



The Case for Care Leave:

**Families, work and the
ageing population**

The context: families, work and our ageing population

2.3 million have given up work to care and almost 3 million have reduced their working hours

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As society faces the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population, longer life expectancies and extended working lives, more and more people are trying to manage work alongside caring for older, seriously ill or disabled loved ones. The pressure that working carers find themselves under as a result has seen just over 1 in 5 UK adults' work negatively affected as a result of caring, including 2.3 million who have given up work and almost 3 million who have reduced their working hours to care at some point.¹

The Government has recognised the importance of parents of young children, particularly mothers, having the option to stay in or return to work after having a child – not only for families but for businesses and the economy. Yet, while childcare is an issue that affects millions of people with young children across the UK, caring is an issue that will affect us all. The vast majority of people have parents who are likely to need help as they get older, and many families also support disabled or chronically ill siblings, partners or children who need assistance into adulthood.

The evidence base for supporting working carers is growing, and it is compelling. With the public expenditure costs of carers feeling unable to continue to work estimated at £1.3 billion a year,² it is crucial that we take steps to help carers stay in work. There is an opportunity to turn these losses into economic gains, with public finances seeing an estimated £1 billion in additional tax revenues if carers can be supported back into the workplace.³ Employers too have found that supporting carers leads to improved service delivery, cost savings and increased productivity.⁴

Many employers have realised the value of retaining the carers in their workforce and have policies in place to support their employees with caring responsibilities. Working carers also have some important existing statutory rights. For example, the right to request flexible working represents a vital step towards helping people to manage work with complex and demanding family lives. However, with so many carers falling out of work because they feel that they cannot continue to manage work alongside caring, it is clear that not enough is being done.

1 Carers UK/YouGov (2013)

2 Pickard, L. *Public expenditure costs of carers leaving employment*, LSE Health and Social Care, London School of Economics and Political Science (2012)

3 Pickard, L. (2012)

4 Carers UK for Employers for Carers and HM Government Task and Finish Group, *Business Benefits of Supporting Working Carers* (2013)

This research shows that the UK is falling far behind other countries, many of which are finding creative solutions to support their workforce and address the challenges of ageing populations.

If the UK is to cope with the critical demographic challenge we are facing and reap the social and economic benefits of helping carers to juggle work and care then more must be done. With 89% of the public in support of a right to a short period of time off work to care, it is time for policy makers to make statutory care leave a priority.⁵

89% of the public support rights to short periods of time off work to care

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1. Why support working carers?

Over three million people in the UK combine working with providing unpaid care for a loved one

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■ Social imperative

There are over three million people in the UK who combine working with providing unpaid care for a loved one, but it can often be difficult to juggle these responsibilities.⁶ Many people find that their work is negatively affected or they have to leave their job altogether to care, often at the peak of their careers⁷. This has huge costs for families, workplaces and the economy.

A rapidly ageing population and longer life expectancies mean that this problem will become even more critical over the coming years. From 2017, the number of older and disabled people needing long-term care is predicted to outstrip the number of family members able to provide it.⁸

The state pension age continues to rise and, as people are expected to work for longer, they will also find themselves trying to care for longer, for more family members and for loved ones with increasingly complex long-term conditions. Unless action is taken to better support families at home and in the workplace, this will be unsustainable and the number of people forced out of work will continue to rise.

The impact of this on individuals and families can be huge. A Carers UK survey found that of carers who had given up work or reduced their working hours to care, 2 in 5 were around £10,000-£20,000 per year worse off.⁹ This fall in income is often accompanied by a sharp increase in household costs as a result of the additional costs of ill-health and disability.

The growing gap between income and outgoings can have a long-term impact on family finances, resulting in debt, rapid loss of savings and an inability to contribute to a private pension. It can also be very difficult for carers who have left work to re-enter the labour market when their period of caring comes to an end, particularly if they are in their fifties or sixties.¹⁰

6 Census (2001)

7 Carers UK/YouGov (2013)

8 Pickard, L. 'A growing care gap? The supply of unpaid care for older people by their adult children in England to 2032', in *Ageing and Society* (2013)

9 Carers UK, *The State of Caring Survey* (2011)

10 The ONS has found that 47% of unemployed people aged over 50 have been unemployed for 12 months or more compared with around 30% of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants aged 18 or over. Figures from Office for National Statistics Labour Market Statistics (2013)

■ Business imperative

It is not just employees and the economy that suffer – employers themselves lose out when carers are struggling to manage work and caring responsibilities.

Businesses incur substantial costs in employee absence and workplace stress as staff try to combine work and caring, and when they give up work, businesses bear the costs of recruitment and lost productivity, often after having invested in the training and development of their employees. The peak age for caring is 50-64, which is often when workers are at their most skilled and experienced.¹¹

The value of enabling carers to work alongside caring would be £5.3 billion a year

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■ Economic opportunity

Helping carers who want to stay in work is not just a challenge, but an economic opportunity for business and the UK economy. Analysis by Age UK, building on work by the LSE, has estimated that the value of carers being able to work would be £5.3 billion.¹²

Better supporting working carers can also have huge benefits for business, with one major utility company reporting savings of more than £1 million per year as a result of retaining carers through workplace support.¹³

11 Census (2011)

12 Age UK, *Care in crisis: more than £5.3 billion wiped from the economy* (2012)

13 Yeandle, S., Bennett, C., Buckner, L., Shipton, L., Suokas, A. *Who cares wins: The social and business benefits of supporting working carers* Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University report for Carers UK (2006)

2. Existing workplace support

Many employers see the business benefits of supporting employees with caring responsibilities

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While support and understanding for carers in the workplace is lagging far behind our understanding of parenting and childcare issues, there has still been significant progress. Many employers see the business benefits of supporting their employees with caring responsibilities and have policies in place to help them manage these alongside their work.

This year, business forum Employers for Carers and Carers UK came together with HM Government to produce a landmark report. 'Supporting Working Carers' looked at the benefits to families, business and the economy of helping carers to stay in work and set out a series of recommendations, both on employment practices and care and support services, which represent an important step towards helping people to work and care.

Whilst flexible working arrangements are still the most common form of support provided by those employers that actively try to support carers, there are existing examples of organisations offering career breaks and additional leave for carers, both paid and unpaid, to help them manage their work and caring responsibilities.

In addition to workplace support from their employers, there are some statutory rights related to caring responsibilities which almost all employees already have access to.¹⁴ These include the right not to be discriminated against under the Equality Act and the right to limited time off in certain situations. The right to request flexible working, currently in place for most carers, will also soon be extended to all employees.

■ Time off in emergencies

Employers must give someone 'reasonable' time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependent. A dependent may be a spouse or partner, a child, a parent, a friend or family member that lives with the employee but does not pay rent, or someone who relies on the employee for care.

14 An employee often has to meet certain requirements. For example, if someone is self-employed, on a short-term contract or employed through an agency they will not be able to claim all of these entitlements. Employees only become entitled to some rights after working for their employer for a set amount of time.

This time off is likely to be short-term, around one or two days, but there is no legal definition of how long a reasonable amount of time off should be. It depends upon what is thought to be reasonable and necessary in the circumstances. This provision is designed for unforeseen situations, such as a sudden injury or a breakdown in care arrangements. It is not designed to be used for planned situations, such as taking someone to a doctor's appointment or looking after them following their discharge from hospital. Employers do not have to pay their employees for emergency time off, though some do choose to.

Employees are entitled to take 18 weeks unpaid parental leave for each of their children

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■ Parental leave

Employees are entitled to take up to 18 weeks of unpaid parental leave for each of their children, up to their child's 5th birthday (or the 5th anniversary of a child's placement for adoption). They will soon be able to take this leave up to their child's 18th birthday. Employers can restrict it to a maximum of four weeks per year.

If an employee is the parent of a child who receives Disability Living Allowance, they can already take this leave up to their child's 18th birthday. However, there are no corresponding rights for carers of adult children, other family members or friends.

3. Why is care leave needed?

Going without any time off, possibly even for years on end, may push carers to breaking point

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When employees are faced with a particularly intensive period of caring they may need some time off to deal with it, even though they might be fully able to return to full- or part-time work after a few weeks or months. For example, they may have to look after a partner who is undergoing chemotherapy. Other employees may have an ongoing caring responsibility which means they need to take an occasional few days off to accompany their disabled child to appointments with a medical specialist or to help their parent move into a care home.

In some limited situations emergency leave may be adequate, for example if an employee has an unexpected crisis that can be dealt with quickly, but, as in the examples given above, it is often not suitable. Emergency leave cannot be used for a planned situation like caring for someone after a scheduled operation. Even if there is a crisis, for example if a frail older relative has a bad fall, an employee could only take emergency leave to deal with the immediate aftermath but not to support their relative while they recuperate. It is also not suitable for carers who need further more time off work to care for someone, for example following a loved one's stroke or heart attack, as it is usually very short-term.

Carers often tell Carers UK that they use up their annual leave entitlements when faced with these situations, leaving them without a break all year. Carers are more likely to be in bad health than non-carers,¹⁵ and people juggling work with care are likely to feel stressed and overworked already. Going without any time off for possibly even years on end may push them to breaking point. When their leave runs out or they feel they cannot cope any more, many employees feel they have no choice but to give up work altogether.

A statutory entitlement to care leave would help many carers to juggle their caring responsibilities with work in a sustainable and manageable way, making them more productive and less stressed, and saving businesses and the economy money in the long run.

15 Census (2011)

4. Care leave outside the UK

While there is no single comprehensive source of information on statutory leave provisions in other countries,¹⁶ available evidence suggests that working carers' rights vary considerably but that care leave is becoming increasingly common across the world. Some case study examples of care leave outside the UK are outlined below, though this list is not exhaustive.

Care leave is becoming increasingly common across the world

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■ Australia

Employees are entitled to ten days per year of paid personal or care leave for when they are ill or need to care for an immediate family or household member who is sick, injured or has an unexpected emergency.¹⁷ If they don't use this up, then the leave accumulates and they can carry it over to subsequent years. If they have used up their paid leave, then employees can take two days of unpaid carer's leave per occasion.¹⁸

■ Belgium

As well as short-term unpaid emergency leave of ten days per year, private sector workers in Belgium are able to take time off of up to twelve months to care for a seriously ill family or household member.¹⁹ It must be taken in blocks of one to three months and it is paid at the same level as parental leave.²⁰ Palliative care leave is also an entitlement, of one month per loved one in need of care with the possibility of extending this for another month.²¹ Again, this is paid at the level of parental leave. Employees in the public sector have similar rights.

16 Though the International Network on Leave Policies & Research does have information available on a wide variety of countries' leave policies. Their reports, including those cited below, are available at www.leavenetwork.org

17 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Personal, carer's and compassionate leave* (2013)

18 Fair Work Ombudsman, *How much leave does an employee get?* (2012)

19 Or 24 months in the case of lone parents looking after a child under the aged of sixteen; OECD, 'Policies to Support Family Carers', in *Help Wanted? Providing and Paying for Long-Term Care* (2011); Service public fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale, *Congé pour porter assistance ou soins à un membre du ménage ou de la famille gravement malade* (undated)

20 Merla, L. and Deven, F., 'Belgium country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

21 Service public fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale, *Congé pour soins palliatifs* (undated)

In Germany, carers can take ten days of unpaid leave and up to six months of unpaid long-term care leave

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■ Canada

In Canada, there is a statutory right to compassionate care leave.²² Employees can take up to eight weeks unpaid leave to care for a gravely ill family member. The family member must have a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks (a doctor's certificate is required). This leave can be shared between family members if they are looking after the same person. If their family member is still gravely ill after 26 weeks, then the employee is entitled to up to a further eight weeks. Although this leave is unpaid, people may be eligible for up to six weeks of compassionate care benefits during this time.²³

■ France

Employees are able to take leave to look after a child under 20 years of age who has a serious disability or illness.²⁴ If they have worked for their employer for at least one year then they will be paid an allowance for up to 310 days in a three year period. A similar period of leave is available for the end of life care of a child or a parent who the employee lives with.

■ Germany

A relative of someone in need of care can take ten days of unpaid short-term leave in the event of unexpected illness and up to six months of unpaid long-term care leave. In addition, 'family caring time' (Familienpflegezeit) allows employees to reduce their working hours to a minimum of 15 hours for up to two years to care for a dependent relative. This leave is paid at a reduced rate, but at a higher rate than the number of hours worked. The employee will repay the difference upon their return to full-time work. However, family caring time is not a legal entitlement.²⁵

■ Ireland

Employees in Ireland²⁶ are entitled to take up to 104 weeks of unpaid leave per person to look after someone in need of full-time care.²⁷ They do not have to take this leave in one continuous period, but if there are gaps between periods they must be of at least 6 weeks. If they request less than 13 weeks off work, their employer may turn down their request

22 Labour Program, *Compassionate Care Leave Pamphlet 5A - Labour Standards* (2010)

23 Service Canada, *Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefits* (2013)

24 Fagnani, J., Boyer, D. and Thévenon, O., 'France country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

25 Blum, S. and Eler, D., 'Germany country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

26 To be eligible, employees must have worked for their employer for a continuous period of 12 months.

27 *Carer's Leave Act* (2001); Citizens Information, *Carer's Leave* (2013)

on reasonable grounds. This statutory care leave is unpaid, though the carer may be eligible for Carer's Benefit (dependent upon social insurance contributions) or Carer's Allowance (which is means-tested). It is also possible for employees who have a 'family crisis' to take much shorter paid leave of three days in any 12 months, up to a limit of 5 days in any 36 months.²⁸

■ Italy

Public and private sector employees in Italy are entitled to three days of leave per month, up to a maximum of two years over their working life, to care for a disabled relative.²⁹ The time off is paid by the National Institute of Social Security (INPS).

■ Japan

Japanese workers can take up to 93 days of family care leave per family member needing care. They receive 40% of their wage paid through employment insurance if their employer does not compensate them during their time off to care.³⁰ They also have a right to unpaid short-term family care leave of five days per year to take care of a family member in 'care-requiring condition', or ten days per year if there are two or more family members to take care of. Similarly, employees with a sick or injured pre-school aged child are able to take up to five days per year to look after them, or ten days if there are two or more such children.³¹

■ Poland

Employees who provide care for another member of the family (over the age of 14 years) have a right to take short-term leave of up to two weeks per year, with financial compensation at 80% of the average monthly wage over the previous 12 months.³² All parents are able to take leave of up to 60 days per year to care for a child of up to eight years of age, or 14 years of age if the child is disabled or chronically ill, in case of unforeseen closure of their school, or illness or childbirth of a spouse who usually cares for the child.³³ This leave is also paid at 80% of earnings.

In Poland employees have a right to take short-term leave of up to two weeks per year

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28 Drew, I., 'Ireland country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013); Citizens Information, *Types of leave from work* (2013)

29 Addabbo, T. and Giovannini, D., 'Italy country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

30 OECD (2011)

31 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Introduction to the revised Child Care and Family Care Leave Law* (undated)

32 Carers UK, *Combining work and care: A European perspective* (2012)

33 Michoń, P. and Kotowska, I.E., 'Poland country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

In the Netherlands employees are entitled to care leave up to twice the hours worked per week, and are paid at least 70% of their earnings

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■ Netherlands

In addition to paid emergency leave (typically one day), employees in the Netherlands are entitled to short-term carers' leave of up to twice the hours worked per week, to a maximum of ten days per year. At least 70% of the employee's earnings are paid during this time off. Longer-term reduced hours are also available to employees whose child, partner or parent has a life-threatening illness: up to six times their working hours per week can be taken part-time.³⁴

■ United States

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows employees to take leave of up to 12 weeks in a 12 month period for a variety of reasons, including childbirth or looking after a newborn baby, but also for the care of a child, spouse or parent with a serious health condition.³⁵ It may be taken in one continuous period or split up into blocks. All public sector employees are covered by the FMLA, though private and non-profit employers with under 50 employees are exempt. People must have worked for their employer for at least one year to be eligible.³⁶

34 den Dulk, L., 'Netherlands country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

35 United States Department of Labor, *Wage and Hour Division (WHD): Family and Medical Leave Act* (undated)

36 Kamerman, S.B. and Waldfogel, J., 'United States country note', in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, ed. by P. Moss (2013)

5. Making it happen

Carers UK's 5-point plan:

- 1. We must raise awareness and improve understanding of carers in the workplace and the challenges they face.** Caring has a huge and growing impact on individuals, on employers and on the economy so it is crucial that we make it part of the debate on employee rights. 3 in 5 people will be carers at some point in their lives³⁷ and we cannot afford to lose carers from the workforce.
- 2. Care leave should be a core issue for all parties and should be embedded in the Government's existing work on employee rights, modern workplaces and extending working lives** – family-friendly employment practices should not just be about leave for parents but also encompass wider family responsibilities across the lifecycle.
- 3. There should be a statutory entitlement to a short period of paid leave for carers.** We would recommend a right to 5-10 days a year to be taken as needed to look after an older, seriously ill or disabled relative or friend who is in need of care and support.
- 4. We must open an urgent debate on longer-term care leave.** There are already statutory rights in the UK to longer-term blocks of leave to look after children or to have a baby, so longer-term care leave to look after an older, disabled or seriously ill loved one could take a similar form. For example, long-term care leave could be modelled on parental leave, to be taken in minimum blocks of one week.
- 5. Carers UK will launch a campaign for care leave,** bringing together key stakeholders – Government, employers, employer organisations, unions and the third sector – to open the debate, explore the best way forward and agree an action plan.

Carers UK is calling for a statutory right to paid leave for carers and an urgent debate on longer term care leave

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