

POLICY BRIEFING: WORKING CARERS

Purpose of the briefing

The purpose of this briefing is to:

- Give an overview of the working carer population in Wales and the challenges faced
- Summarise Carers Wales' work in supporting working carers
- Outline the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on working carers
- State Carers Wales' policy asks for working carers in Wales

Overview

A working carer is someone who provides unpaid support and/or care to one or more people because they are older, ill, vulnerable, or have a disability while maintaining full or part-time employment. Carers may provide care on a temporary or permanent basis and caring can include physical, practical, emotional and mental health support.

Before the COVID19 pandemic it was estimated that 15% of the UK's workforce provided care on an unpaid basis to a friend or family member who needs support due to their age, illness or a disability. This suggests there were around 223,000 working carers in Wales, equating to 1 in 7 of the Welsh workforce¹. The numbers of working carers in Wales have increased substantially because of the pandemic.

The number of working carers in Wales and across the UK has been increasing for many years due to an ageing population with more people living for longer with disability, an ageing workforce through later retirement ages and constrained public sector budgets for care and support services. All of which have increased pressure on families and friends to provide care. More people are therefore needing to work and care for longer and the average person in Wales now has a 50:50 chance of becoming a carer by age 45, long before retirement age².

Many unpaid carers struggle to balance caring for a loved one with maintaining employment, indeed 149,812 people in Wales have had to give up employment to care, and amongst those who have been able to stay in employment, 74,906 working carers in Wales have had to reduce their hours of work³.

¹ Carers UK: Juggling Work and Unpaid Care report (2019)

² Carers UK: Will I Care report (2019)

³ Carers UK: Juggling Work and Unpaid Care report (2019)

Across the UK, research has shown that only two fifths of working carers believe their employer is ‘carer-friendly’⁴.

Carers Wales’ Support for Working Carers

Carers and employment is a core stream of Carers UK’s work and has been for decades dating back to the early 1990s. Our primary objective has been to ensure that carers are able to maintain employment for as long as possible, whilst also working with employers to look at the business benefits of supporting carers and seeking out good practice where we find it. We continue to work with our colleagues across the globe to understand better their policies for working carers and we use this evidence in our research and lobbying work with governments, policy makers and service providers.

Against a backdrop where demographic and other factors are contributing to an increasing proportion of the workforce taking on caring responsibilities, our research⁵ has shown that, if unsupported, caring for as little as 5 hours a week can impact on a carer’s ability to work, with those caring for 10 hours experiencing a significant effect. A 2019 Carers UK survey⁶ found, even among carers continuing to work the same hours, 1 in 6 said their job had been negatively affected by caring, including through increased stress and tiredness. The consequences of not addressing support for carers at work negatively impacts both the employee and the employer.

We have been proactive in our work to address this. Since 2009 we have run ‘Employers for Carers’. Employers for Carers (EfC) is a scheme that supports employers who have made a commitment to supporting carers in their workforce. Members include local authorities, corporates, universities and Governments. EfC’s mission is to show the benefits of retaining carers in the workforce by adopting practices in order to better support carers. In 2018 we launched the Wales Hub of Employers for Carers. We provide employers with the bilingual tools they need to enable employees to manage their work and caring commitments. This includes:

- Raising awareness of caring and caring issues in the workplace
- Reviewing and ‘carer proofing’ current policies and practice
- Identifying and engaging with carers in the workplace
- Developing, supporting and managing staff carer networks
- Training and supporting line managers to implement carer friendly policies

To find out more about the scheme please see the [Employers for Carers Wales website](#).

⁴ University of Sheffield: Supporting Working Carers: how employers and employees can benefit (2020)

⁵ Age UK and Carers UK: Walking the tightrope: The challenges of combining work and care in later life (2016)

⁶ Carers UK: State of Caring 2019 (2019)

By supporting carers in their workforce, employers can increase staff resilience, productivity and performance. Research that drew upon the views of over 200 employers⁷ found that rather than compromising business objectives, recognising and supporting carers in the workplace helps attract and retain employees, increases resilience and productivity, reduces stress and absenteeism and improves people management and staff morale.

Since 2019, we have also run our ‘Carer Confident’ benchmarking scheme which assists employers to build a supportive and inclusive workplace for staff who are, or will become, carers and to make the most of the talents that carers can bring to the workplace. Carer Confident seeks to recognise employers who achieve this, and to inspire others to follow suit. Certificates of achievement are presented to employers who demonstrate that they have built an inclusive workplace where carers are recognised, respected and supported.

Building on our expertise in working with employers, since 2020 Welsh Government has funded the Carers Wales Working Carers Project. The project provides free ‘carer-awareness’ sessions to employers and employment support services, works with carers to support them to become workplace carer champions and/or establish carers peer-support networks and will shortly be launching a Guide for Working Carers. This guide will provide practical advice to support working carers to have a better experience in employment. This will be supplemented by a new Working Carers Hub on the Carers Wales website hosting a variety of information and resources to support working carers.

Impact of the pandemic

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in ten workers in the UK have started providing unpaid care to a vulnerable person. This has meant there are 2.8 million extra workers juggling work and unpaid care since the pandemic began⁸, bringing the total estimated number of working carers across the UK to over 7 million. At the same time many are having their employment interrupted. Carers UK research suggests 9% of carers have had to give up work and 11% have had to reduce their hours, in order to juggle work and care as a consequence of the pandemic⁹.

⁷ HM Government, Employers for Carers and Carers UK: Supporting Working Carers: The Benefits to Families, Business and the Economy, Final Report of the Carers in Employment Task and Finish Group (2013). This includes evidence from over 200 employers of the business benefits of supporting carers in the workplace.

⁸ Carers UK: Carers Week 2020 Research Report The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (2020)

⁹ Carers UK: Supporting working carers in COVID-19: response and reflections Employer survey report (2020)

Research¹⁰ published in November 2020 found unpaid carers in Wales had saved the Welsh NHS and other statutory services £8.4 billion over the course of the pandemic (for the eight months up to that point), equivalent to £33 million every single day by providing care.

A survey of EfC members, conducted between July and September 2020, highlighted good practice by employers in supporting working carers during the pandemic¹¹. EfC members have reported an increase in requests for flexible working arrangements and leave to accommodate caring responsibilities since the pandemic began, along with growing take up of health and wellbeing support. 75% said they had offered additional flexible working arrangements for carers, while additional leave for carers had been offered by 42% of the employers. EfC members have taken a number of other initiatives to support working carers through the pandemic, including visible carer-focused communications and greater championing of carer support in the workplace, specific guidance for line managers to understand the needs of carers in their team and innovative uses of technology to enhance communication with employees.

Encouragingly, 37% of respondents felt their organisations had learned new practical lessons that would help them support working carers in the future, while around a half (49%) said their organisations had developed, or had plans to develop, additional organisational policies or procedures as a result of the pandemic. Employers suggested these could focus on new policies for remote working, introducing carers leave or creating carers policies.

Challenges faced by working carers

Research by the University of Sheffield found 44% of working carers struggle to combine their paid employment with their caring role, with 30% of working carers having reduced their hours and 36% having refused a job offer or promotion, or decided against applying for a job in the first place, because of their caring responsibilities¹². A Carers UK survey found of those who had given up work or reduced their hours, 2 in 5 were around £10-20,000 per year worse off. Carers can find themselves rapidly using up savings and may find it particularly difficult to re-enter employment in their 50s or 60s.

Sadly, we know the situation is very similar in Wales, with close to 75,000 carers feeling they must cut back their hours at work to be able to continue to care for a loved one¹³. Too many carers feel their career and employment will have to be curtailed to perform duties such as picking up medication for the person they care for, taking them to appointments and responding to emergencies or rapidly changing needs.

¹⁰ Carers Wales: Unpaid carers in Wales have saved £33 million every day of the pandemic (2020)

¹¹ Carers UK: Supporting working carers in COVID-19: response and reflections Employer survey report (2020)

¹² University of Sheffield: Supporting Working Carers: how employers and employees can benefit (2020)

¹³ Carers UK: Juggling Work and Unpaid Care report (2019)

Unpaid carers are 7 times more likely to feel lonely than the general population, and levels of anxiety among carers in Wales are nearly twice as high as the general Welsh population¹⁴. For many carers work can be a welcome break from their caring role, enabling them to socialise and pursue their own aspirations while alleviating financial worries. Research for Carers Week in 2019¹⁵ showed carers juggling paid work with caring reported higher life satisfaction and a feeling that the things they did were worthwhile compared to carers who were not in employment, though on both measures working carers were still less satisfied than the general population.

Carers who are given information and advice relating to their caring role are more likely to achieve positive wellbeing goals and personal outcomes as defined in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Carers who can access help and informal support early in their caring journey are less likely to need extensive formal support later on, while missing out on information can exacerbate financial hardship, poor physical and mental health and impede participation in employment and personal interests. Despite being a legal requirement of the 2014 Act, only 38% of carers who participated in the 2020 Track The Act survey by Carers Wales¹⁶ said they had received information to help them care, a decline of 7% on the previous year. Working carers appear to be more likely to receive information to support their caring role, as only 32% of carers of working age who were not in employment said that they had received information, suggesting employers may be a useful conduit of information to carers.

The potential for employers to assist efforts to identify carers and provide them with information has been demonstrated by EfC employers, 76% of whom say they have signposted their employees to online information on caring, while 65% had promoted services from carers organisations. Steps must be taken by employers to assure working carers there will be no negative implications for them if they identify as a carer, that they will have access to meaningful support or adjustments to help them balance their responsibilities and that carers will not have to explain their situation again and again to different parts of their organisation.

Carer entitlements in the workplace will always be a necessity if we are to ensure carers can continue providing care safely while looking after their own wellbeing. While statutory and third sector services for carers must be bolstered, carer friendly workplace policies are essential in enabling carers to access outside services, while a situation where carers struggle to remain in employment puts additional pressure on community services and ultimately on the vulnerable people they care for.

Supporting carers in employment is also a prerequisite of advancing gender equality in Wales. With women having a 50/50 chance of providing care by age 42, and men by 50, policies to support working carers have a gender positive effect¹⁷.

¹⁴ Carers UK: Getting Carers Connected: Research Summary Carers Week 2019 (2019)

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Carers Wales: Track the Act Briefing 5 (2020)

¹⁷ Carers UK: Will I Care (2019)

Policy Context

A study by the London School of Economics¹⁸ estimated that in England alone the public expenditure costs of carers being unable to continue in work to be £1.3 billion a year considering lost tax revenues and carers benefit payments. Building upon this, analysis by Age UK¹⁹ estimated the cost to be £5.3 billion a year to the economy due to lost earnings and tax revenues as well as additional benefit payments. Notwithstanding the moral and social imperative to support working carers, it is clearly critical from an economic standpoint that working carers are supported to remain in employment.

Like all employees, working carers have statutory rights, such as to make a statutory request for flexible working when they have worked for the same employer for six months, set out in UK legislation. Employees may also have contractual rights at the discretion of their employer that go further. Specific protections for carers can be found in the Equality Act 2010 that says employers must not treat carers less favourably than those without caring responsibilities²⁰.

While employment law is a policy area reserved to the UK Government, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 passed by the then-Welsh Assembly commits to support carers to continue in employment.

In 2018 the Welsh Government established a Fair Work Commission to examine how the Welsh Government could improve the world of work within Wales. The Welsh Government accepted the Commission's recommendation that promoting "fair work" should be a responsibility of all Ministers and officials, which it defined as including flexibility at work to support people to remain in employment alongside efforts to create inclusive working environments. The Commission made a series of recommendations relating to areas of Welsh Government competence derived from legislation including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014, the Equality Act 2011 and the Government of Wales Act 2006²¹.

We similarly believe there is much the Welsh Government can do within its areas of devolved competence to improve the employment experience of working carers.

In December 2020 the Welsh Government published its draft National Action Plan for Carers²², proposing four national priorities to guide support for unpaid carers in Wales. One of the priorities is to "support carers in education and the workplace" as part of a wider stated aim to ensure carers can have a life alongside caring.

¹⁸ Dr Linda Pickard: Public expenditure costs of carers leaving employment (2013)

¹⁹ Estimation of the financial impact of leaving work due to caring responsibilities, Age UK (2012)

²⁰ Carers Wales: Looking After Someone 2020/21 (2020)

²¹ Fair Work Wales: Report of the Fair Work Commission (2019)

²² Welsh Government: Carers' National Plan for Wales Consultation (2020)

Though employment law is not a policy area devolved to Wales, we agree with the position taken by the Fair Work Commission that the Welsh Government must utilise the policy levers it does have in connected areas to improve employment conditions in Wales and use its influence to lobby the UK Government to legislate for fairer working practices in reserved areas²³.

In February 2021 the Welsh Government launched a consultation on the draft Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill, beginning the process to enshrine many of the recommendations of the Fair Work Commission into law.

As of November 2020, unpaid carers in Wales had saved the Welsh NHS £8.4 billion over the course of the pandemic²⁴, equivalent to £33 million every single day by providing care.

Support for working carers must be a public policy priority as failure to take steps to support carers to balance employment and their caring role while looking after their own wellbeing would place substantial additional costs and strain upon the health and social care system in Wales.

Working flexibly and remotely

All employees have the right to make a statutory request for flexible working after being with the same employer for six months, though only one request can be made in any 12-month period. Non-statutory requests can be made, but there are no set procedures regarding this. Flexible working includes practices such as flexi-time, job sharing, remote working, compressed hours and temporary breaks from work. Flexible working supports carers to manage their caring responsibilities alongside employment.

“I work full time, Monday to Friday (37.5 hours a week) and have flexi time which means I can work between 7am and 6pm. It really does help with my caring”

Our polling shows 82% of the Welsh public would like employers to offer carers flexible working²⁵. Regrettably, a 2016 survey by the Equality and Human Rights Commission revealed Welsh employers lag behind England and Scotland in offering flexible working, with 10% of Welsh employers offering no flexible working at all, compared to 4% in England and 3% in Scotland²⁶. A 2018 report by the Welsh Assembly Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee “Work it out: Parenting and Employment in Wales”²⁷ called for more action from the Welsh Government to expand flexible working in Wales.

²³ Fair Work Wales: Report of the Fair Work Commission (2019)

²⁴ Carers Wales: Unpaid carers in Wales have saved £33 million every day of the pandemic (2020)

²⁵ Carers UK: Juggling Work and Unpaid Care report (2019)

²⁶ EHRC: Pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination: summary of key findings (2016)

²⁷ National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Work it out: parenting and employment in Wales (2018)

The Welsh Government has stated it would like to have 30% of workers in Wales working remotely on a regular basis over the long term, to promote flexibility in employment and reduce the monetary and environmental costs of commuting. Seeking to embed changes to working patterns seen during the pandemic, the Welsh Government has stated its aim of working in partnership with stakeholders across the private, public and third sectors to support a greater shift to remote working, informed by fair work principles and worker voice²⁸.

Action to facilitate increased opportunities for remote working is clearly needed as while Cardiff University analysis²⁹ found that in May 2020 35% of workers in Wales were working remotely at least in part (compared to only 14% who regularly did so before the pandemic), Wales has the lowest proportion of jobs that can be done from home of any UK nation, taking into account the industry and occupation profile of the Welsh economy.

Leave for Carers

Carers UK research has found that 74,906 working carers³⁰ in Wales have had to reduce their hours at work to provide care. People age 45+ are more likely to have given up work to care³¹, consistent with the age that people are most likely to take on caring responsibilities and when people are most at risk of leaving the labour market early with detrimental consequences for their financial security in retirement. Carers in this situation may rapidly deplete their savings and may be pushed into debt as a result. Dedicated leave arrangement for carers can make a big difference. 40% of carers who had given up work to care surveyed by Carers UK said dedicated leave for carers would have helped them stay in employment for longer, and 50% of carers said it would have made it easier to return to work after a break to care³².

“My retirement plans will be brought forward because of my caring role and responsibilities”

“I’m aware of certain [workplace] policies but they are all heavily weighted towards care for children. There should definitely be a more defined policy for carers in general.”

While existing emergency leave provisions may be adequate in some situations, emergency leave is often not suitable as it cannot be used for a planned situation, such as caring for someone after a scheduled operation, while its short term nature means it cannot be used to care for someone in the weeks and months following a sudden change in needs, such as if a loved one experiences a stroke.

²⁸ Welsh Government: Written Statement: Embedding Remote Working (2020)

²⁹ Covid-19 and the Welsh economy: Working from home-Wales Fiscal Analysis Briefing (2020)

³⁰ Carers UK: Juggling Work and Unpaid Care report (2019)

³¹ Carers UK: Response to UK Government Carers Leave consultation (2020)

³² *ibid*

In 2020 the UK Government launched a consultation on creating a right to 5 days unpaid Carers Leave. While we support this proposal, we do not believe it goes far enough to meet the needs of working carers. Evidence further shows that more generous Carers Leave entitlements are not abused. Centrica, an Employers for Carers member, has found carers use on average only 3.4 days per annum of paid Carers Leave³³. Without carers leave, working carers can quickly use up their annual leave entitlements leaving them without a break all year. Carers Leave is particularly needed as well in the case of parents caring for a disabled child who lose their entitlement to parental leave when the child turns 18. 76% of the public have been found to support paid Carers Leave³⁴ demonstrating wide support for this proposal.

Carer Confident Workplaces

The public values employers who support carers. In 2019 84% of the Welsh public felt an understanding employer would be important to them if they were working carers³⁵.

During the pandemic, Employers for Carers members have demonstrated how to support working carers, actively promoting specialist sources of advice and support for carers, organising virtual carers networks amongst employees and supporting carers to deal with increases in their caring responsibilities.

For many working carers, a Carers Passport can significantly improve their experience at work. A Carers Passport in the workplace is a simple method for discussing and documenting the flexibility a working carer may need³⁶. It enables carers to avoid having to explain their situation every time a staff member moves, or their line manager changes. By facilitating easier, earlier conversations with line managers, employers benefit from increased productivity, employee wellbeing and ultimately staff retention. Carers Passport schemes can be integrated into wider staff wellbeing practices, but they are most effective when they are championed by senior leaders within the organisation and supported by case studies that demonstrate their usefulness and the meaningful support carers can access as a result.

“I feel very lucky to have moved jobs when I did as in my previous role they weren’t carer aware. You have to be confident that your manager understands and is aware of your situation.”

“I think every workplace should have a carer awareness campaign.”

The Welsh Government has committed itself to support a fair work agenda in Wales that encourages inclusive working environments with opportunities for access and flexibility to enable inclusion of diverse groups, including disabled people, in the workforce³⁷. To live up

³³ Carers UK: Response to UK Government Carers Leave consultation (2020)

³⁴ Carers UK: Juggling Work and Unpaid Care report (2019)

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ Carers Passport: Carer Passport schemes (2017)

³⁷ Fair Work Wales: Report of the Fair Work Commission (2019)

to its aspirations of creating a fair work nation, Welsh Government must expect more of employers with regards to supporting carers in the workplace.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen huge changes in the world of work, some of which have the potential to meaningfully improve the experience of working carers moving forward. At the same time our communities have become more aware than ever of the extraordinary efforts of unpaid carers in keeping people who are ill, older or disabled safe and healthy. Governments at every level and employers in every sector must now resolve to take action and lead by example to make Wales a fairer nation for working carers.

Key Policy Asks

As the national campaigning charity for unpaid carers in Wales, Carers Wales calls for the following actions to be taken by the Welsh Government to give working carers the supportive workplaces and reasonable entitlements they need and deserve.

1. Promote the benefits of flexible working to employers and the public.
2. Ensure work to increase remote working in Wales considers the needs of working carers.
3. Lobby for changes to UK legislation that would enable employees, or carers specifically, to make a statutory request for flexible working after 1 month in a job and end the limit of 1 flexible working request in a 12-month period.
4. Lobby the UK Government to ensure carers leave reaches the statute book as soon as practicable, and for it to be increased to 10 days paid leave accompanied by an entitlement to six months unpaid carers leave.
5. Encourage employers in Wales to introduce their own paid Carers Leave schemes to retain carers in their workforce and require carers leave as a condition of seeking public sector contracts.
6. Introduce paid Carers Leave for all Welsh Government employees.
7. Encourage all employers in Wales to introduce a Carers Passport scheme.
8. Encourage employers to co-create workplace carers policies with carers and their representatives in keeping with the Welsh Government's commitment to fair work and worker voice.

9. Establish a Fair Work Forum for Carers in Employment consisting of stakeholders and employers across sectors to identify appropriate expectations of support for unpaid carers in the workplace and to ensure carers benefit from the fair work and social partnership agendas.
10. Public money should be provided only to organisations fulfilling, or working towards fulfilling, the definitions and characteristics of fair work. This must include requiring employers to adopt carer friendly practices.
11. Encourage employers to train line managers in carer awareness.

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