

**CARERS** UK

**Carers in employment  
Information for employers**

# Carers at work



# The challenges of the modern workplace

Working and living in the twenty first century can be a hard act to juggle.

Employers increasingly need a more flexible and multiskilled workforce to get results.

At the same time, employees increasingly need to balance multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace.

In a complex modern world, work-life balance has become a priority for the many, not a concession for the few. This booklet is designed to help employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors think about the needs of employees who are carers, and to adapt and develop workplace policies and practices to support them.

# Who are carers?

**Carers look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. The care they provide is unpaid.**

## An issue for you?

There are over six million carers in the UK, and more than three million of them juggle care with paid work. This means that one in seven people in any workforce may be a carer, dealing with what might seem like two jobs - one paid, one unpaid - and meeting the needs of both.

Caring is an issue which affects us all - demographic changes mean that three in five people will become carers at some stage in their lives. These responsibilities often cannot be planned - caring can happen over time, but it can also happen overnight.

The peak age for caring is 45-64, so many working carers will have significant skills and experience which may be lost to a workplace unless they are supported. Whatever their job, their loss would have an impact. Given the significant skills shortages in some

sectors, for example health care, employers now have to retain skilled staff of all ages, and increasingly widen their recruitment pool.

In the workforce of the future, more people will have to work smarter, for longer, and that includes carers.

And this is not only a women's issue - a DfEE survey of 7,500 employees found that 11% of all male respondents had caring responsibilities, and 13% of all women. Juggling work and care may be an issue for more of your employees than you think, as men and women of all ages across an organisation may have caring responsibilities or even multiple caring roles.

Changes in family structures also have an impact - the increase in divorce, the number of single parent families and the rise in the number of working women means that there is very often no longer an adult at home to manage and/or provide care.

So work *has* to be juggled with care - and employers ignore this at their peril.

## The cost of no support

Combining paid work and caring can be stressful. A survey by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers found that 50% of working carers experienced stress and anxiety.

*Peter cares for his wife who has multiple sclerosis. Her condition has deteriorated over the past year, causing increasing worry for Peter as he tries to juggle her care with his full time job. He has a heavy case load and feels under pressure to work the same long hours as his colleagues, feeling that he will let the team down if he changes his working pattern.*

Caring can also have an impact on absenteeism. For example, in an emergency, many employees find it

easier to call in sick than to admit they are having a problem with care arrangements.

*Over the past year Peter has on occasions taken a day's sick leave to cover emergencies in his wife's care arrangements. He isn't aware of any kind of leave that could help him when things go wrong at home.*

A large number of carers give up work to care. In one Carers UK survey, more than six out of ten carers providing substantial care had given up work to care.

*Peter is suffering from stress and finding it increasingly difficult to manage. He is considering giving up work to care for his wife full time.*

## What do carers want from employers?

**In a number of surveys, carers say they want:**

### **Understanding from managers**

*Peter needs to be able to talk to someone at work who understands the conflicting demands of his work and caring responsibilities and can help him to manage them more flexibly.*

### **Access to advice and information**

*Peter's employer should publicise the provisions it makes for emergency leave, and additional flexible leave arrangements for employees such as him. It could also provide or signpost employees to information.*

### **Flexibility - often short term - including:**

- Time off for emergencies
- Flexible working arrangements
- Flexible leave arrangements

*Peter's employer has serious recruitment and retention issues. Flexible support for Peter at this stage would allow him to juggle his work and caring responsibilities, and his employer would save the costs of replacing a valuable and experienced member of staff.*



What do carers want from employers?

# The benefits of offering support

Support for carers in the workplace does not only benefit the carer - it also benefits the employer. And it is other employers who say so.

## Increased retention

The NHS has included carer support as part of its 'Improving Working Lives' initiative. This aims to improve staff recruitment and retention.

## Improved recruitment

Centrica's carers' policy has improved recruitment into British Gas and Scottish Gas call centres. The development and proactive promotion of the carers' policy has enabled managers to recruit and support staff juggling work and care. The result has been a win-win for both employer and employee, with managers noting the motivation and productivity of recruits. Centrica believes that the policy has resulted in benefits throughout the whole company.

## Reduced absenteeism

Understanding the link between flexible working practices and bottom line benefits has led to BT developing a wide ranging portfolio of flexible working arrangements. This has enabled great employees, be they in sales, customer service, or elsewhere, to continue to deliver great results whilst also fulfilling their caring responsibilities. This has delivered productivity gains of over £10m, accommodation savings of over £40m annually and reduction in sick absence and recruitment costs of over £7m for their business.

## Improved productivity

The Department for Constitutional Affairs has developed a work/life balance policy which includes carers in response to the broader and changing needs of its employees. It has established an in-house Caring Network, which offers information and support to employees with caring responsibilities across the Department and seeks to raise

awareness of carers issues and raise concerns at a senior level. It also seeks to influence policies as they affect carers. Feedback from network members shows that they feel more able to focus on work at work when their caring responsibilities are acknowledged and supported.

## Enhanced management of diversity

As part of the Government's Work-Life Balance Campaign, the Department of Trade and Industry's Challenge Fund gives consultancy support to public, private and voluntary sector employers seeking to address work-life balance.

*'We value difference rather than conformity in our employees and are committed to supporting individuals to manage their lives and work as effectively as possible. The Challenge Fund gave the whole organisation an opportunity to feed into our work-life balance policies, including our Carers Policy.'*  
Carers UK

## Changing the culture

- The first step in developing workforce support is to identify carers and ask them what they need. Be sensitive to issues of confidentiality, and give employees the option of providing information anonymously.

*The Metropolitan Police carried out an audit of the carers in its workforce, and set up focus groups to ask them about their support needs. The process was facilitated by a carers organisation to*

*guarantee confidentiality. The result is a policy that works for employer and employees across all departments - and a commitment to developing an organisational culture that allows carers to be open about their situation.*

- Decide how the whole organisation can respond - find a champion to lead the work, and sell it in at all levels to ensure understanding and commitment.

*The Metropolitan Police has identified a senior officer to lead on carer support, and is planning training for line managers to ensure consistent implementation of carer policies and practices across the whole organisation.*

- Be proactive in creating a workplace which promotes the take-up of carer support.

*The Metropolitan Police is promoting its support for carers by including it in written policies and staff handbooks, to ensure that staff are confident about using it without fear of discrimination.*

- Monitor the take-up of support and determine the benefits to employees and to the organisation.

*'[EOC Scotland] surveyed companies with family-friendly policies and found that only half monitored their take-up and success. This meant that they were not able to evaluate their provision, and were missing opportunities to improve support and retain staff.'*  
Director, Carers Scotland



# What employers can offer

There are a number of workplace practices which can support carers. Some are generic, some specifically designed to meet carers' needs. You should review your work-life balance policies to ensure that they encompass working carers.

Not all employers will use all practices; many will 'mix-and-match' to the requirements of their workforce.

### Flexible working

- flexible starting and finishing times
- compressed working hours

- annualised working hours
- job sharing or part-time working
- homeworking and teleworking
- term-time working
- flexible holidays to fit in with alternative care arrangements

### Special leave arrangements

- emergency leave (paid/unpaid)
- carers leave (paid/unpaid)
- compassionate leave
- borrowing/buying leave
- career breaks

### Workplace support

- carer-aware managers at all levels
- welfare officer or occupational health advisor informed about carers needs
- in-house information and advice
- in-house counselling
- in-house support/networking groups
- subscription to a carers organisation such as Carers UK, which provides information and advice to carers
- subscription to an employee resource service such as LifeWorks, Familylife Solutions or Family Matters

### Flexible benefits

- disability insurance
- healthcare
- long-term care insurance
- childcare/eldercare vouchers

### Other measures

- access to a telephone
- a reserved car parking space, to make access in and out of work quicker and easier
- reasonable notice if overtime or working away from home is required



# Legislative support

Government regulation has a part to play in carer support.

The Employment Relations Act has introduced leave entitlements which can benefit carers.

It includes:

### **A right to time off for emergencies**

Employees now have a right to take a 'reasonable' amount of time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependant. This right also includes some protection from victimisation or dismissal for employees using it. It is at the employer's discretion whether the leave is paid or unpaid.

Situations where leave might be taken include:

- a disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
- if a dependant falls ill or has been assaulted or in an accident including when the victim is hurt or upset rather than physically injured
- to deal with an incident involving a child during school hours
- to make longer term arrangements for a dependant who is ill or injured
- to deal with the death of a dependant

### **Parental Leave**

Employees who have one year's service are now entitled to thirteen weeks parental leave to care for their child, eighteen weeks for a disabled child.

Leave can be taken in blocks of one week up to a maximum of four weeks leave in a year (for each child); or in one day, or multiples of a day if the leave is to care for a disabled child, again to a maximum of four weeks in a year.

Employees may take leave at any time up to a child's fifth birthday; but for the parents of a disabled child, leave may be taken any time up to the child's eighteenth birthday.

### **Flexible Working**

From April 2003, parents of children under six, or 18 if the child is disabled, have a new right to request flexible working such as changing hours or working from home. This applies to employees who have worked for their employer for 26 weeks. Employees will have

to make a written application to make a permanent change to their terms and conditions. Only one request is allowed in one year so it is important that employees think carefully about the financial and caring considerations. If their request is refused, employers must give good reasons and employees can appeal.

Changes in pension, taxation and social policy could help carers in the workforce too.

- carers are now entitled to a second tier pension
- Carers UK is campaigning for the introduction of a working carers tax credit
- Carers UK is campaigning for a review of the main carers benefit, Carer's Allowance

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The information in this leaflet is for guidance only and is not an authoritative statement of the law. The information is correct as of June 2003.

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Please tell us whether you are a:  Carer  Supporter

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I am a carer, but unable to pay the annual subscription at this time, but wish to be a member.

I would like to make a donation to Carers UK of £ \_\_\_\_\_

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**Training Unit** Carers UK's Training Unit is committed to providing courses that reflect real training needs and current issues faced by professionals who work with carers in England and Wales. **For further information:** www.carersonline.org.uk, trainingukcarers.org, 020 7566 7632. Carers Scotland's Training Unit: 0141 221 9141.

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