opinion. And of course, there needs to be policies but as an undergraduate with these, you know needs, you know, more paperwork and more policy and more training. I don't think I would have cared for it. I would have preferred if someone just that you know took me to the side and said "hey, are are you doing OK?" You know, like "is there anything you need?"

**Codes: Impersonal Nature of Policy, Support, Understanding, Staff Support, Staff Training, Sympathy, Support**

EB: Yeah, doesn't make sense that like, if I feel that you can go and talk to someone rather than thinking there's a policy there. But then you have to explain if someone said like we're open to this, we understand this type of situation

PhD1: Yeah. If you need it, you can ask for it and I don't think I heard that when I was, you know, starting my undergrad. What I heard was how to sign off your email, what to do if you need an extension, what happens if you plagiarise, what happens if you cheat on an exam. I don't think I felt like there was that holistic approach. Yeah, that's kind of support and you know, I think it would help if and I know this is a big ask, if there was some vulnerability as well within the department, it would be great to hear from a lecture, you know when you're an undergrad from a lecture, who is, you know, high up, who is teaching, you know, your modules, whatever to say, "you know, I understand because I've had similar experiences". Now they don't have to go into detail, but to say you struggled too as an undergrad or you know "I have things going on in my life too". I know what it's like" so you know, "please note that if you need they're your lectures, they aren't your counsellors. But it's just that feeling that people know what it's like just, you know, I think it would have been amazing to just feel like others know what it's like. As an undergrad, I felt like they probably do, but I didn't think that it was important enough for anyone to talk about. While it is hugely important.

**Codes: Openness of Struggles, Vulnerability, Support, Empathy, Understanding**

EB: Yeah, I agree with you. And as an undergraduate, I kind of feel sometimes when you're really shown commitment and you're really trying hard, the last thing you want to do is tell someone like there's something came up. Or as you said, if you push something out, maybe the circumstances might not have gone in a weeks time, so it

does feel like it's a hard thing to ask. And I do think that if people just said, look, we all struggle, we all go through, there was a bit more equality because I do feel like all undergraduates like your situation, my own. We're not all from a rich background. we have to work. We have to do things so it's like it's not as inclusive as they, you know, when they're promoting all this equality and diversity, it doesn't really. It's not actually what it is, you know, so yeah.

PhD1: I agree. And I always felt that as an undergrad that maybe half of my class or from a privileged background, they wouldn't understand. They didn't understand why I had to go back home, you know, and live in North County Dublin while they were all living in halls. You know, I couldn't afford that, so I definitely think and it's not something that can change just because you say we should change it. I think there needs to be some kind of and more human aspect at the top levels, you know, not just talk about equality, not just talk about diversity and not just talk about struggles, but actually say "no, I've experienced something like this". I know that it's not difficult to say, "oh, we need to appreciate that students are struggling". Appreciate it all you want, but that doesn't change anything. And in terms of policies, I think well policy is a great idea but what about what actually happens when you ask for help? They don't care that you know, isn't that example that I gave you about the exams? I could care less at that time about the policy that my tutor needed to ask someone else who needed to ask someone else about the exam, who needed to ask someone else. That was the last thing I wanted to know about. I wanted to know right now whether I would be able to get my degree or not. So policy is great, but it's not practical, when you're in distress.

### **Codes: Impersonal Nature of Policy, Practicalities of Policy, Lack of Information, Empathy, Understanding**

EB: There is actually a policy in place that you can request extensions and recorded lectures.

sometimes, you know, your mind's on other things and you're not taking everything in they

they do provide slides and things, but not all, it's down to the individual

PhD1: And on a, you know, on a practical level, I lecture in another college and I would say that it's quite difficult to, for any lecture to do both when you're delivering a lecture, you know, that's your our you have to also pre record this. You know you're not being well, at least in my other job. Not being paid for that and I don't have the time to, you know, spend 4 hours when I'm actually delivering one hour. So I think there needs to be support for staff in that as well that if there is a requirement for reported lectures which I agree there should be some kind of you know help for students. There needs to be a process in place that actually supports staff to do that, cause hybrid lectures are hard, trying to record a lecture that you're delivering in real time is awful because half the students online that are kind of sitting in and maybe



listening online can't hear you. You're trying to deliver the lecture to the class, while the people on zoom are also trying to engage and the recording isn't great. So realistically you have to go and record the lecture separately for it to make sense to anyone. While I agree that there should be the availability of the recorded lectures for students, there needs to be a planned process in place where all of these are recorded before the lectures take place themselves and they are available online in the depository on request. Because I also don't think everyone should have access to them all the time, I think it needs to be by choice, it needs to be in circumstances, otherwise students just won't come to college they just won't go, You know the ones that need to need to use them need them, but the ones that don't just will take the easy option, and that sounds harsh, but I know that from you know from my friends that if they have a recorded lecture, they don't want to get out of bed and it's not fair.

**Codes: Recording/Streaming of Lectures, Access to Online Content, Permission to Access Recordings, Technology Issues, Accommodations**

EB: Yeah, In one of my lectures, we discuss and engage and have time for asking questions which can be better for retention and I understand the importance for the lecturer to see if everyone is engaging and whether people are understanding the material, while the live class is on he is also recording the lecture on an MP3 player and later uploads it , So I attend the class, and then i simply play the audio while studying with the slides later at home, I find it beneficial to replay the recording while studying. I find his recording method to be quite effective.

PhD1: That's a really good idea. It doesn't have to be a video recording; it can be an audio recording.

EB: Yeah, He just presses record when he starts to lecture and it's really helpful, yeah.

PhD1: Yeah, I think that's a great idea. And I think that could definitely help students whose minds might be wandering during class, for example, because they have other things going on, or they just have additional needs where they need to stop things to write things down and try again. But I think there definitely needs to be a more kind of formalised approach to it rather than, you know, a student request and you're meant to produce it somehow. I don't lecture in Trinity, I lecture somewhere else, but you know there are situations where students just expect that these things are available and they're not and I have to go and record this in my own time and upload it and send it to them, which is a lot. It's actually a lot and I would do it if I had known that that would be something that will be needed, you know? So I think it's an all around issue of availability, accessibility and also just you know, I feel as an undergrad that when I asked for extensions and I asked for support, I think I was mad at all the people in my year that I knew were asking for extensions and support when they didn't need them. And it's because they were hungover or they were out

partying. Or they just, you know, just didn't do it. I was so angry at them because I felt that now that I asked for help, it looked like I was one of them. And this is just people that I knew that was the reason I'm not saying everyone is that you know, I know that things genuinely come up people have to work. But I also knew of cases of people who's just said "Ohh, I'll just go and get a GP's note that I had the flu because I'm hungover and I can't do this", you know? So like, I felt that that really put you in the same boat as others and that can be difficult when even trying to access recorded lectures. I don't know, there's a lot to be done. And it's not just for student-carers, it's just in general for students who have additional needs or additional responsibilities other than just going to college. You know the standard student finishes school and goes to college and maybe has their parents support. Most people don't have their parents support and they don't have their parents money to, you know, pay their way through rent, pay their way through college, pay their food. You know, they have to do it by themselves, and that's essentially university is a job like going to an undergrad degree is not required It's literally a job you are going to learn and to get a degree you were working on it. So it should be treated that way. People should be understood that you know they are giving it their all while they still have other jobs to do. And yeah, it's not an extension of school and I think unfortunately that's how it seemed. The undergrad is seen as an extension of secondary school where you need to meet deadlines and you need to do your assignments and do exams. But it's really not, and you have other issues in your life.

**Codes: Access to Online Content, Permission to Access Recordings, Disabilities, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Working, Frustration, Balancing Responsibilities, Diversity of College Community, Financial Difficulties**

EB: Yeah, I totally agree. I do think things have changed so much from when Trinity first started taking undergraduate back in the day, like there was probably 90%, OR 100% of the students were all there because they were wealthy and they were getting more education at this stage with people having to work and pay bills and being carers and health and mental health and, you know, yeah.

PhD1: And just that adds into this just one more thing to say. You know I'm the 1st in my small family, I'm the first person at university and I'm the first person to be doing a PhD, right? And so in addition to thought, caring responsibilities, as very often, the case that you know, they don't understand like why are you, why are you putting this first? Why are you stressed? When are you gonna stop studying? And you know, and it's like it's considered an extension of school and something like, you know, you are privileged. And I do understand that I am privileged to be able to continue my education, but. It's this misunderstanding from that side as well And it's all about perspective. But you know it's that can just I kind of mentioned that because that can be an added issue for caring of students with caring responsibilities who are then maybe being told this.

## Codes: Lack of Understanding from Family, Stress

### Interview with PhD Student 2

EGBS: I have a few questions. They're divided. We have some questions about academic engagement and student life. A TCD Policy and the experience with lecturers and tutors. The first question, can you explain what it was like being an undergraduate and carer? What were the challenges you faced? Did you experience that when you were doing your undergraduate?

PhD2: When I was doing my undergraduate, I wasn't, so I don't know if that's if that's a problem for you. I've only done my graduate studies as a carer for an elder person. So, the challenge really is just time you know, and pressure and the fact that you have so many different things, vying for attention all the time. I look at some of my colleagues who are because it's postgrad. The things that are calling for their attention are real. They have lots of stuff going on as well. But they're not as demanding. I feel like it is you just constantly have other people who need to come ahead of yourself, you know, as a carer, it is your responsibility to make sure other people are okay. You find yourself in situations where you're just trying to get on and get a little bit of work done. But other things are calling like I have an app on my phone that tells me when my daughter's blood sugars are not where they need to be and that can be an emergency where you need to engage with that immediately so that that kind of stuff is really hard. Or there was one time I was helping another colleague out with their experiment, I was sitting there with sensors on my head you know, so I had one of those things on. I was trying to do a task and meanwhile, it was clear I was getting these messages on my phone. My father had gone missing, and he has dementia. So, you're just there going, well, I'll just have to finish this thing off and then I'll go, but you're in your mind. It's like really pressing issues and you're just trying to balance them and manage them. It can be really difficult, and it can be emotional.

## Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Stress, Conflicting Priorities, Difficulties Focusing, Diversity of College Community

EGBS: Do you feel as though there is a physical and a mental burden that comes with being a student and a carer?

PhD2: Yes, there's definitely. I mean, there's the physical burden of exhaustion and the impact that that has on your ability to think you know, and an emotional burden because you're carrying so many more responsibilities and you would be, I suppose, in an ideal world, you'd be able to protect time to dedicate to your academic work, but it's just not the way it works. So, it is difficult, you know, it is just a burden is the only way to put it. But at the same time, I do appreciate that lots of people have lots

of stuff going on. But I think because as a carer, you're very emotionally involved in what you're doing. It adds an extra layer. So, it's not just that you have other things that you need to be doing, but to have other things that are very emotionally difficult, like managing vulnerable people and caring for them and I carry that responsibility. So, I think that that adds another layer that isn't obvious. It's kind of invisible.

### **Codes: Balancing Responsibility, Mental Burden, Stress, Impact on Academic Performance**

EGBS: I understand. Thank you. So, do you feel as though it is easier to be a carer now that you're doing your PhD?

PhD2: For me, no, I mean, I guess in other people's situations that could be different but for me now it's more difficult because the level of work that I need to do for my PhD the level of focus, it doesn't go well with constantly being having to respond to this and respond to that, you know, it's not. You really need to be able to kind of clear some mental space to focus on to kind of, and by space, I mean, weeks, you know, where you can just be focusing on developing an idea or working it through or figuring out your statistics or whatever. You really need to be able to kind of block other stuff out. And you can't when you're caring for other people, you know, so yes.

### **Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Difficulties Focusing, Mental Burden, Conflicting Priorities**

EGBS: Okay, thank you. Are there any advantages you can think of regarding being a carer and a student?

PhD2: Well, I suppose it definitely informs the way I see the things that I'm learning. So as a psychology student, it's very much connected. So, it gives me, I think, an extra understanding. So, my approach would be kind of informed by that, like I'm really interested in participating, research or engaged research because I just feel the voices of the people that we are, we might call participants or cohorts or sample cohorts, whatever. I feel more connected to them than I would if I wasn't living and sort of across both posts you know, or across both worlds. So from that point of view, it's very informative. And it also means my focus of interest tends to be around subjects that I've lived through. So, I'm working in type one diabetes now because it means that I've lived the experience of it, you know, so I can see where the gaps are. And I see the value of doing a little bit of work to just try and make an effort towards plugging those gaps and that sort of thing. So yeah, so it's great. They actually do work very well together.

### **Codes: Enhanced Understanding, Using Experience to Inform Research**

EGBS: Thank you. And can you tell us a little bit about your academic performance? Do you think being a carer affected your grades?

PhD2: Absolutely. Without a doubt, yeah, it was it's been really hard things like when I was doing my health psychology Master's, I was actually doing it in Galway, which is insane. So, I remember sitting a statistics exam, I was so tired. I literally hadn't slept for three days. And I was trying to do a statistics exam and I made a stupid mistake that I'd never make, and that kind of thing. It's frustrating. There's no question. Or I'd be writing essays at two o'clock in the morning. Oh, they be okay. But they should be better because if I looked at it later, and I pressed send, and I let you know, I was not doing my best. I mean, I've managed to do it all, it's been fine. But without a doubt, it has impacted on my academic performance. I can't see how it wouldn't, you know, for anyone.

**Codes: Impact on Academic Performance, Rushing of Assignments, Sleep Deprivation, Deadlines, Rushing Assignments**

EGBS: Okay, thank you. Are there any specific resources or assistance you believe would have helped you balance your home responsibilities with your academics?

PhD2: For me, not really. But what I would find, I would find support groups of people who are living through similar situations really, really helpful. Just maybe just have a cup of tea and just talk about it. So, we tried to set one up and they kind of organised it for people like a caregiver, you know, older people, parents and carers, and people with extra responsibilities, but nobody made one meeting. They couldn't make it like, so it fell apart, which was really tragic, because it would have been so useful, but people were just working, or they were at the edge of their abilities to meet their responsibilities to the edge of, of their capacity, you know, so it just didn't happen. And like it'd be one or two people couldn't make it and so nobody's been on the WhatsApp group, so it's a real shame. Maybe we all wanted to meet in person. So, then a couple of people will cancel or this or that. Maybe we should have set the bar lower and just said look, an online meeting will be fine. And then it might have built up a bit of momentum in that way but we set the bar too high, and we couldn't manage it just because nobody could fit it in. So that's a pity, it's tragic.

**Codes: Disconnect from College Community, Support Group, Lack of Personal Time, Balancing Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Technology**

EGBS: Do you remember who organised it? Was it for graduate students?

PhD2: "Grad students" body of some kind like something or not like not a student representative, but some administrative body. I'm not sure would be the grad student office or something like that. I really can't remember.

EGBS: That's fine. Yeah. I was just curious.

PhD2: It was a great initiative. It would have been amazing. But it just didn't work because we're on our own. You know, because we couldn't (we needed it) because we're too busy. But then we're too busy to meet. Yeah, that was tricky.

### Codes: Conflicting Priorities, Lack of Personal Time

EGBS: It is very tricky. So do you feel like the college experience was different for you? And how did this make you feel? Were you able to partake in liking social aspects of college such as societies?

PhD2: So for me, no, but you know, I'm older. I'm a lot older than most students. So that's fine. I have all those things in my other world and my outside world to my personal world, my non-college world. So, for me, that's fine. I mean, I think again, because I'm PhD rather than an undergraduate. It's a little bit different to know. So maybe it is a more isolated occupation, just in the nature of it. It's the kind of thing that you do spend an awful lot of time alone, you know, so, yeah, so I'm not sure it's entirely the caregiving responsibilities that got in the way there. It's just different.

### Codes: Isolated Nature of PhD, Identity as a Mature Student

EGBS: Thank you. Do you have any advice for undergraduate students with carrying responsibility?

PhD2: I suppose one thing I'd say is just to remember how important it is to look after yourself, you know, because they just tend to kind of barrel forward and push through a lot of things and it will catch up with you. It will absolutely "cut up" with you. So, you just need to pace yourself and maybe like I was saying that the group drop the bar a little like or the academic kind of thing, acknowledge that you are not going to be able to achieve and allow it, let that be okay. You know that sort of thing. So, I'd say drop the bar a little bit. Allow yourself to do that, you know, because I'm sure you'll surpass your bar a lot of times but just to feel, you know, to add another pressure on to the pressures that you're already dealing with is not advisable long term. And yeah, that really big piece about looking after yourself, making time to kind of catch up with yourself and to look after your health and all that sort of thing. You know, like, you cannot survive with that without sleep, you know, that will catch up with you. And so those sorts of things. Yeah. And I think reaching out to people who are in the same situation, I think like having somebody that you can process stuff with, is hugely useful. So yeah, take advantage of any opportunities or maybe seek out other people, you know, in similar situations because there's so much value and sharing an experience with somebody else because other people don't get it. And the need you don't want to be moaning the whole time is kind of whining because everybody's got a life. You know, everybody's got problems. Everybody's got stuff going on. But that extra layer, the emotional layer. There's lots of stuff, but it's also highly emotionally charged and usually very difficult. So being able to share that with somebody else can be very valuable.

### Codes: Self-Care, Realistic Expectations, Sleep Deprivation, Support, Mental Burden

EGBS: Thank you. So, now we move to TCD policy. So, how familiar are you with Trinity Support Policies for carer and parents students?

PhD2: Not familiar at all.

### **Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

EGBS: So, do you think a specific training day for the lectures on experience of carer and parents and how to support them would be more beneficial than to be sent?

PhD2: I suppose so. I'm not sure it'd be a whole day, but it might be, you know, because like a lot of the lectures and stuff are parents and carers themselves. So, I think, like I have not encountered a situation where they didn't have sensitivity to it because most of them are older. I look at what they do, and the responsibilities that they carry, and I marvel at how they manage it, you know, so there is that, in fact, they would understand more than other colleagues you know.

### **Codes: Understanding, Personal Responsibilities of Lecturers**

EGBS: Okay, thank you. So, going in this direction, like experience with lecturers and tutors, did you disclose your care status with your lecturers or your tutor during your post-graduate course? And if so, how did this make you feel? Did you feel as though they were understanding?

PhD2: Yes, my experience was very positive. I mean, it's very linked to the work that I'm doing. And you know, part of it and then the other part of it, so I'm carrying down and I was carrying up, so yeah, I mean, I never felt that they didn't understand at all. Yeah, I guess it was a good experience.

### **Codes: Understanding, Empathy Staff Support**

EGBS: Thank you. So, about lectures. Were there ever times that you had to miss a lecture or how does this make you feel? Did you feel like your lectures were understanding in this situation as well?

PhD2: Yeah. So that applies less to me, I don't do many lectures. Maybe in the early years, in the first year, I did more lectures but it was in COVID time, so I often had an online option. Which I frequently would take. And so, I did quite well in that situation. And I can't think of any time it was a huge problem. I missed stuff, but you know, people miss things. So yeah, no, I was fine.

### **Codes: Recording/Streaming of Lectures, Attendance, Technology**

EGBS: Would you like to add anything or comment? Anything that you feel is relevant? That we didn't talk about?

PhD2: Nothing comes to mind. I think mostly, it's that my situation is a bit unusual because I'm older than the average person in my situation. So, I'm not sure how applicable my experiences are to other people's experiences. No, I think we covered everything. Yeah. Okay.

**Codes: Identity as a Mature Student**

EGBS: Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

PhD2: No problem at all.

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## Appendix S.2 – Thematic Analysis

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Time Management and Academic Requirements	Timetabling, Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Flexibility of Exams, Assignments and Lectures, Balancing Responsibilities	Flexibility, Balancing Responsibilities, Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Attendance, Flexibility of Exams/Assignments, Lack of Flexibility, Academic Requirements, Conflicting Priorities, Deadlines, Time Management, Extensions, Deferral of Exams, Parenting Responsibilities, Rushing Assignments, Timetabling, Academic Requirements, Work Placement, Modular System, Impact on Academic Engagement, Balancing Workload, Advance Notice
Staff Training	Lack of Engagement in Training, Utilisation of Existing Projects	Mandatory Training, Utilisation of Existing Projects, Training Renewal Requirements, Staff Training, Lack of Clarity, Lack of Information, Personal Responsibilities of Lecturers, Practicalities of Policy, Technology Issues, Tutor Training,

		Lack of Engagement, Relevance of Training, Time Consuming, Perceived Training Gaps
Policy Implications	Awareness, Implementation, Input from Carers, Heterogeneity of Caring Responsibilities	Limited Awareness of Policy, Policy Dissemination, Advocacy for Change, Policy, Impersonal Nature of Policy, Practicalities of Policy, Disclosure of Pregnancy, Policy Gaps, Input from Carers, Automatic Accommodations, Policy Implementation, Heterogeneity of Caring Responsibilities, Accommodations, Broadness of Policy, Collaboration, Navigating the Policy, Limitations in Addressing Specific Needs, Lack of Facilities

<p>Inclusion of Students in College Community</p>	<p>Inclusivity, Stigmatisation, Disconnect from College Community</p>	<p>Diversity of College Community, Language Barriers, Barriers to Education, Inclusivity, Participation in Events, Importance of Community Building, Alternative Admission, Educational Disadvantage, Stigmatisation, Absence from Social Events, Disconnect from College Community, Desire to Participate, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Elitism, Support Group, Importance of Socialisation, Unfair Advantage, Lack of Visibility, Isolated Nature of PhD, Identity as a Mature Student</p>
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Support	Childcare, Financial Support, Hybrid Learning, Support Services, Understanding from Staff	Lack of Flexibility, Support, Lack of Childcare, Barriers to Education, Course Specific Understanding, Financial Support, Advocacy for Change, Accommodations, Permission to Access Recordings, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Accommodations, Counselling Limits, Disability Services, Funding, Technology, Sympathy, Gratitude, Staff Support, Vulnerability, Openness of Struggles, Empathy, Access to Online Content, Technology Issues, Diversity of College Community, Disabilities, Support Group, Tutor Service, Privacy, Pregnancy, Disclosure of Pregnancy, Risks to Pregnancy, Lack of Facilities, Awareness of Support, Childcare
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Student Challenges	Physical Health, Mental Health, Stigmatisation, Balancing Responsibilities, Impact on Academic Performance, Financial Difficulties	Conflicting Priorities, Lack of Personal Time, Shame, Health Issues, Reluctance to Disclose, Lack of Care , Self-Reliance, Guilt, Stress, Anxiety, Selfishness, Regret, Self-Care, Impact on Academic Performance, Sleep Deprivation, Eating Habits, Stubbornness, Determination, Sense of Self, Frustration, Financial Difficulties, Exhaustion, Working, Lack of Understanding from Family, Difficulties Focusing, Mental Burden, Realistic Expectations, Student Wellbeing
Positive Aspects of Caring	Using Experience to Inform Research	Enhanced Understanding, Using Experience to Inform Research
External Factors Contributing to Responsibilities	Financial Difficulties, Heterogeneity of Caring Responsibilities, Housing Crisis	Financial Difficulties, Recipients of Care, Parenting Responsibilities , Housing Crisis, Living Conditions, Education Costs, Cost-of-Living Crisis

### Appendix S.3 – Sub Themes and Quotes

Subtheme	Relevant Quotation
Timetabling	<p>"Yeah, I think there is. I don't know how it would work in terms of logistics and timetable. But I think there is a case for inclusivity to look at timetabling between the hours of 10 and four. If you look at employers that have very inclusive work practices, meetings have to take place between certain hours and Trinity has that policy for work meetings, they have to take place between core hours, and you really shouldn't be scheduling them out of that. Yeah, I think there's a case to be made that that could be done timetable wise."</p>
Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar	<p>"I think myself, as a parent, it would be great if Trinity was in line with me with the school holidays, and that would certainly make my life a lot easier. You know, like for example, this week midterm break, I'm teaching now all day Thursday and it's fine. You know, my children are older now and can start to fend for themselves, but like it is, it would have been trickier back in, you know, back when they were younger and another point, particularly the two weeks at least."</p>

Flexibility of Exams, Assignments and Lectures	<p>"The reality is that no matter how much they would spread it out, no matter how many you know, opportunities, they would have four different assessments. Like if it wasn't an exam, if it was an assignment, I still would have struggled because this was an ongoing thing. It wasn't something that just happened once and interrupted my exams once. If the exam was a month later, I can guarantee there would have been an issue with it as well."</p>
Balancing Responsibilities	<p>"I feel like it is you just constantly have other people who need to come ahead of yourself, you know, as a carer, it is your responsibility to make sure other people are okay. You find yourself in situations where you're just trying to get on and get a little bit of work done. But other things are calling"</p>
Lack of Engagement in Training	<p>"It it's very difficult to force a whole university's worth of lecturers to attend training on something specific, like student-carers."</p>
Utilisation of Existing Projects	<p>"I think the Inclusive Curriculum, people should embed it in their existing training, because they have already got the badge"</p>
Policy Awareness	<p>"I don't know if it's that the students aren't aware themselves that they're, you know, that there is this policy"</p> <p>"there is a policy but not all students that have caring and parenting responsibilities are even aware of the policy"</p>

Policy Implementation	"I would like to see it evolving into something more tangible for students and something that gives a little bit more of a scope for them"
Input from Carers for Policy	"We have to start making requests so that the students inform us, we actually put out what the students are requiring."
Heterogeneity of Caring Responsibilities	"Could be many, many things could be not having, you know, having children with specific needs that require extra older parents. Or, like you said, younger siblings or difficult situations that require extra input from the student."
Inclusivity	"I just think that actually it would just give so much more freedom and be much more inclusive for people who can't commit, who are not 18 and with no commitment, and everything going well and to programs and to degrees"
Stigmatisation	<p>"There are still people who believe that, you know, Trinity is the elite, it's the best university.</p> <p>We only have intellectuals, you know, you need to be dedicated to your intellectual growth,</p> <p>and everything else doesn't matter. I think those voices that disregard life like health, mental health, caring responsibilities, illness, other circumstances and say, "well, if you</p>



	really want it, you'll just focus on your academics"."
Disconnect from College Community	"When you're in your undergraduate you know, you start meeting new people. You're supposed to be thriving, you're supposed to be the new community. But I was limited by that because I had to go home, you know, I couldn't really go out with friends."
Childcare	"If there was a nursery in college, where parents could leave the children for the duration of a lecture and go do the class and I collect the children , something on the premises of the university that is accessible, ideally free of charge. I think parents need this kind of support"
Financial Support	"I guess what would have been more helpful I think would be like transport to hospitals, you know, not from Dublin because like I lived in North County Dublin and the nearest hospital was quite a bit away. So you know, things like the practicalities of how do I get there and then, you know, my mom is difficult when it comes to medical care. So it's like I couldn't even do that, I couldn't convince her to do that. So practical things like funding would have helped to some extent."

Hybrid Learning	<p>"I think students should have to apply for permission to get access. I don't think it should be just blanket I think if they're in person, ideally, people should attend in person, but 100% of students can't. And there's reasons why they should be allowed to access recordings."</p> <p>"I feel quite strongly that recordings of lectures should not be made available to students because then they just do not come into college. And it's not the same, you do not get the same experience, listening to recordings as you do sitting in a lecture theatre."</p>
Understanding from Staff	<p>"I don't care about policies, I care about human understanding and feeling like you're a person, not just a number in the University"</p> <p>"So you know that certainly anything that we can do to support the students to get through, we will, but we are confined by the fact that it's a professional course."</p>
Physical Health	<p>"And my experience of being a caregiver and a student, it was also complicated by the fact that I have some of my own chronic health issues, which you know were up and down during my undergrad"</p>

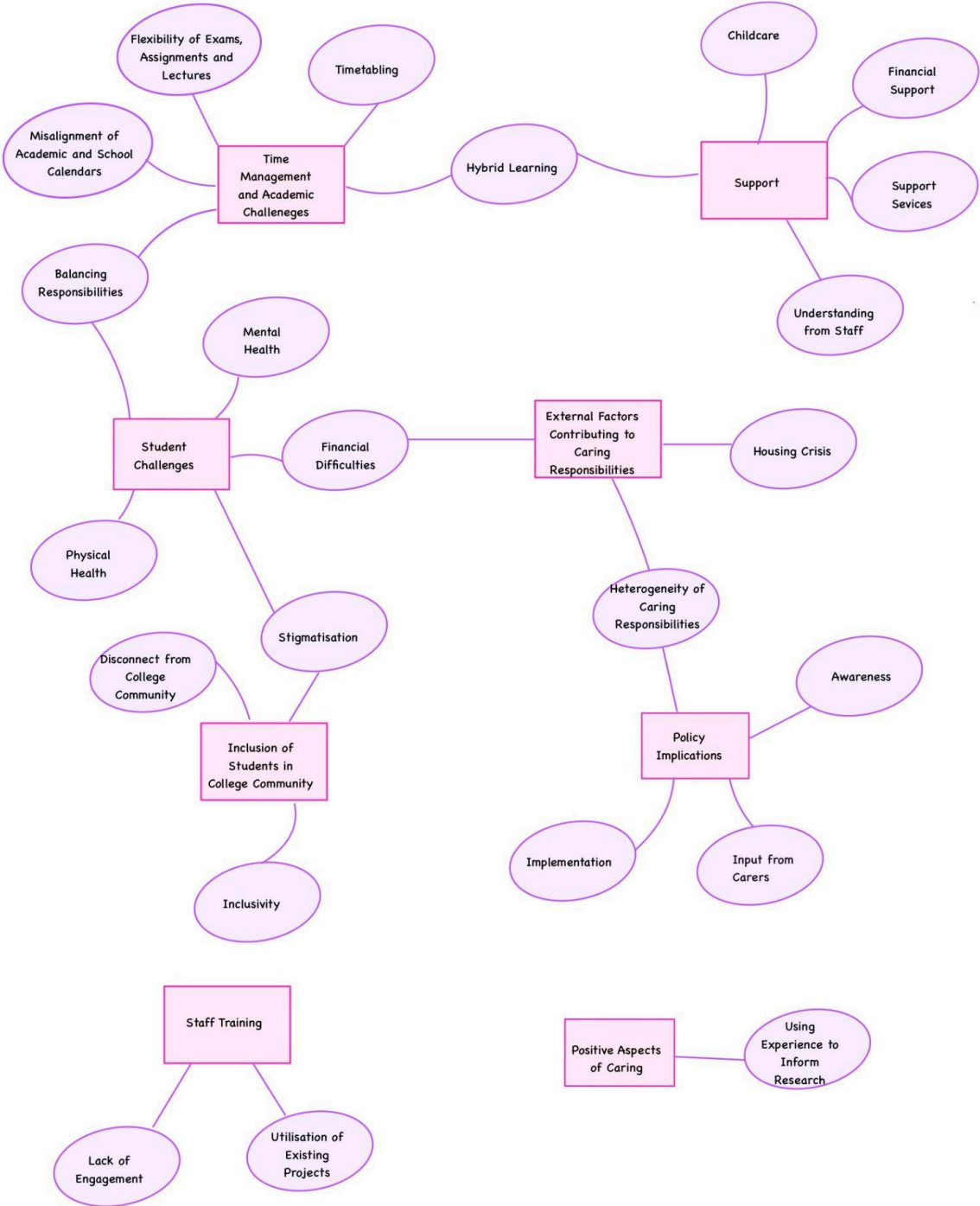
Mental Health	<p>"In your head you're always wondering what's going on and, you know, you're trying to be there for the person you're caring for, but you're trying to also live your own life. And you know, with that comes the guilt of "Ohh well, what if something happens?" "Am I being selfish?" "Was I selfish?" "What if I didn't see something happening?" And you know if, especially in my context where I'm the only person that could help, it was always like you're a little bit on edge and then, you know"</p>
Impact on Academic Performance	<p>"I was not doing my best. I mean, I've managed to do it all, it's been fine. But without a doubt, it has impacted on my academic performance. I can't see how it wouldn't, you know, for anyone."</p>
Financial Difficulties	<p>"I've had students say I missed your lecture because I was working and that's sad. To hear that. People are struggling or have to struggle that part to do, to try and meet the requirements of the course"</p> <p>"I don't think I'd be able to do the things I did, which was survive on energy drinks, survive on coffee and cigarettes and you know, that's it. Because I wasn't buying food either because we didn't have money, so all I had was coffee and the library."</p>
Housing Crisis	<p>"Certainly, probably not being able to leave their home and maybe having to commute and this is just probably the best side of the coin."</p>

Using Experience to Inform Research

"My approach would be kind of informed by that, like I'm really interested in participating, research or engaged research because I just feel the voices of the people that we are, we might call participants or cohorts or sample cohorts, whatever. I feel more connected to them than I would if I wasn't living and sort of across both posts you know, or across both worlds. So from that point of view, it's very informative"

Appendix S.4 – Map of Themes and Sub Themes

**Themes and Subthemes of Interviews**



## Appendix T – Analysis (Focus Groups)

### Appendix T.1 – Coding of the Transcripts

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#### Overall Themes

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Theme 1: Time Management

Theme 2: Emotional Strain

Theme 3: Physical Strain

Theme 4: Financial Pressure

Theme 5: Academic Performance

Theme 6: Positive Aspects

Theme 7: Policy Implications

Theme 8: Impact on Career or Future Plans

Theme 9: Underrepresentation of Students with Caring Responsibilities

Theme 10: Access to Supports

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#### Informal Carer Online Focus Group

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KC: What is it like being a student and a carer, what challenges do you face?

P1: When I'm in college that's my one time to study since when I go home I have those responsibilities. So it limits me how much I can study. Like, if, for example, I have assignments to do I will need to make arrangements so that those caring responsibilities aren't pushed aside if that makes any sense.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Impact on Academic Performance, Limited Study Time, Need for Arrangements**

P2: Yeah, I have to say, I find the same thing when you go home.

P3: You can have a plan to do a bit of work at home, but it never goes to plan. It's very tough.

**Codes: Time Management Challenges, Lack of Flexibility, Work Placement**

P2: I find trying to work everything in, I'm kind of lucky, I think, because my kids are adults. They are still in the house, though. But I have to spend a lot of time up with my dad trying to kind of take care of him. He's just around the corner from us, so it's not that bad. We're trying to take care of him and get into hospital appointments and doctor's appointments and I don't think college is very flexible. He doesn't have carers or anything coming in, so it's not a formal arrangement. He'd had an accident and I asked for, I think it was an assignment to be deferred until the summer and I was told no, that they couldn't unless I got medical certificates. He wouldn't give me permission, so I can't just go to his doctor and say, "look, I need you to say that I'm helping taking care of him at the minute" without him telling the doctor it was okay. And he thinks he's fine, you know, he doesn't need any help. So it can be very frustrating. And time consuming. Very time consuming.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Resistance to Help, Frustration, Lack of Flexibility, Time Management Challenges, Medical Documentation Required, Lack of Formal Arrangement**

P4: Just to build on what participant 2 was saying there, one of the things I have found is the pressure on from some lecturers to attend every seminar and every lecture when it's just not feasible. Sometimes I think there's a lack of understanding. I don't feel like they necessarily understand that, like, they say there's help there. But, you know, nobody really advises you where to go and where this help is and it can be quite challenging sometimes. I remember I couldn't go, I was bringing my mom to a hospital appointment and I got a really, well it wasn't a nice email. It was like, very forward like "please explain your absence". And they knew the circumstance and yet it was still, you know, there was still no understanding and look, to be honest, sometimes it feels like there's a lack of care there.

**Codes: Attendance, Lack of Understanding, Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Care**

P3: I remember back when we came back from being online from COVID. I was concerned around the way they were sending children home if there was any symptoms in school and I had concerns around then it prevented me from being able to come in to the college, I have to have a 80% or above attendance, or I don't pass. And so that was really challenging then. And in the end, it was fine, you know, but there was an anxiety and I went to talk to someone about it, the head of the school, and I was told, you know, I'm no more special than anyone else, just because I'm a parent or carer. And I was put into this, like blanket you know, care and responsibility thing. Yeah, there is a lack of care, like you said.

**Codes: Lack of Understanding, Attendance, Anxiety, Stress, Sense of Disconnection from College Community**

P5: I fought tooth and nail to get in here. And I thought once I got in, that's it, I'd be grand. But I'm still fighting, it's very frustrating. I'm fighting to be seen as a parents and to be seen as a carer, Yet in the charter for being a parent and a carer, there are supposed to be provisions made for us. Now I've reached out on several occasions to different people asking for these provisions to be enacted. And I've been stonewalled. At the moment I'm in talks with the student support officer, she is advocating for us to be seen and heard, and to have the accommodations that are outlined in the charter, for us. For me, though, there doesn't seem to be an understanding of the challenges that we face. They say they understand, but I don't think they do. The guilt that I have in coming here, because it's always a trade-off, and for the most part, that's me, and the house, and everything. Though I have to balance the caring responsibilities with college, and nothing else matters. And that's very, very hard. Because life matters at the end, I have to have some kind of life.

**Codes: Frustration, Guilt, Lack of Understanding, Balancing Responsibilities, Need for Accommodations, Lack of Support, Advocacy**

P3: It's hard to prioritise college, isn't it?

P4: I would say, Yeah, prioritising college is hard. But at the end of the day, the people that I care for my priority. And then college comes second. Yeah, but even the supports that are supposed to be there, that would make it easy for me to study, aren't. So I'm at a point where I'm thinking "why am I even doing this?"

**Codes: Overwhelm, Balancing Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Lack of Support, Frustration**

P6: As undergraduate students, we have a lot of kind of attendance that needs to be figured out. So we couldn't just say like, we go into lecture online, or we can, like just ignore it. So it's like, we need to balance, we need to make a very good time arrangement. Because like caring for other people at home is very hard, it's not that flexible. And also the lecturers time is not flexible as well. So it will be very hard for students, especially on the undergraduates to have a balance of time.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Attendance, Lecture Streaming/Recording, Time Management, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: Do you think there's a physical and mental burden that comes with being a student and a carer? Can you explain what that's like?

P2: I think I think it's probably more of a mental one. Well, yeah, probably more of a mental one than a physical one. Because you can get physically exhausted. But I think the mental drain of like just trying to, to work in everything you know, to work in school, and then you know that you have so much work to do for school and you have great intentions. And then when assignments come around, you just generally



tend to be rushing them. But the mental thing of trying to, I think fit everything in and keep everything together. can be very draining, exhausting.

**Codes: Mental Exhaustion, Time Management Challenges, Rushing Assignments, Impact on Academic Performance, Overwhelm, Pressure**

P1: I'm not sure if I would use the word burden. Like, I mean, if you're taking care of family, I mean, you kind of feel obliged or you feel like this is you know, you're doing something good. But it is definitely draining, I'd say more rather, on the mental part as, as the previous person said to me, however, that will take a toll on your physical self. So you'll be more exhausted then to do your own assignments or to stay up longer or to, I don't know, there's not going to be a free day to either, like spend like couple hours, you know, to do something. You'd rather just sleep in because you're exhausted, so it does take a toll on your physical health.

**Codes: Obligation, Exhaustion, Strain of Caregiving, Sense of Altruism**

P4: I feel like there's no cut off point. When you're at home and you're rushing for, say, an assignment deadline. I just feel like there's no cut off point. It's mentally exhausting. It's like, you're trying to fit everything into 24 hours, and sometimes it just feels so impossible. And it's not feasible. At Christmas I really burned out from the mental exhaustion of it all. And I just think, like, I reached out for help to one of my coordinators, but it was really a waste of my time. But yeah, I don't know, I feel it's mentally exhausting more than anything.

**Codes: Rushing Assignments, Impact on Academic Performance, Burnout, Lack of Support, Mental Exhaustion. Overwhelm, Absence of Boundaries, Time Management Challenges**

P5: Yeah, pressure. I think the mental drain affects the physical body, you know. I mean, I prioritise studying over eating sometimes, you know, sleep and everything else. And then that's gonna have a roll on effect, where it's gonna affect my mental ability to study. And it's just that you don't have any free personal time. It's study or caring. Yeah, that can be really hard.

**Codes: Burnout, Interplay between Physical and Mental Health, Impact on Academic Performance, Impact on Mental Ability, Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Personal Time, Impact on Eating Habits**

P3: I think it's absolutely both physical and mental. Like I, I'm in my fifth year, because I did the Access Program beforehand. So like, I know participant 5 said that they prioritise study over food. There were years there where I literally didn't have time to exercise. And, you know, I think it's just as important as food, and then the impact on sleep. And then when people you care for are sick, on top of trying to be a student, it's just fairly challenging, you know? So I would say it's absolutely physical, mental and emotional. All the things, you know.

**Codes: Impact on Physical Health, Impact on Sleep, Impact on Exercise, Impact on Eating Habits, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: Do you feel like your experience is different to that of a typical college student? How does this make you feel?

P3: But yeah, I mean, at times I can resent the amount of time someone else in my class might have to spend on something as always, maybe get a first because they have that privilege of that time. But then I do believe that people have, like, I know there's someone in my class and they might not have caring responsibilities, but he's having to work a lot of hours. I can be resentful of not even in relation to study, but the fact that other people are able to engage in being a student and student life and join societies and go to social events connected with college, whereas I've had to accept from the get go, that I'm not able to engage that way, you know.

**Codes: Identity as a Parent, Identity as a Mature Student, Diversity of Student Population, Resentment, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community, Absence from Social Events**

P1: completely agree with on there, that there, I don't see this more like a typical student, I think everyone might have this perspective that, you know, for your college, you'll have, you know, you'll spend a couple of hours studying and then go out with your mates and stuff. But everyone has their own situation, and everyone may have their own things that they have to do. But for me, my caring responsibilities has made it so that I'd have to, you know, leave events that, you know, were quite big, or that I really wanted to attend on multiple occasions. And I think that's one thing that I've had to accept. But it made me upset a little bit, since like, I really wanted to go to those. And there was more than one occasion. Does that make sense?

**Codes: Disappointment, Diversity of Student Population, Balancing Responsibilities, Absence from Social Events**

P2: I think I would be the same. Every year, I say, I'm going to go to something at the end of the year, some event, you know, to finish off the school year. But I don't, I never go. By the time you get your assignments done, and everything else is gone, it's just completely impossible. So I think to a large extent, a lot of mature students kind of stand outside of the that box, like I don't. I think I've gone to two events. I've been here for about three years now or something. And yeah, I've never seen a mature student at them.

**Codes: Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Inaccessibility of College Events, Desire to Participate, Disconnect from College Community, Absence from Social Events**

P3: Yeah it's harder to do things. And I think, you know, I think that people recognize that it's harder, but it's a tough one, isn't it?

P2: Don't get me wrong, I don't have any interest in going out and getting blotto with the younger ones. But I would like to go to some events just to kind of, I don't know, get the feeling for it, or something. I don't know.

**Codes: Desire to Participate, Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Differentiation Between Younger and Older Students, Absence from Social Events**

P3: I wanted to do the whole community mentoring thing for, for a program where you go and you know, it's to inspire other people to come to college and be a mature student, especially if they're parents or carers. I've had to then prioritise college work, because it's kind of a privilege to be able to do things like that. And that's something that's so meaningful and actually would help people but yeah, I'm not really able to deal with so yeah.

**Codes: Disappointment, Balancing Responsibilities, Disconnect from College Community, Desire to Participate, Desire to Inspire Others, Absence from Social Events**

P4: I feel like there's almost like a common perception with lecturers and teaching staff that everybody is a typical student, you know, that there's that we live lives that don't have these responsibilities. And I feel then the pressure to be typical student and the guilt I feel then when I'm not a typical student, and I'm missing events, lectures, seminars, and you know, I'm struggling to stay on top of the workload, and then the guilt because, well, I'm not able to do all of this. But then there's, there's not like when you reach out, there's, there's no help, essentially, there's no help.

**Codes: Guilt, Pressure, Balancing Responsibilities, Attendance, Lack of Support, Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Struggle to Manage Workload**

AS: Are you aware of Trinity's support policy before carers and parents?

P3: No, before participant 5 mentioned it I wasn't aware at all.

P1, P2, P4: No

**\*Participants were given a 5 minute break to briefly read the policy\***

P2: I don't think it is implemented. it's definitely not widely known about, that's for sure. I came through the TAP program as well. And I even at that stage, and I have to say they were very good. Like, we weren't told about that either. And there were other mothers as well, that came through with me.

### Codes: Lack of Implementation, Limited Awareness of Policy, Positive Experience with TAP

P3: Where's the actual policy? It talks about pregnancy law. And then, like, where's the actual relevant parts? It's kind of not relevant for me, because I have mandatory attendance. So regardless of that, I have to meet the requirements, which is that I have 80% or more attendance. So I'm absolutely killed trying to do it, luckily I'm so committed. I don't know how I've done it to be honest, to get to year five, and I've never had any attendance issues. I've only had to ask for a couple of extensions. But yeah, it's not it's not it's not easy to navigate all of that. And, yeah, like, I'm lucky, I have a very approachable tutor. And I haven't needed to get in touch with her very often. But it's a real test of resilience, you know?

### Codes: Challenges with Navigating the Policy, Attendance, Resilience, Approachability of Tutor, Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities

P1: I think firstly, the policy isn't really put out there, because I sure have never heard of it. Like, I don't think from what it sounds like anyone else did either. I mean, to be honest, for my course, it might because the type of course it is, but I'm not sure. There is a bit of an understanding if people have families, and if people have other commitments and other responsibilities to do I think they are understanding. If you even send them an email, they'll get back to you saying "it's all right", like they are good about it. So in this regard, I think, actually, for my course, I'm pretty happy in this regard.

### Code: Limited Awareness of Policy, Support, Course Specific Understanding

P3: I'd be the same. But like, I suppose it's that real thing of well, you have to do the essential requirements. And like, there's no getting away from that. And I know, it's probably difficult for the college as well. But yeah, it's just I don't think it's recognised, or understood or cared enough for that. how challenging it is to be parent or carer in college. Like, yeah, and I suppose, and I get that, okay. There's a policy that I didn't know about, and I'm there five years, and it's never come up. So I'm wondering what happened there. But I don't think it's enough to know.

### Codes: Academic Requirements, Lack of Support, Limited Awareness of Policy, Challenges of Caring Responsibilities

P5: I was aware of the policy thing through Trinity INC. It was flagged to me there which was very helpful. But yeah, so I have reached out to my tutor and mentioned the policy and they didn't even know about it. So it's not only us that don't know about it, the college that don't know about it. So I don't know, maybe it could be flagged with them, because then they can maybe suggest that there is extra support available. What I am in the process, of calling in some of the supports that they mentioned that are available, so yeah, I'll let you know how that goes. In particular,

the one where we can have flexibility in the way of the supplementals can be classed as our first attempt, which I tell you what, to me, I would be able to come up for air at that point. It wouldn't mean I do any less work, it just means I'd be able to balance my life and my care and me. Life would be so much easier.

**Codes: Awareness Through Trinity-INC, Limited Awareness of Policy, Lack of Support, Advocacy for Additional Support, Balance of Responsibilities, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams, Lack of Implementation**

P2: If we had the leeway that participant 5 just went mentioned there, like our grades would probably improve as well, you know, because you're not, you're not under as much pressure or if they're spaced out that little bit more, you know, instead of just trying to throw stuff together to just get it in on a deadline. There's, yeah, I think there really needs to be some sort of leeway with deadlines, particularly when everything is coming up, like for finishing in the space of two weeks, you know what I mean? And then you're still trying to keep on top of all your other work. And then there's presentations and everything, you know.

**Codes: Impact on Academic Performance, Balance of Responsibilities, Accommodations, Balancing Workload, Deadlines, Pressure**

P5: The stress shuts down your brain, the creative part of your brain.

**Codes: Stress**

P3: Like, I hear what you were saying there needs about, you know, around deadlines and extensions, and all that. But I definitely think like, I know, the disability service is there. I don't think it's the most appropriate way to link in for more support. Because I don't think being a parent or carer is a disability. But I don't think it's enough to just have a student-parent representative as part of the student's union, I think, yeah, I think that there needs to be more. And, yeah, it's not good enough, really, in this day and age, you know, with all the diversity and all that, that we're not more able to be part of college life or embraced as part of it. It's nearly more accepted that "oh, because you're mature and apparent, you don't get it", you know. So I don't think that's good enough. And I definitely think that college could be support us more. I know they have that lovely new building in printing square and I think there's a lot more that could be done in terms of support. And on my course we have just gotten a welfare and support person who comes from TAP as well. So I loved meeting with her, but I'm on the way out of college. I could have really done more all the way through. Because I think it you a tutor is great to have when you need that kind of representation and my tutor has been brilliant. But that welfare and support person has been key for me, only since Christmas, I've been able to benefit from it. But it was huge. You know? Yeah, I don't even know if other schools have a person like that. But it's made a big difference.

**Codes: Deadlines, Accommodations, Lack of Support, Diversity of Student Population, Disconnect from College Community, Representation, Appreciation for Existing Support**

P2: The issue that I had, like when my dad had the accident, I went to my tutor, and he explained it all to her. To her. She was absolutely brilliant. And then she then went to the school, you know, for the one I was looking for the deferral from, and they said no, and there was nothing she could do about it. It wasn't her, it was the school, you know. The tutor came back and she said that they've given me a week extension. The accident my dad had, I was gonna have to move into his house, there was literally no possibility that I was getting assignments done, you know? That was why I asked for it and I explained everything to them, but I couldn't get doctor's notes. And that yeah, that was the end of it. They just said no.

**Codes: Lack of Support, Medical Documentation Required, Approachability of Tutor, Deadlines, Challenges with School's Decision, Balancing Responsibilities**

AS: Are there any changes that could be made to the policy to aid you in balancing your responsibilities and academics?

P5: Yep, 9am lectures, they are absolutely just not doable. And also, I would say coming in for one lecture on a Friday is tough as well. I could be at home catching up on stuff. Yeah, given like the person who I care for a bit more attention, studying, all the rest of it. A three hour round trip for one lecture is really, really heartbreaking. And I understand maybe as a young person or somebody else to come it's not an issue, you can catch up with friends, you can go to a society, go, you know, do the fantastic things that young people do. But as a carer a three hour round trip for one lecture is heartbreaking.

**Codes: Timetabling, Commuting, Disconnect from College Community, Lack of Flexibility, Balancing Responsibilities**

P4: Absolutely agree with participant 5 on that. And I think that the hybrid kind of form of learning would be so helpful for us, you know, it kind of accommodates to our needs a little bit more. That would be so helpful.

**Codes: Hybrid Learning, Accommodations**

P2: I agree, if lectures were recorded, you know, and then you could just go back and do it in your own time I think would be more helpful because I'm guessing you know, timetabling is very difficult for them anyway. You're never going to please everybody, but I think even if lectures were recorded, you know. If I only have to come in on a Friday as well for one or two lectures now like it's completely a pain to have to cram it in, it turns into a five hour a day when realistically, I could just watch it at home in two hours, you know? Yeah. So that would be helpful, but I can

understand their difficulty with timetabling. So I think if you're trying to solve that, recording might be better.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Accommodations, Timetabling, Commuting, Lecture Recording/Streaming**

AS: Have you ever asked for recordings personally from lecturers, by letting them know of your current responsibilities?

P5: I have been told no, now, it's not going to happen. I do know that there's pushback in terms of the lecturers maybe, I've heard that they are afraid to open the doors to these things, it's a slippery slope downhill to their jobs being taken away. So I can understand their concerns, but I think there has to be a degree of flexibility for people who really would benefit from online lectures. Not for people who just choose not to come in, for whatever reason, but if you really need and will benefit from it academically, I think there could be accommodations made.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Job Security, Accommodations, Lecture Recording/Streaming, Resistance, Differentiation between Needs and Choices**

P6: I think the timetable arrangement is a very important issue. The prices of housing in Dublin is very expensive, a lot of students are living kind of very far away. A lot of students couldn't just come like to attend like nine o'clock lecture. And specifically, a lot of lectures should be like compressed, for example. Some lectures are two hours on Monday morning and two hours on Tuesday afternoon, so a lot of students if they couldn't attend the Monday morning nine o'clock lectures, they just don't go to school. But if the lectures can be arranged to one day and in a kind of more accessible time, like 10 to two o'clock. I think it's better for more students to have the same opportunity, to take care of their loved ones and still go to the lecture as well at the same time.

**Codes: Timetabling, Impact of Housing Crisis, Commuting, Balancing Responsibilities, Attendance**

AS: If lectures had a specific training day, where they learned the policy but also of your experience as a carer, do you think this would be beneficial?

P1: I think that will be the best thing. Because, you know, like timetabling and everything, as much as we want it to suit us, it can't always be set the way we need it to be. And stuff like that. And that's completely understandable. So I think the only thing that people need to do is just be more empathetic and understanding about the topic like, some people know what's like, some people don't. It's just about kind of feeling what other people are feeling, being in their shoes, or a little bit, you know, I think that's the best way for just people that need to be understanding about it.

**Codes: Understanding, Empathy, Timetabling, Diversity of College Community**

P4: I think that there's not just a lack of understanding, but a lack of awareness in within the teaching staff about policies. And I think maybe, like, they need to be made aware of these policies, and maybe that will promote a bit of understanding and empathy. But I think until they're made aware of it, that we really don't have any hope of, you know, getting any support.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Understanding, Empathy, Lack of Support, Barriers to Support**

AS: Have you ever had to miss lectures due to caring responsibilities, how did this make you feel?

P2: Yeah, I have missed quite a lot of lectures and some tutorials as well. You feel kind of pressured, because, you know you're gonna be putting yourself under more pressure then, because you're trying to catch up and you do miss things in the class, when you're not there. You know, I know you get the slides and stuff, but it's all the little bits of information that you really need. So you immediately feel, as soon as you know you're gonna have to miss a lecture or tutorial, you're immediately on the backfoot. Like, for me, it really mentally like it's kind of the start of the cycle of like, "crap, what am I gonna do now? And how am I going to catch up?". Then you just might even feel like you're in a place where you're just on top of everything, and then that will happen, and then you're going back again. And it's not like, you can just say, you're going to give up something else to get to the lecture, because there's just too many things to focus on.

**Codes: Overwhelm, Balancing Responsibilities, Pressure, Stress, Attendance, Concerns of Falling Behind**

P4: I agree with participant 3. When I miss lectures and seminars, I feel pressure to catch up. I feel guilty because I'm not there. And, and almost, like, feel ashamed a little bit that I am not able to attend, like, say the typical student and I feel quite anxious about the whole situation. And it's a vicious cycle.

**Codes: Guilt, Shame, Anxiety, Concerns of Falling Behind, Pressure, Attendance**

P1: Feeling anxious is definitely a part of it. I can't say I've really missed much like lectures and stuff. Rather definitely, like anything extra definitely, though. Like anything, like, an extra hour to do this or, an event? Definitely, no, it's just what I have to do. And that's it. And then sometimes it depends, that will be difficult. So anxiety is definitely there.

**Codes: Anxiety, Attendance, Lack of Personal Time, Acceptance of Obligations, Balancing Responsibilities**



P6: What I've missed, the lecture didn't take attendance. So it's like kind of, it's fine, it didn't have a negative effect on my grade, on my marks. But it's similar as someone said before, it's like a bit guilty and like, yes, because like we didn't go to lecture and we just take all the slides you study but we didn't like take in the communication in the lecture. So that kind of yeah, there should be some other kind of ways to make it like better.

**Codes: Attendance, Guilt, Lack of Support, Impact on Academic Performance**

AS: If there were a specific service for carers to sign up and receive accommodations and support, would you find this beneficial?

P2: Definitely. Because I know that we're all mature students, as far as I can tell, but there's definitely going to be some younger people that are carers as well. Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, they should be involved as well. Like they should be getting concessions or whatever it is to make sure that they're okay too.

**Codes: Advocacy for Young Caregivers, Diversity of College Community, Equal Access to Support**

P5: Yeah, because to be fair, when you see a young person, you just assume they're a typical student, and they're just there. They can go out all night, and then complete an assignment in the morning, you know, obviously, they can't.

**Codes: Advocacy for Young Caregivers, Diversity of College Community, Equal Access to Support, Assumptions of Young Students**

P1: I think they've made a good point, people just get the assumption that since I'm young, you know, like, I probably I'm having a good craic at college and everything. But to be honest, like, I'd rather study and then go home, to take care of the responsibilities, responsibilities that I do have. So it's not like that I'm gonna make the most of college. And that's why my five minutes late, for example, or something like that, you know, it's the opposite. I'm kind of more of being like a second parent essentially, I suppose. I'm not like complaining, I'm just saying, it's not like that for everyone.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Diversity of College Community, Assumptions of Young Carers**

AS: Is there anything anyone would like to add?

P4: I just one final thing I'd like to add is, one of the things I struggle with is I don't feel like I'm included in the college community, because I miss out for, you know, for being a carer. And I feel like something like, a group to touch in with like, like, even a welfare officer would be so beneficial. But genuinely my college experience isn't what

I expected it to be. Because I don't feel included. And that's genuinely down to being carer as well as a student.

**Codes: Disconnect from College Community, Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities, Impact on College Experience, Desire for Inclusion, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion**

AS: How does this feel for you, feeling like you're not included?

P4: It sometimes feels, you know, a little lonely, especially when you see other people's experience is different. And you start to question, well, you know, "how come I can't do that?" It just, it doesn't feel good to not have the same experience.

**Codes: Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Impact on College Experience, Disconnect from College Community, Questioning Belonging**

### Student-Parent Online Focus Group

KC: Can you explain what it's like being both a parent and a student and what kind of challenges you face?

P1: It's stressful, and it's really hard to get the balance and everything, you know. For my course, we have to do placements every year, as part of it and you don't get paid for any of them. And you have to get like, my kids were in creche for the last semester, for the whole semester. It cost me 500 quid a month and there's no support or services there to help you with any of that, you know. The other biggest challenge I found over the years is the fact that they don't coincide the holidays, the reading weeks, and holidays with midterms, and you know, the holidays with the school in schools. So you end up not being able to go to college, because you have to look after your children because you can't afford to pay for the childcare, you know. With my course, especially, like we are required to have 80% attendance, so and if you don't get 80% attendance, then then make you redo the whole of his semester. So this is like a situation that I'm finding myself in at the moment because of health issues. It's not making those allowances that you have to have for your childcare, you know. I've more to say as well, but someone else can have a turn.

**Codes: Financial Strain, Lack of Financial Support, Childcare Costs, Attendance, Academic Requirements, Work Placement, Misalignment between Academic Calendar and School Calendar, Stress, Unpaid Work Placement**

P2: I concur with everything you say. My children are not in childcare anymore, as they are that little bit older. The youngest is 10. There's a reason that I'm only going back to college now, it's because they're that little bit more independent. I knew it wasn't feasible financially or logistically for me to do this course, which is full time

and on site for most of us. So, the challenge is like the timing of doing something like this and resulting in me now being a mature student. The entry to do this is a challenge because, you know, your family is a non-negotiable, that's not something you can forget about or turn down a notch. So timing of entering the course. I 100% concur with the academic calendar not overlapping with the school calendar, that is that is a real challenge. The other thing as well, is that I the last thing I'll say is that like I'm a parent, I'm a student, but I also work because I have financial responsibility. So trying to juggle the three is a challenge.

### **Codes: Timing of Entry to College, Financial Strain, Balancing Responsibilities, Misalignment between Academic Calendar and School Calendar**

P3: Yeah, pretty much all the same things. One of the biggest things is definitely the way the academic year doesn't overlap with like, regular school schedules as well. Considering primary and secondary school and creche are all the same term time. Ironically, my creche closes the same time, as the primary and secondary. And then obviously, the big dynamic and trying to juggle doing your work, keep up with your reading and keep up with your assignments. But also make sure that you're there for your children so that they're not feeling left behind or neglected or like abandoned, because all of a sudden, mammy's gone to do something that they're not used to their mammy doing and that kind of stuff. Those would be the main things, as well as making sure that my children know that I'm not abandoning them for college. And that, yeah, the way the academic calendar doesn't overlap.

### **Codes: Concern for Children's Wellbeing, Balancing Responsibilities, Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar**

P4: This is my second degree, so I've seen the two sides of what a college experience should be but it does feel like it was predominantly made for students that are fresh out of school. To have to go back and explain like, look, I have childcare or when a lecture gets cancelled and they ask you to come back in later on. They don't realise I can't come back in later on. I've paid a childminder from nine to one, if I have to bring them back and say actually "no, hold on", I'm having to pay her, like an extra couple hours. Because you're supposed to be full time and whatever., and having such a small child, like I have to actually see her. So it was either me having to work nights, where I wasn't getting to see her. I was breastfeeding her, so I couldn't do nights. Financially everything took a hit, like and then having to do placements and things like that, I got to the stage where I was working 70 odd hours a week because I was doing 30 odd hours in clinical placement, that I wasn't getting paid for. But I was having to work three days a week, so I could pay for childcare to look after her while I was doing college. Like I knew I could change to different days and things like that. But I contacted the college to say "could you tell me, am I on long days or am I on short days or could you preferably put me on somewhere with long days, not looking for every single day for you to tell

me. But just that you could give me that benefit that I could say to my child minder, look, I'll need you for three days for the next six weeks. It was almost like I was trying to get more, I was trying to like get preferential treatment. I was just looking for the bare minimum.

**Codes: Differentiation Between Younger and Older Students, Lack of Understanding, Financial Strain, Childcare Costs, Breastfeeding, Work Placement, Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities, Working**

KC: How do you feel trying to juggle these two responsibilities?

P3: It's really stressful. Like, the second semester, I've gotten a bit better at it. I made a lot of mistakes during the first semester. I was able to find new ways to adapt and figure stuff out. But it's still really hard. Not seeing your children for such long periods of the day, like my kids are two and four years old. So like Monday, Tuesday, I finish at 6pm and I get home just for bedtime. And they're in creche from, like 9:10am some days. They don't see their mam essentially for two days, and I don't see them for two days. So that's really tough, it's really stressful. There's a lot of like, guilt that comes with that as well because you're trying to do something better for your future, their future. There's also this like the irony of learning about child wellbeing and you're trying to make sure your kids psychological well-being is maintained and nurtured is really tricky.

**Codes: Stress, Guilt, Time Management, Balancing Responsibilities, Concern for Children's Wellbeing, Adaption**

P1: As participant 3 was saying, like the late finishes, or the early starts as well. For me, I have three lectures that start at 9am. My kids are all in primary school, you know, and they get on the school bus at half past eight. So it's like, I either have to miss the lecture, or I have to arrange for someone to mind them for half an hour in the morning, which is really, really difficult to try and do that, you know. It has a cost that incurs to it, to make it that way and then some of them, you're only going in for one hour and that's it for the day, you know? There's nothing else in the day, and then you're leaving town again and then trying to get organised. As I've learned, as I've gone through the years to try and get the academic work done, you know, all the assignments done, when it's getting towards those deadlines and things like that. I've now developed quite a good system, and you know, but it's let me down on occasion as well. So I try to say for April, I've got seven essays to do. So I count back a week, an essay per week, you know, to organise to get it all in and fitting in with the parenting as well. But sometimes they might give you something at the last minute and then it just throws everything up in the air, do you know like that you're not doing the essay right and then you haven't got enough time or whatever. For the kids as well, like, I feel really guilty when I have to do my work, and I can't sit there and do their homework and things with them. One of my children has additional needs as well, you know, and I don't feel like I'm there as much as what I need to be there.

Especially with placements and academic work. That's essentially working full time plus getting your academic work done. Often it's just it's so much pressure, you know?

**Codes: Guilt, Concern about Children's Wellbeing, Adaption, Pressure, Manage Workload, Financial Strain, Attendance, Timetabling, Childcare, Adaption, Work Placement, Deadlines**

P4: People are kind of going "oh, you should have waited", but if I wait till later, that would potentially mean I was gonna have to put on hold having another child. Like in general, like financially, my mortgage, everything, all of that, that has had to take a hit for me to go back to college now, like life isn't going to get any easier. It's only going to get harder. And if I was to look for an extra child, or what I wait till I'm 40s 50s before I decided to go back and do this, it's not a benefit then to me. I've been trying to do it and not use my child as a scapegoat because that's the way I feel every time. I have mentioned it to them. You got to put it off. That's my only excuse you can put it off. When when we started internship, there was a meeting and it was with a male college professor, and he basically stood in front of a roomful of women and men or predominantly women and told us that internship is nine months. if you get pregnant, you won't graduate. And I kind of felt like, "hold on, you don't know, the situation that the women that's in the room have gone through, you don't know, going through fertility treatment". It was just a horrible way for the college, like even for him to be the one to say it. Okay, I understand that it may be true. If you've obviously fallen pregnant within the nine months, you might have to take time off or whatever, they could have said it in a nicer way but predominantly could have been said by a woman.

**Codes: Timing of Entry to College, Family Planning, Lack of Understanding, Balancing Responsibilities**

P2: One thing I felt really challenging is that there is very little flexibility from the college to kind of help and meet some of some of those needs. Like, for example, I have a day on Wednesday, when I have one lecture, which I like I love attending it, it I get a lot out of it. But it's 12-1 in the middle of the day, I have a commute of about 45 minutes each way. You know, it's interfering with things like pick up from school, things like that. So my whole day is gone pretty much to attend that one particular lecture. And I've reached out to the lecture and say, "look, is there any way that I could see a recording of the of the lecture". It's not, you know, because it didn't want to come in, it's just not worth my time to come in. And as a result, you know, you make a choice every week, will I go to the lecture, or will I try and keep my sanity and do some reading or whatever it is. The flexibility, it's sort of gone. Like you have to fit in a very kind of rigid schedule into something where there's very little space for for manoeuvring most of the time.

### **Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Commuting, Attendance, Lack of Flexibility, Timetabling, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: Were you able to access the recordings?

P2: They refused.

P3: No way!

P1: It's so ironic because they had everything online. Like when I started in first year, we were still on COVID restrictions, you know, so like that things were recorded or and were made available for you that way. And now suddenly, they're like, "oh, no, we can't do it". My sister works at a university in London and as well as having the live lectures, they record every live lecture and make it available on Blackboard to all their students as well so they can go back and review it so yeah. Like, I don't know why they can't do things like that.

### **Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Lack of Flexibility**

P3: I had a slightly different experience. My partner wound up in hospital and had to have surgery really quickly, medical emergency or whatever, but I missed the whole week. All the lecturers had sent me the materials and even classes were my attendance counted towards my grade, they were like "it's okay", like they accommodated that. So, I think it was just because it was like an extreme kind of medical emergency that I got that accommodation. So I find it difficult they said that, because the one hour is the one class that they wouldn't allow you the video, for the one class a week.

### **Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Attendance, Accommodations**

P2: Maybe it's this particular lecturer. It was great to hear that they were able to do that, you know, but the reason that they were able to give you that was because of this extreme situation. Why not do this as a default? There's considerations about, you know, attracting people to the campus and the image of the of the culture, of the university. But if you're already stressed, like, it's not putting you on par to really follow your course, the way others may be able to easier. So just a bit of, I don't know, it puts you at a disadvantage. Even temporary access or password protect, like, I mean, there's maybe there's a level of trust that needs to be established between the student and the lecturer that you're not going to abuse the situation. But yeah, I just think, coming from COVID situation to begin with, like, where it just became the default, and now turning that back. It really leads to just like, awkward situations, like difficult situations, that could be really simple.

### **Codes: Academic Disadvantage, Lack of Trust between Lecturers and Students, Stress, Accommodations, Streaming/Recording of Lectures**

KC: You briefly mentioned the mental burden that comes with being a parent and a student, do you feel as though there is also a physical burden?

P1: I passed out on campus last year, from like blood pressure and heart issues, but like, it comes on from stress, you know, the trying to run around constantly. Before you even get into college, you've run a marathon, because, you know, you've got the kids ready for school, and all of that stuff that that entails, you know, and got yourself in there, that's exhausting in itself. Then like, I'm sitting on the train, trying to get some work done when I'm on the way, on the commute. You just feel like you're rushing around all the time, and trying to do everything and be a good mam and be a good student. And really, just working yourself into ground while doing that, you know.

**Codes: Stress, Burnout, Balancing Responsibilities, Cardiovascular Issues, Exhaustion, Fainting**

P2: I think it's more sleep deprivation, in my case, that's gradually building up. It's because you're trying to get your reading done but it has to happen when the kids go to bed, you know, so you're late, and then you go to bed late, you're up early again. And it kind of builds up. You just know that you feel yourself becoming more rundown. And then as soon as lecture times finish, you get sick. And that's the time you spend with your family. So you know, you don't really get that break that you need to kind of ramp yourself up for the next semester. So from that perspective, yeah, I would have a physical burden. On the positive side, it makes me walk a lot more as well, so that's good

**Codes: Sleep Deprivation, Impact on Sleep, Burnout, Rundown, Balancing Responsibilities, Managing Workload**

P3: Depending on how well I manage to keep up with the work. If I started to fall behind even remotely, I started to get tension all around my back and chest. I have arthritis in my hands as well, so I get like, inflamed. And then I panic even more because my hands are struggling to type or write or keep up with the work as well. So yeah, and definitely, the sleep deprivation. I started like putting myself to bed at like the kids time and waking up that couple of hours earlier to try to get the reading in. So I'm not staying up mad hours, but even still, it does take its toll because by the time you get to your first lecture, you've already been at it for six or seven hours. Instead of you know, roll out of bed about seven or 8am and go to your lecture at nine or 10 or you know. A third of your day is nearly complete before you even get to where you actually have to start working.

**Codes: Back pain, Cardiovascular Issues, Stress, Sleep Deprivation, Arthritis, Time Management, Balancing Responsibilities, Concerns of Falling Behind, Exacerbation of Health Issues from Stress**

KC: Can you explain any advantages you feel you may have from being both a student and a parent?

P3: Less distractions. You kind of have your focus, like you have your studies, and you have your kids and like your home life as your focus, because I find that I'm not worried about socialising or heading over to the pub, you know. And there's others, you don't get hangovers, so you're not falling behind with your work or having session depression and not able to do your work then the next day.

**Codes: Focus**

P1: Yeah, it's a really positive thing to show that your children but you're doing this and that, like, especially as mature students that, you know, this is an option for them to go on and do something like this? And I mean, my kids, they're always asking me all sorts of questions about whatever reading it is I'm doing or whatever placement I'm on. It's opened up a lot of things for them. So I definitely see that as very positive

**Codes: Positive Role Model, Fostering a Learning Environment**

P2: Yeah, 100%. And, at the end, that's a really nice thing to do, as well, to see that they're showing that interest and that they see you do this for yourself as well, I think it's an important message to give them and kind of giving them a sense that they're still important as well. I think definitely being a mature student and being a parent, I think your view on a lot of subjects might be a little bit more nuanced, because you kind of have that little bit of life experience for lack of a better word. So definitely a pro.

**Codes: Positive Role Model, Fostering a Learning Environment, Life Experience, Self-Importance**

KC: Are there any specific resources that the college could offer for you, or any assistance that would help you balance your responsibilities?

P1: They could help more financially with the childcare costs. And they could make the materials available lectures material online for us as well, you know, and a certain allowance for attendance where it's required.

**Codes: Childcare Costs, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Attendance, Accommodations**

P3: Definitely, with the financial assistance, because I remember when it was orientation week, before everything commenced the liaison officer actually telling us that there was a Childcare Grant or support available, but when I went to inquire about, it turns out, they've been out of use for a few years, they hadn't been doing that. And even when you're applying for like, the Student Assistance Fund, like you're not given any details of when that's supposed to be finalised, it's just like,



Okay, here's your forms, and then that's the end of it. They give no like, approval on it, you can't even financially plan ahead, that you might get the support. So that can be very frustrating as well.

**Codes: Lack of Financial Support, Lack of Information**

P2: Maybe on intake, before you start your course or at the start of the year, to kind of check in on students, you know, are you aware of all the supports that are available. Even just to create an awareness with your, with the course director with your lectures, that, you know, that there are students who are juggling all of these things. And then, specifically for me, because I'm like, also a mature student that, you know, I am very aware that I have to gain experience in this field, like, any kind of support in terms of like career guidance, or just a conversation with somebody about, you know, what pathways are there that are suitable or that are feasible? Are there places to have more flexibility like that, even to have a conversation with someone about that, like, proactively, without having to go seek it out, I think would be great.

**Codes: Student Check-In, Diversity of College Population, Career Guidance, Feasibility of Pathways**

P4: Even for the likes of the situation of where the TCD creche said that they hadn't got the staff. There are people in Trinity that are doing psychology, education, social care. I'm sure some of us would be willing to have provided the staffing for them in order to get the creche running. At the end of the day, if it's going to benefit all of us, I'd certainly say I'm sure those things would volunteer to help him if he got the creche open. Or some sort of after school programme that was accessible, because I met some mothers with kids in secondary school, they would really benefit if they had classes in the evening. It would really benefit if they could drop the kids off for homework classes.

**Codes: Lack of Support, Community, Lack of Childcare**

AS: Are you aware of Trinity's support policy for student-parents and carers?

P1, 2, 3 and 4: No

**\*Participants were then given a 5 minute break to read over the policy briefly\***

AS: You weren't aware of the policy, as parents. Having now read it, how do you feel about the dissemination and the implementation of this policy?

P1: I don't think it has been implemented, like just from the one thing that I have that stood out for me when I just read it briefly there was that the timetables would be available, you know, well in advance for us so that we can plan. That has never happened to me. And I'm in my sixth semester at this stage. Never. The lecturers

have been good when you can't make it in because of midterms, and a lot of them are in agreement with it as well. Do you know like, that is an issue because they have children themselves?

**Codes: Policy Implementation, Timetabling, Misalignment of Academic and School Timetable, Childcare, Attendance, Support from Lecturers**

P3: The same for me. I mean, I had contacted about two of my lecturers asking, solely because I was trying to organise childcare. I'm in my final year. And still, I think it was two weeks beforehand. Even though they were aware that it was because of childcare, that it wasn't just, I don't know, me trying to get ahead of anybody or anything like that. It was solely on the purpose of childcare. And it wasn't made available.

**Codes: Timetabling, Policy Implementation, Childcare, Lack of Flexibility**

P2: When I read the policy, I was like, a lot of it doesn't apply to me? I am not pregnant, or will I be in the future, and I don't have small children. So I can say I'm maybe in a luxury position, that childcare isn't that big of an issue for me. It's more like what I'm missing from it is more the like, it seems to be focused on sort of the, like, very specific stages of being a parent, and not so much on sort of the day-to-day support. Like the agreement between maybe college lecturers, students, that I'm missing a little bit from it, if that makes sense?

**Codes: Lack of Support, Childcare, Lack of Relevancy**

AS: Is there anything you could suggest could be added to the policy, to better support parents in Trinity?

P1: They could let us know that this policy is actually in place and available to begin with, like, you know, on admission. The three of us on here didn't even know of its existence.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

P3: Yeah, I mean, it's part of the interview process, you're talking about yourself and your situation and everything like that, even if on the person doing the interviews, and that they mark us as parents, so that will be automatically sent out when enrolment begins. Rather than having to wait to be assigned a tutor, who might get in contact with us, before we have to go looking for them to find out anything.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Automatic Parental Identification**

P2: I think having the policy is one thing. But I don't see any evidence of it actively being implemented in terms of, you know, communicating that it exists, or kind of having a conversation about how you could benefit from it or leverage it. I just

assumed that there is no support available, I just have to get over this. This is a choice that I have made. So just, you know, struggle through, I mean, it's been a conscious decision to do this. But it is also really difficult on a day to day and that's kind of what I'm missing the implementation part of that. I don't know, like, what can be done. I have never had a conversation with course director anyone about the fact if I am a parent, and how that might impact my college work or what I could do to make to relieve some of the stress from that. There's no tutor as far as I know. And so yeah, I'm not seeing any of it in practice in my situation.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy, Lack of Implementation, Accommodations, Lack of Support, Stress, Impact on Academic Performance**

P4: I agree with the others, I felt the same way. Because when I started back over and back as a mature student, I went to try and even see, because I had contacted the college about childcare, because I've seen the creche on campus. On numerous occasions I sent in emails went down to the creche but the doors were never open. Then I got told that it's there, but they didn't have staff to run it. So therefore, they couldn't give it to me. When I went back to college, it was in the year of COVID, we didn't have to go on practice placement. I was up the wall trying to find some sort of childcare, to the extent that I had to contact the College and said "if I can't go, is this gonna go against me?". They were like, "well, yeah, you need to have a finished by a certain time during the summer". I just could not get creche. There was no even information about where I could go, there was no one to even guide me in a different direction. It was just like "sorry, we don't know, you'll have to look for that yourself".

**Codes: Lack of Childcare, Lack of Support, Lack of Information, Impact on Academic Performance**

P2: Finding childcare that needs that flexibility is really difficult, like in the real world, they want it to be in five days a week, you know, it's very costly, it doesn't help.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Childcare, Childcare Costs, Financial Strain**

P4: Even having to try and get back into some of my placements I contacted, we have a clinical practice coordinator. I had contacted and I said to her "look, I can get maybe childcare to cover for three days, can you maybe put me in for the three days? Is there somewhere where I can do three days, long days, instead of short days?" and she was like "no well, like you chose to go back and do this, unfortunately, like we can be shown you any preferences". I'm not looking for you to show me preference, I'm just looking for you to adapt to the situation that you can, you have got the different areas available. It's not like I was looking for any sort of special treatment. When she was so young, I was still breastfeeding and everything and I was looking for somewhere, then when I got there, it was trying to find somewhere where I didn't have to go in and explain every morning that I am breastfeeding, I need somewhere to like store milk or go home and a longer break

that I can go home and drop the milk home, like some sort of leeway. And every time I had to go back in if I was working with different staff, had to go back in explain the situation explain what was going on. They didn't even want to get involved, even if they could have sent an official letter from one like from the college to them to say, "Look, she is what she is". And therefore I didn't have to explain myself every day. And there was no sort of like support there to say, "Well, look, we'll explain it with the manager". That way the manager is aware and something is put in place, I've got to the stage where I was bussing it back and forth to try and drop off milk or meet the lady that was watching my daughter at the time, meeting her halfway to drop off milk and things like that, because that was the only thing I could do. Because when I explained the situation, I was basically told, "well, maybe you should have waited a year or two years".

**Codes: Work Placement, Breastfeeding, Lack of Support, Lack of Understanding, Timing of College Entry, Childcare, Accommodations, Balancing Responsibilities**

P2: That's really frustrating, right? Even the entry or the access to education as a parent is really, really complicated. And if you're, if you're being kind of blamed for like, for trying to do this, it doesn't help or de-stress these things. It doesn't help with the guilt. And like why should, you know, a parent not have the same kind of access to third level education as anybody else? You know, there's simple accommodations that can be made. But it's like I waited like a year, like a decade before I did this, you know, thinking about it that "Oh, when's the right time?" It's never the right time. And I shouldn't really have had to wait until it was the right time. This was something I had to do, but it did kind of keep me away from it for a long time. So even kind of the access, knowing that it's going to be hard, knowing that it's unlikely that you're going to be able to juggle things.

**Codes: Frustration, Stress, Guilt, Accommodations, Equal Access to Education, Timing of Entry to College, Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Support**

P3: It's kind of a situation where you're not local for special treatment. You're just looking for someone to be a little bit compassionate.

**Codes: Empathy, Understanding**

AS: If there were a service for parents and carers, wherein you sign up on enrolment so tutors and lecturers can see your parental and carer status, and you are aware of the available supports, what are your thoughts on this?

P3: That would make everything a lot more smoother, a lot easier. If it's just an automatic service that is given to you that you have access to that you're able to see what accommodations can be made, what facilities are available, what, like, that

would make the most logical sense. Yeah, given the amount of the monumental responsibility of like, you know, trying to raise human beings.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Automatic Parental Recognition, Accommodations, Support**

P2: Yeah, it's having a place within the college to go to, to make it like, tangible. And a, you know, you'll find it easier to find your own way, if something like that was in place, if there's somewhere you could go to give you that like, initial sort of advice, or give you that idea that you hadn't thought of yourself.

**Codes: Support, Accommodations**

P4: Especially with like, the mental side of going back to college. You might have been in or out of school for 15 years, or you might have not been in an educational system for such a long time to step back in, and even the whole system has changed from when you were in education. So even that's a whole culture shock in trying to find "Who can I talk to", "who is available", "who's actually going to listen". especially if you're in school in the 80s, or 90s, you're trying to get a teacher to accommodate you is, it wasn't an experience that was provided ever. that's the thing with mature students going back from around those times, that was built into them for such a long time that it's what you're going to get from someone who is authority in education. So that is also a thing that should be accommodated with, like the automatic system and showing that there is this openness that there is this flexibility.

**Codes: Timing of Entry to College, Generational Differences, Accommodations, Support**

AS: What are your thoughts on staff training and the policy? If there was a specific training day for staff, who would be learning about the experience of carers and parents and how to support them, where students speak for themselves? Do you feel this would be beneficial?

P3: Definitely. Sometimes it isn't necessarily an information thing that like, they just don't know. For anyone I've come to it's never "I'm really sorry I don't know but maybe this person can help", it's always a wall. Like "I don't know, sorry". And you're kinda left thinking, "Well, do you know anyone that I could go to? Do you know where I could go?" So at least if they had some sort of information that they knew where to send people, and everybody was singing from the same hymn sheet.

**Codes: Lack of Information, Limited Policy Awareness, Lack of Support**

P2: Yeah, I think it'd be one of the things that would be really beneficial to really implement that policy is yeah, that needs to be at least in awareness. So you don't you don't encounter those closed doors or like, "I don't know where to send you, what to do with you"

### **Codes: Limited Policy Awareness, Lack of Policy Implementation, Lack of Support**

AS: Have you ever disclosed your parental status with tutors or lecturers, and how did it go?

P3: I didn't know what that was something that you're supposed to make known at the start of term to make things a little smoother, because the only time I really reached out was when it was an emergency. You know, because it's not like you have like a monthly conversation or something like that, to see how you're getting on or what your needs might be, which might be a bit more helpful. Or maybe every six weeks or something to do like a zoom check in with the tutees.

### **Codes: Student Check In, Lack of Support**

P1: Yeah, they do that once, and then they disappear. You never hear from them again.

### **Codes: Lack of Support**

P2: It's funny, like, I would never think of that me being a parent being something I would need to disclose. Like, it's just part of my life, who I am. I can see, you know, where, you know, that would be a good thing because it kind of might raise a flag or like put an asterisk to your name. I think there's a lot to it. You just try to get on with it and struggle through because that's been the experience that you're expecting almost.

### **Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Support**

P1: I think some of the lecturers they seem to have this stance of like, regardless of what your status is, as a parent, they're like, "well, you decided to do the course, you took it on, you knew what the requirements were and you signed up for it". And that's it. So you're gonna have to just go with it, you know? Yeah. They don't want to bend and shape at all, you know, they they just expect you somehow to do it, you know?

### **Codes: Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Understanding, Lack of Flexibility, Academic Requirements**

P2: And like a really practical example, any of the doctoral programs, right? We have an information session, like, I'm only in my first year, but that was a path that, you know, I sort of had considered until I heard sessions. It's like, "okay, there was 15 places that are paid. And there's 200 applicants for these, you need to have a first in all of your subjects. Realistically, you need to have two years of relevant working experience". And when am I going to do this, with everything else that's going on? So that's not that's just not attainable. There's no kind of support and kind of exploring alternative pathways or exploring how you might be able to get there. And,

again, it's not looking for a special treatment, but it's looking for like not to be excluded from an opportunity.

**Codes: Career Guidance, Feasibility of Pathways, Barriers to Advancement, Lack of Support, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: Do you feel like your college experience is different to typical students? And how does this make you feel?

P1: Absolutely like, I haven't been to anything, my social is going to the Buttery for a coffee. Do you know, like, I haven't been part of any social events or any of that experience. And I don't feel like I'm missing out. Like, I don't care, you know. But I'm having a vastly different experience than everyone else, you know, I run home from lecture to get my kids and sort my kids out. You know what I mean? Yeah, it's a very different experience. But I mean, I don't mind.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Absence from Social Events**

P4: The College tried to organise, I think a, a parents evening thing. They organised it at seven o'clock at night. Most of us that have small kids, that's bedtime like, so that was clearly an oversight for everybody. Because the majority of us to have kids under the age of 8, that's bedtime. When we think about anything at seven, half seven, whatever, that is kids' bedtime. So like, they had the overall of saying that "we did try to do something", but in reality that wasn't for any of us, that wasn't going to be accommodating for parents, considering it was supposed to be for us.

**Codes: Lack of Understanding, Lack of Support, Inaccessibility of Social Events**

P2: Yeah, I think the experience is different, I don't feel like I'm missing out. I know why I wanted to do this and that feels really good. Like, I'm grateful for that you know, I can do this. But it's putting such a strain on me, it's putting a strain on my kids, as well as putting a strain on my partner. So that's something you're very aware of. So but it makes you also want to, you know, do your best and do really well. So it's definitely a more a richer college experience than the one I initially did when I was 19, you know?

**Codes: Stress, Balancing Responsibilities, Sense of Purpose, Focus , Grateful**

P3: Yeah, it is extremely contrasting, in situations when you know, like most of the groups are talking about going out for drinks on a Thursday night, and you're sort of like, "okay, I'm gonna go put my kids to bed". And then you hear them about like, well I do personally anyway, I do get a little envious of them talking about how they've so much time to do things. And like even working up until the last minute on assignments, it's like I'm so jealous, you've had even to that time to procrastinate, for that one. That luxury to have that time to procrastinate. Just a different experience.

**Codes: Absence from Social Events, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community, Resentment, Desire to Participate**

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### Informal Carer In-Person Focus Group

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KC: Can you explain what it's like being a student and a carer and what kind of challenges you face?

P1: I feel like it's very time consuming. Before going to college, I used to have more time. But now it's like, okay, I need to prioritise my course. And I also have to go to placement. So it's, you know, there's a lot of things in college. And then when I go home, a lot of the times, I need to help my mom. It was like this before but now it's affecting me more because I don't have as much time. So I feel like I'm more pressured.

**Codes: Time Management, Balancing Responsibilities, Work Placement, Pressure**

P2: For me, first year didn't feel so bad. For some reason I find this year it's a lot, it's more of a struggle. I find it difficult to be able to go into the library and spend time there, because once I'm finished here, whatever time I finish it, I kind of need to go straight home. I have a husband and he doesn't leave the house. So basically, with the exception of hygiene, most things I have to sort of do for him. So I find that affects me. Then trying to study, because he's on his own all day, you're trying to study, and he's coming in trying to have a conversation. So I find that's affecting me, but yet I can't stay. And then there's things going on in college because I'm in a mature students group, they have these things, they organise things, you know, for the mature students, usually in the evening. Yeah, so basically, I don't really attend anything, because I feel I can't leave him.

**Codes: Time Management, Balancing Responsibilities, Disruptions, Limited Study Time, Absence from Social Events, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community, Desire to Participate , Stress**

KC: Regarding the social aspect of college, what are your experiences with this?

P2: Sort of, during the day, you know, the Mature Student mornings, and, you know, I'd meet up with some, you know, from the group. But once I'm finished here, I can't. If my last lecture finishes at four, I can't hang around til seven. I have to go off. So yeah, it affects me. I don't have a social life.

**Codes: Absence from Social Events, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community, Desire to Participate, Lack of Personal Time**



KC: Do you feel this has impacted your college experience?

P2: It does, I don't think I'm in the position to grab everything, even if I wanted to. I can't really blame my husband really either, you know, he would say do you want to go out? I feel guilty then, so I don't go out. I don't really drink, you know, so missing out on pubs doesn't bother me. But it's the fact that I feel I can't go out in the evening, because of how things are.

**Codes: Absence from Social Events, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community, Desire to Participate, Lack of Personal Time, Guilt**

KC: How does that feel, missing out on that social aspect?

P2: I think I'm missing out a fair bit, you know, because I'm missing out on an aspect of college life. I mean, I've had this dream to come to college since I was 25, since I had my first child. And you know, I always swore because I was taken out of school. So rarely, it was something I always wanted to go back to, I never dreamed I'd get to come here but I feel I'm missing out and in certain ways. And like I said, the college lives, you know, kind of going for the college meetings maybe once a month, twice a month, it's not really an option for me.

**Codes: Absence from Social Events, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disconnect from College Community, Desire to Participate**

P1: I can't say that I'm missing on that. I can say sometimes it happens. Maybe if my mom needs me, then I need to prioritise her over maybe social meeting, friends, and stuff like that. So sometimes it does happen. And that's fine. But I'm not like missing out a lot.

**Codes: Absence from Social Events, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: Do you feel that there is a physical and mental burden that comes with being a carer? Can you explain what this is like for you?

P2: Definitely. Yeah. For me, the physical part for me is because I have medical problems of my own. You know, that sort of that has that strain on me. Then mentally, because I'm constantly having to think about my husband. Yeah, you know, so it takes us toll on me. It definitely takes its toll and it's very draining. And then it's affecting your study and it's affecting you. You know, trying to do your work, you know, trying to do your assignments and things like that. So yeah, it has definitely affected me. It's only in the last year that I've discovered that I have my own physical problems. But definitely stress is a factor. I don't suffer with depression or anything like that. But yeah, I do find that it can be quite stressful. And then, you know, when you go home, trying to do sort of housework even, I find that physically and mentally

it's becoming a bit of a strain. So that worries me, in terms of making it through this year.

**Codes: Stress, Exacerbation of Health Issues from Stress, Impact on Academic Performance, Concerns of Falling Behind**

P1: Yes, I agree with this. For me, it's not physical, but it's more of a mental thing. Because a lot of the times, like if my mom needs help, let's say she needs to make an appointment, I need to call and make an appointment for her. She needs to go somewhere. I need to go with her. So anything that has to do with her personal maybe personal business will also have to do with my personal business. Because I'm the one bringing her translating for her. It does really sometimes stress me mentally. Because sometimes, I feel like she doesn't think about my priorities, which is college at the moment. And sometimes I feel like she's just, you know, ignoring this, I have things to do things to study for, and then she just expects me maybe to be with her. So yeah, definitely mentally.

**Codes: Stress, Feeling overlooked, Balancing Responsibilities, Limited Study Time, Strain of Caregiving**

KC: Are there any advantages you feel you have as a carer and student?

P1: Helping, I guess, altruism.

**Codes: Altruism**

P2: Trying to think how I feel about it. I mean, I don't think there's any advantages. This is something I've, I've been doing for years, you know, while working. Yeah. So yeah, there's no real kind of advantage. You know, I'm still in the same position I was in 10 years ago when I was working.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: Can you tell us a little about your academic performance, do you feel its impacted by your caring responsibilities?

P2: Personally, I haven't done too badly, in all fairness. I honestly feel my grades could be a lot better. But I also feel that's part of that's partly to do with the fact I was taken out of school at 15. So I think that had an effect in itself, of course, doesn't do a lot for your self-esteem, when you have that longer gap. But my grades are okay, so far, this year is okay. Not too sure from the rest of the semester. I think I have improved, like they have improved a little bit now kind of in this year. So for me, even, you know, one up is an improvement. So yeah, I haven't done too badly considering.

**Codes: Impact on Academic Performance, Improvement of Grades**

P1: No, not really. For me, it's okay. I've managed my time in a good way. So I study whatever I have to study so I'm quite happy. But I only started doing this like a few months after I started college because I had to realise, okay, how can I manage everything you know. So I struggled a little at first, but then with my final exams or final assignments, then it was fine.

**Codes: Time Management, Adaptations**

KC: Do you think there's any specific resources or assistance that Trinity could give you that would help you balance your home responsibilities and college?

P2: For me, it would be maybe occasionally to have the option of the lectures being recorded. Sometimes, you know, you can download the slides. But they're not really recorded. Definitely, I think that would, for me would be a help. And also, because I have additional health issues, I often find it hard to concentrate throughout lectures. I miss what's being said, and I can't remember. Now, I do have the ability to record, but I have to be here to record it. If I'm, if I'm ill, or I have a hospital appointment, you know, I have no way of knowing what the last lecture said, sometimes what the lecturer says is as important as the slides, because you're learning more from what he's saying. So something like that, for me would be a help.

**Codes: Impact on Mental Ability, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Absence, Impact on Academic Performance, Lack of Flexibility**

P1: I agree with what participant 2 said, I think it would be good if we had the option. There are some lectures that are pre-recorded online. But a lot of them are like big, big lectures, and they're in the class and it should just be another option. And but one of the things that I really appreciate is how many libraries there are in Trinity. So that's pretty good, because the main one is very busy most of the time. So if, if that one is busy, then I could just go to the other ones.

**Codes: Appreciation of Facilities, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Lack of Flexibility**

AS: Are you aware of Trinity's parent and carer support policy?

P1 & P2: No

**\*Students are then given 5 minutes to read the policy briefly\***

AS: What are your thoughts on the policy?

P2: So I know I can get disability help now, because I have accommodations. You know if I need to I can get an extension, you know, for medical reasons. Yeah. But I mean, I'd never think to go to my tutor. I'd never expect help due to you know, these kind of responsibilities as home because I mean, I'm very lucky and I chose to come.

### Codes: Gratitude, Accommodations

AS: Do you think there should be something similar for carers? A service similar to the disability service?

P2: Yeah, I think so. Now, I don't know what type of service but I feel maybe there could be something. For me, it would be the option, say, you know, on the day where I'm sort of struggling, and I know, I really feel that I can't go in and face college on that day that I have the option of recording. To me, that would be, you know, the perfect thing.

### Codes: Accommodations, Access to Support, Streaming/Recording of Lectures

AS: Now that you are aware of the policy, is this enough to support you, do you feel, or could more be done?

P1: I feel like it would have been useful to know this since I started college. Yeah, the policy is really good. And the fact that they have it is good. It's just if I wasn't going to come here to this focus group, I wouldn't have known.

### Codes: Lack of Information, Limited Awareness of Policy

AS: If there was a specific training day where lecturers and tutors gain insight into the experiences of students with caring responsibilities, what are your opinions on this?

P1: It would be good, yeah

P2: Yeah, it would put them up to speed for what it's like for these students. A lot of the lecturers are not very engaging. Or sometimes after a lecture, you might be looking to go up to ask for something, you know, ask him something to him or her or something very specific about, you know, maybe what you're doing. And there's already a gang of people waiting to talk to them. But to make the lecturers aware that, you know, there is a case for me for recording lectures.

### Codes: Support from Lecturers, Accommodations, Lack of Understanding, Streaming/Recording of Lectures

AS: Do you feel that the college has a good awareness surrounding students with caring responsibilities, could they be better supported?

P1: I have a lot of friends who maybe are in the same situation because of the language barrier. Yeah, it will be useful to just maybe have a general knowledge of the support and the different policies and training it has, because I know there are so

many of them, but I heard about the disability. About the financial ones, but not this. If there was a service, I think my friends and I would use it.

**Codes: Lack of Information, Limited Awareness of Policy, Access to Support**

AS: Have you informed your tutors of your carer status and if not, is there a reason why you didn't?

P1: I just felt like no one really asked, it was never mentioned. So why, you know, I don't like saying it without any reason.

P2: No I didn't, I don't know if I'd feel comfortable sharing it.

P1: I wouldn't mind at all, as long as it stays private.

**Codes: Reluctance to Disclose, Privacy Concerns**

AS: Have you had to miss lectures or class and how did this make you feel?

P2: I haven't had to miss many, only one, but that was because of a medical problem, not because of being a carer.

**Codes: Attendance**

P1: I think maybe once or twice, I had to once I think was for my mom to bring her somewhere. And then another time it was for my mom and brother. I felt like it was the right thing to do. Because I knew that I was helping my family. So I didn't feel guilty or anything, you know, and I don't really miss class. So it's okay. I'm not trying to have a perfect attendance. So it's fine if I miss it once in a while. And like for us a lot of the times like the lectures, they just read from the slides. So for me, it's not really a lot of difference. I never missed a tutorial.

**Codes: Attendance**

AS: How do you feel about the timetabling, are there any issues for you regarding this and your caring responsibilities?

P1: We did ask about this, about recording the classes, because also like other people were saying, Okay, well, maybe I have work or I have kids or I have this and that and they just said, is this is a full time course. So we should adapt to the way the course is.

**Codes: Lack of Flexibility, Attendance, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Timetabling**

P2: I don't see what the lecturers could do, even if you did approach them about this, to be perfectly honest. With timetabling, it's hard to accommodate everyone. For me,

it would be recording. \*gestures towards participant 1\* For you, you said the slides tell it all, but for me we need the lecturer to explain.

**Codes: Timetabling, Streaming/Recording of Lectures, Impact on Academic Performance**

AS: Is there anything you would like to add?

P1: I just think for me and many of my friends, the parents are from another country and they're older, they don't want to learn the language, so they rely on the children and it's just a lot of pressure. They expect the child to be smarter than them, it's a lot of stress. And it's not just me, I've discussed this with my friends too.

**Codes: Stress, Feeling Overlooked, Balancing Responsibilities**

P2: I just wanted to say thanks, it's a relief to be able to talk about this.

**Codes: Gratitude**

### Student-Parent In-Person Focus Group

KC: Can you tell me what it's like being a parent and a student? What kind of challenges you face?

P1: I suppose the difficulties I have is that everyone still lives with me. And sleepless nights are a pattern. Yeah. And I just find it hard to get into the zone sometime, when especially when you're given like seven assignments to have to be handed in within a week. Yeah, it's just an overall kind of challenge, I think. Because when you come back as a mature student, it kind of.... well, I know from my personal experience coming back as a mature student, like I waited until they were old enough, for me to do this. I just feel like it's been more hassle. Because they were finishing school themselves and getting into trouble in school and then grandkids came along. Yeah. So it's just been hard to engage.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Difficulties Focusing, Sleep Deprivation, Timing of Entry to College, Stress**

P2: For me, like participant 1, I waited until mine were older to come to college. But having been a full time mammy for 20 years, they haven't quite grasped the fact the fact that I'm not available to them 24 hours a day anymore. So when I sit at home to write or to study, I will be interrupted repeatedly to drive people or, and we live remotely. So yeah, like it's not like any my teenagers can go anywhere without me. Yeah. And then with my daughter playing football in another county, my husband's just started a new job and has to commute too. So he literally gets home and has a

15 minute window to eat before he goes out. I'm kind of expected to have a dinner on the table for having travelled two hours from college to home. And yeah, it's a bit wearing but it's nearly the end of third year and I've survived this far.

**Codes: Balancing Responsibilities, Commuting, Limited Study Time, Disruptions, Exhaustion**

KC: Do you think there's a physical and mental burden that comes with being a parent on the student?

P1: Absolutely. Yeah, definitely.

KC: Can you describe a little bit further like what kind of physical burden you experience?

P1: Yeah, I mean, sometimes you'd forget to eat so you end up sick and sleep deprivation as well. Do you know what I mean? Sometimes you're worried and, yeah, running around like headless chicken. Sometimes I have severe impostor syndrome because I just feel like I don't belong. Yeah. Even after doing the foundation course and getting to third year, I still feel like I don't belong. See, you have that added stress on top of your home environment that you're trying to micromanage. And then it's tough. It is tough.

**Codes: Stress, Imposter Syndrome, Impact on Eating, Impact on Sleep, Sleep Deprivation**

P2: I can absolutely empathise about that. The constant commute, I usually get a bit headachy. My own children have finally got appointments for CAHMS, I have been waiting on that for two years. So I'm trying to deal with that as well. The stress of it, yeah, I suffer. When I'm very stressed, I get a lot of neck and shoulder pain and headaches. So yeah, I have to carry paracetamol in my bag.

**Codes: Aches and Pains, Headaches, Stress, Commuting, Interplay between Physical and Mental Health**

KC: What about your own mental health? Do you feel like that's been affected?

P2: It has, yeah

P1: 100%

KC: Do you think there's any advantages to being both a parent and a student?

P2: I do because with the course I am doing, I eventually want to teach at secondary level. Yeah. And having, you know, got five children to the age. Yeah. I feel like I have more of a holistic view of how children should be taught, I feel like I have better connection. Being a parent to five very different teenagers, I think will prepare me for

this. It also means that I'm used to being surrounded by a group that are the same age as my classmates. You know what I mean? So I don't really, I know, some mature students feel a bit awkward. Yeah, she's the only one in a small group, whatever. I think I'm just kind of used to that. So it doesn't bother me.

### **Codes: Better Understanding, Relatability**

P1: Definitely, like I can put myself into their shoes I know where they're coming from, having to stay and listen and learn and focus and be at class at a certain time. And I definitely think I've been more easygoing, like, if my child forgot something you know, general, like silly things, but they have a ripple effect on the family. Yeah, I suppose that would be probably a silly little things to someone else, to me it's huge. I mean, like, if things don't kind of fit in your daily plan.

### **Codes: Better Understanding, Relatability, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: What about your academics? Do you think that you've learned any skills from parenting that are transferable?

P2: I think time management, yeah, is definitely something that you sort of become second nature, especially within the big family. I don't know about you, but my house is like an army regiment, like, just so that we can get everything done and seen to be very...not rigid, but quite solid routine. So yeah, I'm used to knowing that, you know, this has to be done by this time. And this is when I need to start.

### **Codes: Time Management Skills, Balancing Responsibilities**

KC: What about the social aspect of college, do you feel like you're able to partake in that? Are you a part of any societies?

P2: I'm with the mature student society. And I'm a student mentor this year as well. I try to get to social events, but I would miss out on quite a lot. But it's not just because of my parental responsibilities, it's because of the distance.

### **Codes: Absence from Social Events, Desire to Participate, Commuting**

P1: I'm just here to learn. I have 21-year-olds in my class, and I've got kids older than that.

### **Codes: Differentiation Between Younger and Older Students**

KC: Regarding academic performance, do you feel being a parent affects your grades?

P1: I think the overall stress, I mean, it didn't affect my grades to the point of failing, I'm still here. Yeah, grateful to be here, I'm humbled to be here. Yeah. For me, I know



how lucky I am. But could I do better? If my environment was different, absolutely yeah, that would go without saying, from my personal opinion.

**Codes: Stress, Impact on Academic Performance, Gratitude**

P2: I'm doing better than I thought I would do. But at the same time, I do sometimes wonder. Like, if I could actually get time to study without being interrupted. Would I achieve higher? I don't know. There's no way of knowing.

**Codes: Impact on Academic Performance, Disruptions, Limited Study Time**

KC: Do you think there's any specific resources or assistance that the college could offer you that would help you balance your responsibilities at home, and your academics?

P2: This is something I've been thinking about since I agreed to come to this. Yeah. And I haven't been able to come up with anything. Because for me, I think the biggest obstacle is the distance. And I chose this college knowing that that was going to be far. So that's down to me. That's not down to the fact that I'm a parent. It's nothing that the college can fix. I could have gone to a close to college, but I was only going to get to do this once. So I was coming to Trinity.

**Codes: Commuting**

KC: Would lectures being recorded or streamed help you, do you think?

P2: I mean, the lectures that were difficult for me to get to last year were recorded, and it did help. Yeah. So I was able to do that. But this year the structure of my courses is different so with every module it's like a seminar, it's part lecture part tutorial. It's interactive all the way through so it wouldn't work.

**Codes: Streaming/Recording of Lectures**

P1: For my course, we have to check in to every lecture, using an app on our phone, you connect with Bluetooth. We have like 80% attendance, so we have no choice but to be face-to-face. We can't check in online, I don't think it's applicable. I know one of the girls in my class had medical issues, she's mature and has kids. Even she was told like that your full medical note is not going to be taken into consideration. You need to be present, or you have to repeat the semester.

**Codes: Attendance, Academic Requirements, Lack of Flexibility, Lack of Support**

AS: This next part is regarding policies for student-parents and caregivers. How familiar are you with the student policy for the support policy?

**\*Both students look at us blankly, shaking their heads\***

AS: It's okay. I will send you both a link which directs you to the policy. You can take a look and read the policy briefly.

**\*Recording stopped while both students read TCD policy for 5 mins\***

AS: Now that you have read the policy, do you think that it is enough to support you as a parent or more can be done to ensure this?

P2: I thought it seems fairly comprehensive. And in fairness, it's all done through your tutor. I was aware that I could approach a tutor if you had any kind of an issue. But that was actually my daughter, who attended Trinity, who made me aware of this. I think that was because of COVID as well, I didn't have an orientation session. As a student mentor. I put it in emails to my mentees just in case, yeah, if they had any kind of an issue that, you know. I've kind of outlined situations in which they should contact the tutor and advise them to contact a tutor in the first week or two so that they have some contact.

**Codes: Access to Support, Approachability of Tutor**

P1: Yeah, it looks great.

AS: You weren't aware of it, as a parent. So how do you feel about the dissemination and implementation of the policy?

P1: Maybe it's not implemented fully? I think there's an awful lot that's just spoke? Yeah. You know, it's very much around your own boat. When you come into Trinity.

**Codes: Policy Implementation, Lack of Support, Self-Reliance**

AS: Do you feel lecturers have a good knowledge of the policy?

P1: I don't know, I presume only the policymakers really know the policy.

**Codes: Limited Awareness of Policy**

P2: I'm inclined to assume that, you know, when you come to college, you're an adult. So you kind of look after yourself, that kind of thing.

**Codes: Self-Reliance**

AS: How do you feel about contacting your tutor, if you had any issues?

P2: I have had to contact my tutor once since I got here but it wasn't related to my children. A family member had passed away in the middle of exam season. I didn't need anything in the end, I just let my tutor in case.

AS: Did you find them to be supportive?

P2: Yes, my tutors are fantastic. But I know a lot of my classmates have said like, they've emailed their tutor several times, and never had a response.

**Codes: Approachability of Tutor, Support**

P1: I reached out to mine before when I was looking for an extension on an assignment. Like we had to do a 14 week placement, I was working there full time. I think it was too late when I asked him. I didn't find them very supportive.

**Codes: Approachability of Tutor, Lack of Flexibility, Lack of Support, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams**

P2: My experience might be slightly different, because I'm also on the disability service. I contacted my tutor when I first got here, in first year. And I actually met her in her office. So I've actually sat and spoken to her so I feel okay about contacting her and I know she'll get back to me straight away.

**Codes: Approachability of Tutor, Support**

P1: That's something I've noticed, I think if you are in Trinity and you have a disability, you are looked after.

AS: If there was a service, similar to that of the disability service, where you sign up to say that you're a parent or caregiver, what are your thoughts on this?

P1: There should be a service for parents. I mean the TAP program is all about mature students coming back. They want to be more inclusive, but aren't being more inclusive? Because there is nowhere for us to go. Like, if there was a service like that. I mean, I reached out for support with the student counselling service recently and they were like, we won't be able to see it until June or July. Then my semester is done, and my imposter syndrome has not gotten any easier. For the first time I actually reached out for help and it's like, sorry, no. I think if there was a service where people knew what people were going through, with no judgement or expectations. No, "you have to be this this this to get in". Have a service where people can just go and be heard or go and sit for a few minutes by themselves. Because parents when you get home, you're flat out. Like if the kids want something, you're a taxi, a chef, ATM, you're refereeing, you're the dog walker. It'd be nice to have a service where you don't have to be admitted. You could just be yourself. You can just be.

**Codes: Lack of Support, Overwhelm, Diversity of College Community, Equal Access to Support, Disconnect from College Community, Inclusivity**

P2: I get that from the Mature Student Society. Which is it student led, student run. It is part of college, but it's not built by the college. And we go over coffee mornings for two hours over the atrium. We're all in the same boat. And we've often had

discussions about impostor syndrome of people who are a year ahead of you and your course will talk to you about it and feel a bit better than to know what I mean. I have had a good time there.

**Codes: Gratitude, Appreciation for Existing Supports , Identity as a Mature Student**

AS: How do you feel about the timetabling in college? The semesters often don't align with school midterms, is this an issue for you?

P2: My kids were off last week on midterm. Yeah, but mine is a bit older. There is always the concern, like when you're on the way home, is the house still going to be in one piece? Or if they've gone out, have they locked front door?

**Codes: Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Stress, Balancing Responsibilities**

P1: Same for me, Yeah. Did they turn everything off, is the straightener beeping?

**Codes: Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Stress, Balancing Responsibilities**

AS: What about the timetabling of events, how do you feel about this?

P1: For events and stuff, yeah, don't get me wrong. It seems to me like Trinity is run on Trinity's schedule and nobody else's. I don't mean that they should suit me, I don't mean that at all. Well, I think the policymakers are not in our shoes, they don't understand.

**Codes: Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Exclusion/Isolation, Inaccessibility of Events**

P2: There's still a whiff of elitism isn't there?

**Codes: Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Exclusion/Isolation**

P1: Yeah, it's like we want to be seen to be inclusive. But we're not inclusive.

**Codes: Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Exclusion/Isolation**

AS: You don't think they are as inclusive as they portray?

P1: Yeah, 100%. Even with my impostor syndrome like I'm from the north inner city. Even this campus was like a no go territory, only posh people, wealthy people came here. Yeah. When I was growing up that was just how we felt. It just seems like elitism is still here. The security man asked me one day where I was going, obviously he heard me speak. I don't know. He asked me if I was going to the book of Kells. So

that was when I was only in first year. It's not nice. So yeah, it's just one of those things and I don't think Trinity is going to change. That's what it is. That's what we signed up for.

**Codes: Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Exclusion/Isolation, Diversity of College Community, Desire for Inclusion, Questioning Belonging**

AS: If there was a specific training day that made lecturers and tutors aware of the experiences of parents, what are you opinion on this?

P1: Definitely. I believe in seeing and hearing the real stories, not second-hand, third-hand, or waiting for research papers to be conducted and carried out and then passed and shared. You're waiting years for things to be published. And then it's like resourcing the paper, like and then it's like, finding out about the paper and the policies, and then it's feedback. It just takes forever. Just listen, do you know what I mean?

**Codes: Lack of Information, Limited Awareness of Policy, Understanding**

P2: Yeah, just kind of on a similar theme. In the second semester of first year I had a timetable issue. And I wanted to move a tutorial, but I didn't know who to contact. I contacted the tutorial leader, I just, I didn't want to sort of play on the facts. I didn't want to be like "oh, make allowances for me because I have this going on". I just sent an email saying, "this time doesn't suit me as possible to switch this other time". And he said, "You'll have to ask the lecturer". I asked the lecturer and another very snotty email back saying that "the college are not in the habit of changing people's timetables, just because it didn't suit them". So I was like, Okay, right. It happened again in second year. And this time I emailed and I said, "look, I'm a mature student, I have family at home, and I commute to college. This tutorial is or this class is going to be a real difficulty for me is possible switch to this other class?" And they were like, "Oh, that's no problem". So maybe it's just that I'm too proud?

**Codes: Lack of Information, Lack of Support, Lack of Flexibility, Understanding, Accommodations, Reluctance to Disclose, Timetabling**

AS: Do you often have to miss lectures or classes due to your responsibilities? How does this make you feel?

P1: Yeah, I've missed a couple but not like many. Like participant 2, mine are older, otherwise I would have struggled. I was on placement from August to December, when my granddaughter was born. A couple of times I was late to placement, and that was reported, like, jotted down. It was just so annoying because I literally done a full-time job for free. It is annoying, but I'm not asking for allowances, but like seeing that wrote about you. it's annoying.

**Codes: Attendance, Balancing Responsibilities, Time Management Challenges, Frustration, Work Placement, Conflicting Priorities**

AS: Do you feel as though you shouldn't receive allowances at all?

P1: Why should I? I don't have a disability. There's a lack of support. If you have to get something submitted by 12am or 5pm and you're in class from like, nine to four all week. My weekends are out on the sideline, like yourself on the sideline or minding my granddaughter. My granddaughter is autistic and she's not-verbal, so I can't leave her alone. I don't want an allowance as such, just like have a little understanding or empathy or something.

**Codes: Lack of Support, Deadlines, Balancing Responsibilities, Conflicting Priorities, Lack of Personal Time, Limited Study Time, Time Management Challenges**

AS: Are any of your lecturers aware that you're a parent and have they been understanding?

P1: A few are aware, but I wouldn't ask them for anything.

**Codes: Self-Reliance, Lack of Support**

P2: I haven't had to bring it up. I guess I've been lucky. And then this year, my actual on campus hours are quite small. Like, kids appointments and stuff can be made around my hours.

AS: Is there anything else you would like to add?

P1: I joined the community mentoring and stuff because I wanted to give back. In the first year I started the community mentoring and the library tours. I didn't get an orientation or anything because of Covid so like I didn't know where anything was or anything, I was so overwhelmed. I was expelled from school like when I was 14 and here I was, so I didn't want anybody else to have that overwhelming feeling of walking in. You have to register with the college for the tours and you get paid. I got paid for five tours and then my welfare got stopped and the revenue was on to me saying I was employed by Trinity College Dublin. Even when I offered the support it was like I was being punished.

**Codes: Sense of Altruism, Desire to Inspire Others, Positive Role Model, Overwhelm, Lack of Support, Financial Strain**

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## Appendix T.2 – Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-Themes	Code
Time Management	Hybrid Learning, Attendance, Balancing Responsibilities, Limited Study Time and Rushing Assignments, Commuting, Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar, Timing of Entry to College	Balancing Responsibilities, Attendance, Limited Study Time, Need for Arrangements, Time Management Challenges, Lack of Flexibility, Work Placement, Conflicting Priorities, Lecture Streaming/Recording, Absence of Boundaries, Rushing Assignments, Lack of Personal Time, Deadlines, Impact of Housing Crisis, Commuting, Misalignment between Academic Calendar and School Calendar, Timing of Entry to College, Timetabling
Emotional Strain	Imposter Syndrome, Mental Exhaustion and Overwhelm, Burnout and Strain of Caregiving, Pressure and Guilt, Stress and Anxiety	Balancing Responsibilities, Lack of Personal Time, Frustration, Stress, Anxiety, Mental Exhaustion, Overwhelm, Pressure, Guilt, Burnout, Strain of Caregiving, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Disappointment, Shame, Concerns of Falling Behind, Questioning Belonging, Concern for Children's Wellbeing, Generational Differences, Feeling Overlooked, Imposter Syndrome

Physical Strain	Impact on Sleep, Impact on Eating Habits, Interplay between Physical and Mental Health, Aches and Pains, Cardiovascular Issues, Impact on Mental Ability	Sleep Deprivation, Impact on Sleep Habits, Impact on Eating Habits, Impact on Exercise, Fatigue, Interplay between Physical and Mental Health, Burnout, Impact on Mental Ability , Fainting, Cardiovascular Issues, Rundown, Back Pain, Arthritis , Exacerbation of Health Issues from Stress, Aches and Pains, Headaches
Financial Pressure	Childcare Costs, Lack of Financial Support	Financial Strain, Lack of Financial Support, Childcare Costs, Unpaid Work Placement, Working
Academic Performance	Limited Study Time and Rushing Assignments, Disruptions, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams, Attendance	Impact on Academic Performance, Limited Study Time, Attendance, Lecture Streaming/Recording, Rushing Assignments, Impact on Mental Ability, Struggle to Manage Workload, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams, Balancing Workload, Deadlines, Concerns of Falling Behind, Academic Requirements, Academic Disadvantage, Disruptions, Improvement of Grades, Difficulties Focusing



Positive Aspects	Inspiring Others, Altruism, Focus, Gratitude, Adaption	Sense of Altruism, Resilience, Desire to Inspire Others, Adaption, Positive Role Model, Fostering a Learning Environment, Life Experience, Focus, Self-Importance, Sense of Purpose, Appreciation of Facilities, Gratitude, Better Understanding, Relatability, Time Management Skills, Appreciation for Existing Supports
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Policy Implications	Awareness, Implementation, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams, Equal Access to Support, Diversity of College Community, Accommodations, Approachability of Tutor,	Awareness Through Trinity-INC, Limited Awareness of Policy, Lack of Support, Advocacy for Additional Support, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams, Lack of Implementation, Accommodations, Representation, Appreciation for Existing Support, Medical Documentation Required, Resistance to Accept Help (Recipient of Care), Approachability of Tutor, Deadlines, Challenges with School's Decision, Representation, Timetabling, Accommodations, Advocacy for Young Caregivers, Diversity of College Community, Equal Access to Support, Assumptions of Young Students, Barriers to Support, Challenges with Navigating the Policy, Lack of Relevancy, Automatic Parental Identification, Equal Access to Education
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Access to Support	Lack of Flexibility, Self-Reliance, Childcare, Accommodations, Advocacy, Lack of Information	Lack of Support, Medical Documentation Required, Approachability of Tutor, Deadlines, Challenges with School's Decision, Lack of Flexibility, Lack of Formal Arrangement, Accommodations, Advocacy, Limited Awareness of Policy, Course Specific Understanding, Advocacy for Additional Support, Flexibility of Assignments/Exams, Resistance, Differentiation between Needs and Choices, Understanding, Empathy, Lack of Childcare, Breastfeeding, , Lack of Trust between Lecturers and Students, Support from Lecturers, Lack of Information, Stigmatization, Reluctance to Disclose, Privacy Concerns, Self-Reliance
Impact on Career and Future Plans	Career, Family Planning, Timing of Entry to College	Timing of Entry to College, Family Planning, Career Guidance, Feasibility of Pathways, Barriers to Advancement

Underrepresentation of Students with Caring Responsibilities	Disconnect from College Community, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Diversity of College Community, Inaccessibility of College Events,	Disconnect from College Community, Lack of Understanding, Lack of Care, Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion, Lack of Personal Time, Identity as a Parent, Identity as a Mature Student, Diversity of Student Population, Resentment, Inaccessibility of College Events, Desire to Participate, Differentiation, between Younger and Older Students, Advocacy for Young Caregivers, Diversity of College Community, Desire for Inclusion, Questioning Belonging, Absence from Social Events
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### Appendix T.3 – Sub Themes and Quotes

Sub-Theme	Quotations
Hybrid Learning	<p>"For me, it would be maybe occasionally to have the option of the lectures being recorded. Sometimes, you know, you can download the slides. But they're not really recorded. Definitely, I think that would, for me would be a help"</p> <p>"It would be the option, say, you know, on the day where I'm sort of struggling, and I know, I really feel that I can't go in and face college on that day that I have the option of recording. To me, that would be, you know, the perfect thing."</p>
Attendance	<p>"I remember I couldn't go, I was bringing my mom to a hospital appointment and I got a really, well it wasn't a nice email. It was like, very forward like "please explain your absence"</p>
Balancing Responsibilities	<p>"The guilt that I have in coming here, because it's always a trade-off, and for the most part, that's me, and the house, and everything. Though I have to balance the caring responsibilities with college, and nothing else matters"</p>
Limited Study Time and Rushing Assignments	<p>"When I'm in college that's my one time to study since when I go home I have those responsibilities. So it limits me how much I can study"</p> <p>"and then when assignments come around, you just generally tend to be rushing them"</p>

Misalignment between Academic and School Calendar	"The other biggest challenge I found over the years is the fact that they don't coincide the holidays, the reading weeks, and holidays with midterms, and you know, the holidays with the school in schools"
Timing of Entry to College	"But it's like I waited like a year, like a decade before I did this, you know, thinking about it that "Oh, when's the right time?" It's never the right time"
Imposter Syndrome	"Sometimes I have severe impostor syndrome because I just feel like I don't belong"
Mental Exhaustion and Overwhelm	"the mental thing of trying to, I think fit everything in and keep everything together. can be very draining, exhausting"
Burnout and Strain of Caregiving	"I burnt out a Christmas, and I haven't been able to come back from that, to be honest with you. So it's affected this semester, in a big way"
Pressure and Guilt	<p>"And I feel then the pressure to be typical student and the guilt I feel then when I'm not a typical student"</p> <p>"I feel really guilty when I have to do my work, and I can't sit there and do their homework and things with them."</p>
Stress and Anxiety	<p>"It's stressful, and it's really hard to get the balance and everything, you know"</p> <p>"feel pressure to catch up. I feel guilty because I'm not there. And, and almost, like, feel ashamed a little bit that I am not able to attend, like, say the typical student and I feel quite anxious about the whole situation"</p>

Impact on Sleep	"I think it's more sleep deprivation, in my case, that's gradually building up. It's because you're trying to get your reading done but it has to happen when the kids go to bed, you know, so you're late, and then you go to bed late, you're up early again"
Impact on Eating Habits	"I mean, I'm prioritise studying over eating sometimes"
Interplay between Physical and Mental Health	"When I'm very stressed, I get a lot of neck and shoulder pain and headaches. So yeah, I have to carry paracetamol in my bag"
Aches and Pains	"If I started to fall behind even remotely, I started to get tension all around my back and chest. I have arthritis in my hands as well, so I get like, inflamed"
Cardiovascular Issues	"I passed out in campus last year, from like blood pressure and heart issues, but like, it comes on from stress, you know, the trying to run around constantly"
Impact on Mental Ability	"I often find it hard to concentrate throughout lectures. I miss what's being said, and I can't remember"
Childcare Costs	"you end up not being able to go to college, because you have to look after your children because you can't afford to pay for the childcare"
Lack of Financial Support	"my kids were in creche for the last semester, for the whole semester. It cost me 500 quid a month and there's no support or services there to help you with any of that, you know"
Disruptions	"Then trying to study, because he's on his own all day, you're trying to study,

	and he's coming in trying to have a conversation"
Flexibility of Assignments/Exams	"In particular, the one where we can have flexibility in the way of the supplementals can be classed as our first attempt, which I tell you what, to me, I would be able to come up for air at that point"
Inspiring Others	"Yeah, it's a really positive thing to show that your children but you're doing this and that, like, especially as mature students that, you know, this is an option for them to go on and do something like this?"
Altruism	"Like, I mean, if you're taking care of family, I mean, you kind of feel obliged or you feel like this is it you know, you're doing something good"
Focus	"Less distractions. You kind of have your focus, like you have your studies, and you have your kids and like your home life as your focus"
Gratitude	"I'm humbled to be here. Yeah. For me, I know how lucky I am"
Adaption	"I've gotten a bit better at it. I made a lot of mistakes during the first semester. I was able to find new ways to adapt and figure stuff out"
Policy Awareness	"I think firstly, the policy isn't really put out there, because I sure have never heard of it. Like, I don't think from what it sounds like anyone else did either"
Policy Implementation	"Maybe it's not implemented fully? I think there's an awful lot that's just spoke? Yeah. You know, it's very much around your own boat. When you come into Trinity."



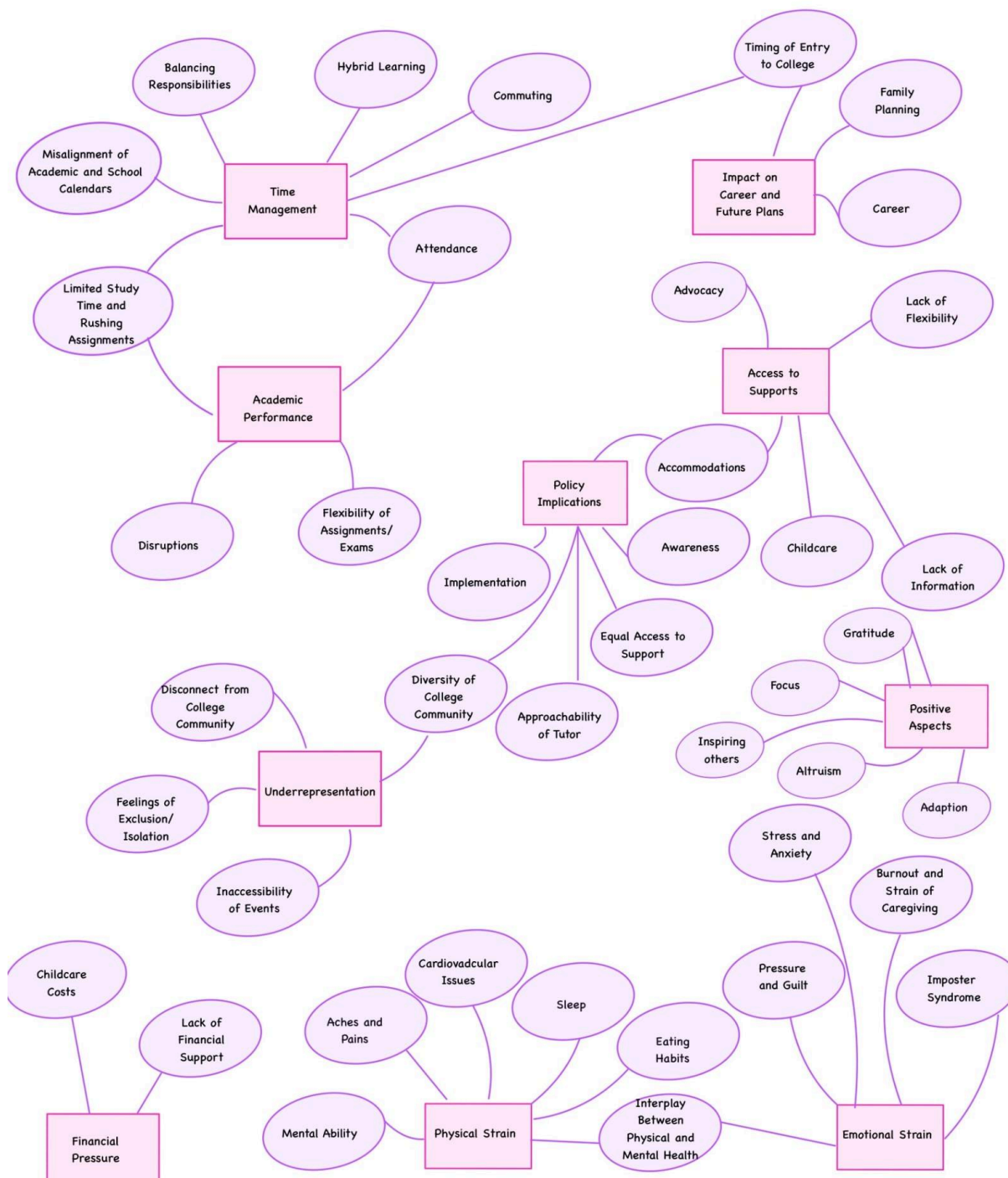
Equal Access to Support	"And like why should, you know, a parent not have the same kind of access to third level education as anybody else? You know, there's simple accommodations that can be made"
Diversity of College Community	"I always saw myself as different because I'm a mature student and I'm a parent. I do think that you can have this idea in your head of a typical student, but I do believe that everybody has stuff going on at home, that can be challenging on the student role"
Accommodations	"I'm fighting to be seen as a parents and to be seen as a carer, Yet in the charter for being a parent and a carer, there are supposed to be provisions made for us. Now I've reached out on several occasions to different people asking for these provisions to be enacted. And I've been stonewalled."
Approachability of Tutor	<p>"And, yeah, like, I'm lucky, I have a very approachable tutor. And I haven't needed to get in touch with her very often"</p> <p>"Yes, my tutors are fantastic. But I know a lot of my classmates have said like, they've emailed their tutor several times, and never had a response"</p>
Lack of Flexibility	"Placement is really challenging, because I don't have the flexibility of the college timetable, and that might necessarily start at 10. Whereas placement is like a full-time job for 12 weeks, where I have to be there on time and finish and that's extremely challenging"

Childcare	"because I had contacted the college about childcare, because I've seen the creche on campus. On numerous occasions I sent in emails went down to the creche but the doors were never open. Then I got told that it's there, but they didn't have staff to run it"
Self-Reliance	"I'm inclined to assume that, you know, when you come to college, you're an adult. So you kind of look after yourself, that kind of thing."
Lack of Information	"There was no even information about where I could go, there was no one to even guide me in a different direction. It was just like "sorry, we don't know, you'll have to look for that yourself".
Advocacy	"At the moment I'm in talks with the student support officer, she is advocating for us to be seen and heard, and to have the accommodations that are outlined in the charter, for us"
Career	"And then, specifically for me, because I'm like, also a mature student that, you know, I am very aware that I have to gain experience in this field, like, any kind of support in terms of like career guidance, or just a conversation with somebody about, you know, what pathways are there that are suitable or that are feasible?"
Family Planning	"People are kind of going "oh, you should have waited", but if I wait till later, that would potentially mean I was gonna have to put on hold having another child."

Disconnect from College Community	<p>"One of the things I struggle with is I don't feel like I'm included in the college community, because I miss out for, you know, for being a carer."</p> <p>"it's like we want to be seen to be inclusive. But we're not inclusive."</p>
Feelings of Isolation/Exclusion	<p>"genuinely my college experience isn't what I expected it to be. Because I don't feel included. And that's genuinely down to being carer as well as a student"</p>
Inaccessibility of College Events	<p>"The College tried to organise, I think a, a parents' evening thing. They organised it at seven o'clock at night. Most of us that have small kids, that's bedtime like, so that was clearly an oversight for everybody"</p>

Appendix T.4 – Map of Themes and Sub Themes

**Themes and Subthemes of Focus Groups**



## Appendix U – Other Findings

### Appendix U.1 – Survey

**Note:** For clarity purposes the word "carer" is used throughout these results to describe all students with caring responsibilities i.e. informal carers and student parents

#### Demographic Information

Age of Participants	Number of Participants
18 – 24	182
25 – 34	27
35 – 44	12
45 – 54	9
55 – 65	2
66 +	1

Gender of Participants	Number of Participants
Male	35
Female	195
Non-Binary	2

Student Status	Number of Participants
EU Student (Irish)	168
EU Student (Non-Irish)	36
Non-EU Student	28

Immigration Status	Number of Participants
Family Immigrated to Ireland	173
Family Did Not Immigrate	60

## Caring Responsibilities

Caring Status	Number of Participants
Yes	73
No	154

Immigration Status of Carer	Number of Participants
Carer Whose Family Immigrated to Ireland	17
Carer Whose Family Did Not Immigrate to Ireland	56

Student Status of Carer	Number of Participants
EU Carer (Irish)	61
EU Carer (Non-Irish)	8
Non-EU Carer	4

Carer Type	Number of Participants
Informal Carer	46
Student Parent	18
Both Informal Carer and Student Parent	10

For Whom Informal Care is Provided	Number of Participants
Parent/Grandparent	32
Partner	5
Friend	1
Sibling	16
Other	7

<b>Types of Care Provided</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Household Tasks	46
Translation	8
Supervision	25
Transportation	20
Emotional Support	35
Reading/Writing	12
Other (responses mentioned below)	8
Internet	1
Shopping	1
I care for a child with Intellectual Disabilities	1
Medication Dispensing	1
Medical Appointments	1
Financial	1
Hospital Appointments/Financial	1
Making/Attending Medical Appointments; General Admin Tasks; Shopping etc.	1

<b>Multiple Care Recipients</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Individuals Who Care For More Than One Person	7

<b>Gender of Carers</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Male	10
Female	62

Non-Binary	0
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Of those who disclosed their gender and caring status, **86.1%** of carers were female.

Hours of Informal Care Provided Per Week	Number of Participants
3 – 6	32
6 – 9	10
9 – 12	9
12 – 24	6
24 +	5

### Support from Tutors and Lecturers

Students Whose Tutor is Aware of Caring Responsibilities	Number of Participants
Yes	51
No	11

Students Who Have Received Support From Tutor	Number of Participants
Yes	54
No	8

Rating of Support From Tutor	Number of Participants
	1
	0
	0
	5
	3



However, only **9** participants answered this question.

<b>Reasons for Not Disclosing Caring Status with Tutor</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Responses indicating the student didn't feel the need to disclose due to perceived irrelevance or lack of benefit.	31
Responses where students mention limited interactions with their tutor or not yet needing support.	8
Responses indicating a belief that the tutor would not be supportive or understanding, or past negative experiences.	4
Responses where students view their caring role as a personal responsibility or something they can manage themselves.	3
Responses where students were not aware they could disclose, did not feel comfortable doing so, or didn't know who their tutor was.	1
Responses related to administrative hurdles or systemic issues within the institution that discourage disclosure.	1

**48** participants answered this question.

### **Impact on Academic Performance**

<b>How Often Caring Responsibilities Impact Your Academic Performance</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Never	3
Rarely	10
Sometimes	27
Very Often	14

Always	7
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<b>How Often Lectures Are Missed Due to Caring Responsibilities</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Never	12
Rarely	17
Sometimes	26
Very Often	5
Always	1

<b>How Often Assignments are Requested Due to Caring Responsibilities</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Never	20
Rarely	17
Sometimes	16
Very Often	5
Always	3

<b>Students Who Felt They Could Manage Responsibilities Better When Lectures were Recorded or Streamed</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Yes	46
No	5
Don't Know	10

### **Assessing Financial Burden**

<b>Students Who Feel They are Struggling Financially</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Yes	88

No	109
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<b>Students Who Received Financial Support From TCD Last Year</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Yes	133
No	64

<b>Personal Sources Used to Fund Participation in Education Last Year</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Money from Family or Friends that you don't have to Repay	129
Money from Family or Friends that you do have to Repay	20
Personal Savings	85
Earnings from Work during Term Time	66
Earnings from Work during Holidays	78
From Borrowings e.g. Loans/Overdraft	12
Other	14

<b>Other Sources Used to Fund Education Last Year</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Government Financial Support (SUSI Maintenance Grants; Childcare Grants; Back to Education Allowance etc)	70
University Hardship or Access Funds	32
Bursary or Scholarship	41
None of the Above	96
Other	10

Of the **32** participants who accessed the hardship fund, **56.25%** (n=18) were carers.

## TCD Policy

Policy Awareness	Number of Participants
Aware	30
Not Aware	166

Of the **196** participants who answered regarding policy awareness, only **15.31%** were aware of the TCD policy for parents and carers.

Student who feel TCD's support policy is implemented effectively	Number of Participants
Yes	8
No	18
Don't Know	167

Only **4.15%** of respondents feel the policy is implemented correctly.

Students who think tutors and lecturers should be trained to ensure they can support caregiving students	Number of Participants
Yes	141
No	8
Don't Know	45

**72.68%** of respondents think staff should receive further training to support caregiving students.

If there were a specific service set up for students with caring responsibilities, like the disability services, would you use this service?	Number of Participants (Carers)
Yes	22
No	16
Don't Know	23

Among carers, 36.07% responded that they would use a specific service for caring students, while 26.23% would not and the majority (37.70%) answered "Don't Know".

### **The Impact of Hours of Caring on Student Wellbeing and Burden Scores**

Additionally, to ascertain whether there is an association between hours spent caring and wellbeing, as indicated by previous literature (Haugland et al., 2020; Alfonso et al., 2023) a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted between hours spent caring and both burden scores of caring students and WHO-5 scores of caring students, due to categorising hours spent caring into groups (e.g. 3–6).

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to compare the mean burden scores across five categories representing the hours of care provided per week: 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-24 and 24+. The analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the group means,  $F(3, 9) = 1.367$ ,  $p = 0.314$ . This suggests that the hours of care provided per week do not have a significant effect on the burden scores of caregivers.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to compare the who-5 scores across five categories representing the hours of care provided per week: 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-24 and 24+. The analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the group means,  $F(4,37) = 2.48$ ,  $p = 0.061$ . This suggests that the hours of care provided per week do not have a significant effect on the who-5 of caregivers.

## Appendix U.2 – Data from Preliminary Interviews

### **TCD Student Union Student-Parent Officer**

During the preliminary interviews, Trinity College Dublin's Student-Parent Officer raised significant concerns regarding the college's support of student-parents. The officer, who is also a student-parent, reported that she was never asked about her parental status or offered assistance while studying. As a result of this lack of recognition, she advocated for more substantial financial support for student-parents, as well as organising meetups to foster a supportive community among them.

Nevertheless, the officer faces difficulties in raising awareness and gaining support within the college. She has noted a general lack of recognition from other departments regarding the unique challenges faced by student-parents, particularly those arising after maternity leave and for parents with school-age children. There's a perception that the college does not fully understand the pressures experienced by student-parents and carers, suggesting that current support mechanisms are insufficient.

Another critical issue identified during the interview was the lack of a system for identifying student-parents within TCD. This lack of data prevents the college from understanding the challenges these students face, their needs, and potential dropout rates due to their dual responsibilities. This situation highlights a broader need for institutional changes to better support the diverse needs of the student population.

Her latest update highlights ongoing efforts to enhance the academic experience and welfare of student-parents. Together with the Student Union and the Senior Tutor's office, the officer has conducted a survey to gather insights into the number of student-parents. Moreover, the officer's desire to expand the remit of the part-time officer position to include carers reflects a commitment to diversity and inclusion for all students who manage additional responsibilities alongside their studies.

## **TCD Crèche Manager**

In regards to childcare services, TCD's Crèche Manager highlighted that persistent understaffing is a significant challenge. While the crèche has been operating since 1969 with a capacity for 52 children, it has been forced to operate at 65% of its capacity, turning away many desperate student-parents seeking childcare. The crèche's clientele primarily consists of mature students, PhD candidates, and students from the TAP, with over 5,000 staff members also needing these services. As a result of the staffing crisis, fewer spaces are available in the crèche, which directly impacts the ability of the TCD community to access childcare.

Staffing levels have improved recently, with the crèche currently having 70% capacity and planning to have 90% by early April, but the issue of competitive wages continues to be a challenge. Recruiting and retaining staff at the crèche is difficult due to the lower salaries of early years staff. This has placed the crèche and similar services across Ireland in a challenging position, with professionals leaving for higher-paying roles in other sectors.

Despite these improvements, the manager says that a substantial waiting list of 50 children still exists, many of whom will never get a spot. This situation underlines the urgent need for increased support and resources to provide childcare to the TCD community.