

Holding on or moving up? Supporting carers and parents in employment

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About Coram Family and Childcare

Coram Family and Childcare works to make the UK a better place for families by bringing together what we learn from our on the ground parent-led programmes and our research to campaign for solutions that parents want and need. We focus on childcare and early years to make a difference to families' lives now and in the long term. Before August 2018, we were known as the Family and Childcare Trust.

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About UNISON

UNISON is the UK's largest public service trade union with 1.25 million members, 1 million of them women. Our members are people working in the public services and for private contractors providing public services. They include frontline staff and managers working full or part time in local authorities, the NHS, the police service, colleges and schools, the electricity, gas and water industries, transport, non-departmental public bodies and the voluntary sector. Whilst we have members at all pay levels across the sectors, many of our members are part time and low paid, working in traditionally low paid sectors like care, catering, security and cleaning.

Acknowledgments

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Summary

There are nine million working parents in the UK, and two million balancing paid work with caring for an adult. These numbers will increase over the next few decades as the population ages, meaning there are more people with care needs, and as more women join the workforce. Adjustments to working arrangements – for example, changing working hours or taking temporary leave from work – can prevent this group from dropping out of employment altogether. This benefits employees, their families, businesses, and the wider economy – crucial as concerns grow about possible labour and skills shortages following Brexit. But at the moment, getting the adjustments needed to stay in work is often a matter of luck.

This research, based on a survey of 2,057 members of the British public, a survey of 2,933 UNISON members, and in-depth interviews and focus groups with 40 people who combine or have combined paid work with being a carer or a parent, finds that:

- ▶ There is strong support for help with balancing working and caring, whether or not people are carers or parents themselves. 77 per cent of the public say that government should do more to help carers at work and 73 per cent think employers should do more. In a survey of UNISON members, 96 per cent of people with experience of balancing paid work and caring responsibilities thought that the government and employers should do more.
- ▶ The most helpful interventions to support people to balance working and caring are thought to be greater control of working hours (82 per cent) and paid carers' leave of 10 to 20 days per year (77 per cent). Some of the people we spoke with in interviews and focus groups said that carers' rights and parents' rights past the first year of a child's life should be more similar to rights during maternity and paternity leave.
- ▶ Men and women both take on caring responsibilities, but responses to our survey of UNISON members showed that women are more likely than men to have already made adjustments to their working arrangements to accommodate caring responsibilities. Responses to a YouGov poll of the public showed that women are more likely than men to think that if they were a parent or carer working full time, they would make each of a range of adjustments to their working arrangements in order to meet their caring responsibilities. For example, just under half (48 per cent) of all GB women think they would have to reduce their working hours if they had caring responsibilities, compared to just under a third (32 per cent) of men.
- ▶ Among people who are combining working and caring, having a sympathetic and flexible manager often makes the biggest difference to how well they can manage. This seems to be more important than whether the employer has formal parents' or carers' policies in place. Informal, low cost arrangements such as being allowed to 'make time up' in the evening if you have taken a family member to an appointment during the working day are often highly valued.
- ▶ Conversely, certain policies can make it harder for people to balance work and care and ultimately more likely that they will leave the workforce or miss out on a promotion. These include restrictions on when and how often people can make flexible working requests, or requirements to work in a specific location even when this is not essential to business operations.

To make it easier for people to balance work and care and retain valuable skills in the economy, Coram Family and Childcare is calling for:

- 1. Employers to adopt best practice around supporting employees with caring responsibilities.** This includes recruiting flexibly by default, putting in place policies and procedures for carers in the workplace and providing training for managers on supporting carers and implementing these policies. Flexible working includes offering staff control over their hours and granting them day-to-day flexibility to deal with unpredictable events.
- 2. Government to introduce up to 10 days per year of paid carer's leave.** Individuals should be able to take it as a single block or individual days, paid at the same rate as maternity and paternity leave.
- 3. Government to introduce the right to up to a year of unpaid leave from your job for carers,** with a right to return to your job modelled on maternity leave.
- 4. Government to support employers to adopt best practice by providing free resources and training.** This includes developing an e-platform for resources and delivering training for managers on how to support working parents and carers.
- 5. Government to prioritise understanding and addressing the issues carers and parents face in retaining, entering and progressing in work**

Section 1: Parents and carers in the workplace

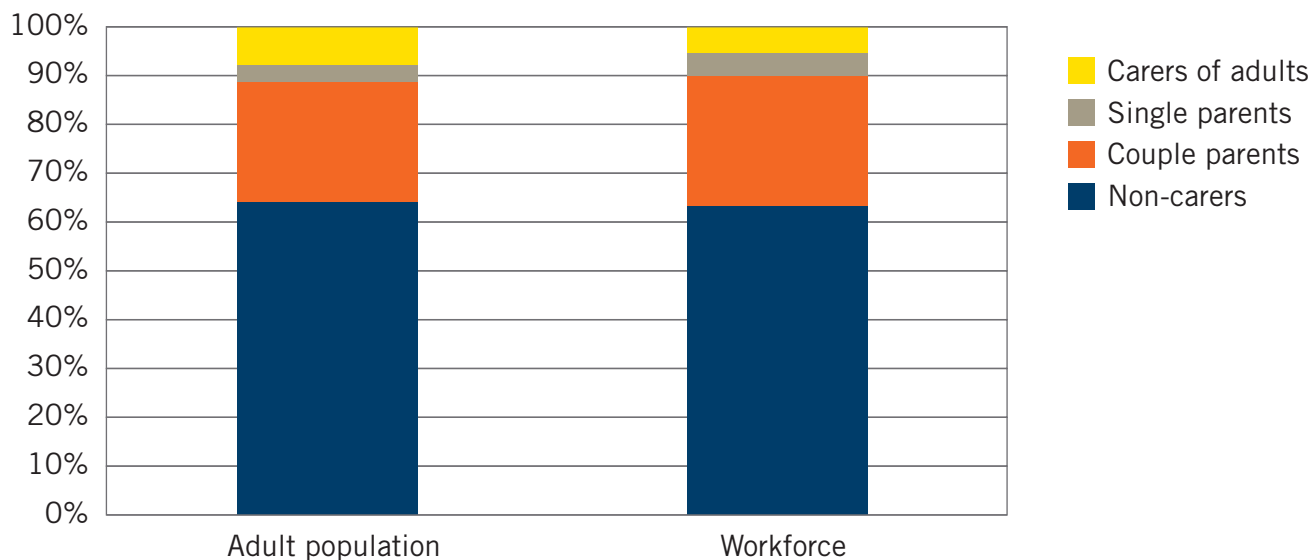
Millions of people in the UK are trying to balance working and caring, whether it is for a child, a partner, a relative or a friend. In this section we outline who these carers are, why it is so important for them to be able to balance work and care and what options are open to them. Using government statistics, data about carers gathered through surveys and stories of individual carers gathered through interviews and focus groups, we illustrate what it is like to try and balance work and care and some of the difficulties carers and parents face.

The survey data in this report is based on two key sources: a survey of 2,933 members of the trade union UNISON in May 2018, and a poll of 2,057 members of the British public conducted by YouGov in August 2018. We also conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with 40 people who combine or have combined paid work with being a carer or a parent. All names of carers and parents cited in the text are pseudonyms. There is more detail in the methodology.

Who is balancing working and caring?

Millions of people in the UK are in paid work and also have caring responsibilities for an adult with a disability or health need, for a child, or both. Nearly two million carers are in paid work in England (Carers UK, 2015). Nearly eight million parents in England are in couples where both parents are in paid work and one million single parents with dependent children are in paid work (ONS, 2017a). Together, parents and carers represent over a third of the workforce (ONS, 2017b).

Almost half (46 per cent) of carers in the UK are in paid work – although 80 per cent are of working age (Peters and Wilson, 2017). More than nine out of ten fathers and nearly three quarters of mothers are in paid work, either part time or full time (ONS, 2017a). The peak age for caring for adults is 50 to 64: one in five people in this age group have a caring responsibility, and many have responsibilities for both an older parent and a child (who may be grown up but still need parental support) or a grandchild (Carers UK, 2015; Ben-Galim and Silim, 2013).

Fig 1: Population of adults and working adults in England, by caring responsibility¹

Sources: Peters and Wilson, 2017; ONS 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Carers UK, 2015. People who look after their own disabled children under 18 are counted as 'parents' rather than 'carers'

About 18 million children in England – more than a quarter of the total – are looked after by a grandparent some of the time (Department for Education, 2017). Grandparents in employment are more likely to say they look after their grandchildren than retired grandparents: 63 per cent versus 55 per cent (TUC, 2013). Among women trade union members aged over 50, 17 per cent said they helped with their grandchildren to allow parents to work (Labour Research Department, 2014).

The number of people combining working and caring in the UK has risen in recent years: the proportion of mothers in employment has risen by more than ten percentage points in the last two decades. Employment rates for single mothers in particular have risen significantly and now stand at 69 per cent. It is estimated that the number of carers in the UK will rise from the current 6.5 million to 9 million by 2037 (Carers UK, 2015). This is driven by the UK's population aging and having more care needs, a rising employment rate, meaning that fewer people are available to care full time, and tighter public sector budgets for care and support services, meaning that families need to do more as the state does less (Employers for Carers, 2017).

The need to balance work and care

All working carers and parents will need to find the right balance for them between their employment and their caring responsibilities. If they cannot find a balance that works for them, they may end up leaving the workplace altogether. For some people, this will be a positive choice – they want to spend more time with their child, or with the person they care for. But others will leave the workplace because they cannot make the balance work practically. For this group, being able to find arrangements which support them in the workplace might mean they can stay in a job for longer.

Nearly half (46 per cent) of workers in Great Britain think that it would be difficult for them to balance work and care, while 41 per cent think it would be easy. Twice as many think it would be very difficult to balance work and care as think that it would be very easy (17 per cent vs 8 per cent). People with experiences of caring were more likely than those without to think that support for parents and carers such as more

¹ The number of carers of adults excludes those who also care for children, or 'sandwich carers'. The proportion of carers who are sandwich carers was assumed to be the same in England as in the UK as a whole, and sandwich carers are assumed to be no more or less likely to work than other carers.

control over the hours they work (87 vs 82 per cent) or paid care leave for 10-20 days a year (82 per cent vs 77 per cent) would help them to balance work and care. UNISON members currently in work with experience of balancing working and caring are more positive about the impact of this on their careers than those without caring responsibilities: for example, 21 per cent of employed carers or parents think it is harder to get a job if you are a carer or a parent, and this rises to 80 per cent of people who are neither carers nor parents. This may be because those with experience of caring have practical experience which shows it can work – or more negatively because people who have not been able to make it work have been forced out of the workplace and therefore are less likely to be trade union members.

If people are unable to balance work and care, they may be forced to leave their job. When asked to imagine that they were a carer and/ or parent working full time, one in six (16 per cent) adults in Great Britain think that in order to manage their caring responsibilities as a carer, they would have to leave their job. Women are more likely to think this than men, with 20 per cent of women reporting that they think they would have to leave their job if they were a carer compared with 12 per cent of men. Similarly, 13 per cent of UNISON members who have had some experience of caring have left a job because of this – 14 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men reported leaving their job to manage their caring responsibilities. It is estimated that over 300,000 people with a caring responsibility have left the workforce and are still not in paid work because of this responsibility – about 62 per cent of these are women (Carers UK, 2016).

“My parent had a fatal illness/condition and needed adjustments to their living environment. The employer was advertising unpaid leave – I applied thinking it would be ideal to help my situation. The employer declined the request and no adjustment to hours to help. I had no option but to resign.”

Carer for an adult

“I have many colleagues who have young children who have been forced into shift patterns when they have young children and some have been pushed out of the company as no options or leniency was given, this upsets me as I feel if the company wants to do something they will no matter the consequences for those who have worked for them for a long time. It creates fear within the workforce.”

Former carer for an adult

People who have left the workforce to care – whether for a child or an older adult – often find it difficult to return to the workplace, or to find a job which matches their level of skill and experience. In response to a Government consultation in 2017, carers who had returned to work or wanted to return to work reported issues with a lack of affordable care (particularly for disabled children), low self-esteem, skills no longer seeming relevant to the workplace, and employers and recruitment agencies being unwilling to consider them because of gaps in paid employment on their CV. Most reported that they had received no support in returning to work and the support or training they could access got mixed reviews as it was often felt to be focussed on low skilled, low paid roles (Kendall, 2018). Women who take a career break of a year or more to care for someone earn on average 28 per cent less than other women – equivalent to £4 an hour (Paull, 2018).

Effective support for people to balance work and care can help them not only to stay in work, but to progress more quickly. Some 12 per cent of adults in Great Britain think that if they were a carer and/ or parent working full time, they would refrain from asking for a promotion, and 8 per cent think that they would take a job which pays less per hour. Women are more likely to think that their career progression would suffer than men, with 14 per cent of women saying that they would refrain from asking for a promotion if they were a carer and/ or parent working full time compared with 10 per cent of men.

“I definitely feel that progression in my job may not be possible with the increasing amount of time I have to spend caring for my parents and the perception of my superiors toward that.”

Carer for adults

“I can't go for a promotion as the job description requires overnight stays, even for posts which never actually stay anywhere overnight.”

Parent

In some cases, employees who have a job which offers some degree of flexibility can feel unable to move because a new employer might not offer this – effectively barring them from promotion. Some people also told us that it is harder to access professional development opportunities if you work part time to accommodate caring responsibilities.

“[I used] flexible working patterns but this went hand in hand with never getting full time hours back, not being able to attend CPD and so losing out on promotions and extra qualifications.”

Parent

“The NHS [as an employer] has supported me unfailingly as a carer for my husband with MS. Is this because I was already working for them and my boss is kind? I don't know but I would not change my job for fear that I would not receive this support in another post.”

Carer for an adult

Employers can make a range of changes to support people to balance working and caring responsibilities – either because they choose to, or because the Government requires them to. There are a huge range of possible changes but they broadly fall into two categories: those which use flexible working of some kind, and those which offer time off work. These are discussed in more detail, both in the UK and internationally, later in this report. In some circumstances, employees have rights to time off or flexibility, but these tend to be qualified in some way for example, they are only available to people in some circumstances, or they are rights to request rather than rights to have.

Getting the employment side right is only one part of balancing working and caring: people also need to get the caring side right. If people cannot access free or affordable, high quality care – whether this is for a child or an adult – they will often not be able to work. Similarly, if health or social care appointments for the person being cared for are at inflexible times or at inconvenient locations, work can become very difficult. The availability and price of care is, of course, strongly influenced by decisions about public spending. These issues are hugely important, but this particular report is focused on the employment side of the balance.

Ways of balancing work and care

For those who wish to stay in employment while managing their caring responsibilities, there are several ways they can balance working and caring. Here we discuss the most common ways to balance work and care: taking time out of work, reducing the number of hours worked, and having flexible working hours.

Three quarters (76 per cent) of the UNISON members we polled who had caring responsibilities said that they had made some change to their work as a result of being a carer, such as taking time out of work or reducing their hours. Women were more likely to say that they had made changes than men, and carers of children were more likely to report making a change than carers of adults. The group who were most likely to have made a change to their work because of their caring responsibilities were those who cared for a disabled child(ren): 86 per cent of these parents said they had made a change.

Taking time out of work

There are few official statistics available on carers or parents taking short periods of time out of the workforce on a temporary basis, except for those on maternity leave. The formal entitlements to parental leave and emergency dependents' leave (discussed more fully below) are not paid, so employers have no reason to report them to government in order to recoup costs. When people are given paid time off, or

asked to ‘make up time’ at a later point, it is possible that there will be no record of this even in employers’ own HR systems. In a survey of working carers, Carers UK found that 12 per cent had used carers’ leave, 7 per cent had used dependents’ leave, and 38 per cent had used annual leave (Carers UK, 2014). The stress caused by caring makes access to annual leave for rest time, rather than for managing caring responsibilities, even more important.

Case study: Peter, who uses annual leave to attend medical appointments

Peter provides care for his wife who had to leave work because of a disability. In caring for his wife, Peter needs to attend regular hospital appointments with her. Because these appointments are only offered during his working hours, he has to request time off work. Since his employer does not offer paid carers’ leave, Peter would rather take this time off as unpaid leave, preferring to sacrifice his salary rather than eat into his fixed amount of annual leave.

“There’s no flexibility there ... they say that if you want to take the time off, not as a holiday, you have to take it as unpaid. And I said, ok, that’s fine, I get that. But as soon as you ask for that, they say, no take it as holiday ... What happens if I run out of holiday?”

“What I would like to do basically is if I have to go out for a couple of hours to the hospital I go out and am able to make that time back, by being able to work a bit longer. I’m using up my holiday, which is my rest time, on hospital appointments”

In some cases, parents and carers may take sick leave for a caring responsibility, and it seems this is often with employers’ knowledge and perhaps tacit agreement: 35 per cent of employers say that ‘family/home/caring responsibilities’ are among the top five causes of short term absence – below only stress, minor illnesses such as colds, and musculoskeletal issues (CIPD, 2016). In the Carers UK survey cited above, 22 per cent of working carers had used sick leave for this reason.

Nearly a third (30 per cent) of adults in Great Britain think that if they were a carer and/or parent working full time they would have to take unpaid leave from work to meet their caring responsibilities. Similarly, taking time out of work was common among the UNISON members that we polled, with 24 per cent of those with caring experience having taken unpaid leave. Members were strongly in favour of having options to take time out of work, especially if it was paid, with about 90 per cent saying that it would help if they could take paid care leave of 10 to 20 days per year.

In the same poll, being able to take a career break with a guaranteed return to your job was viewed as helpful by 78 per cent of carers and 91 per cent of non-carers. Taking a career break may be less popular among those with caring responsibilities because of the stress on finances that many carers experience which makes it harder to go unpaid for an extended period. Nonetheless, it is clear that the option to take time out of work – whether a career break or a few weeks each year – is seen as helpful among those with and without caring responsibilities as a way of balancing work and care.

Working part time

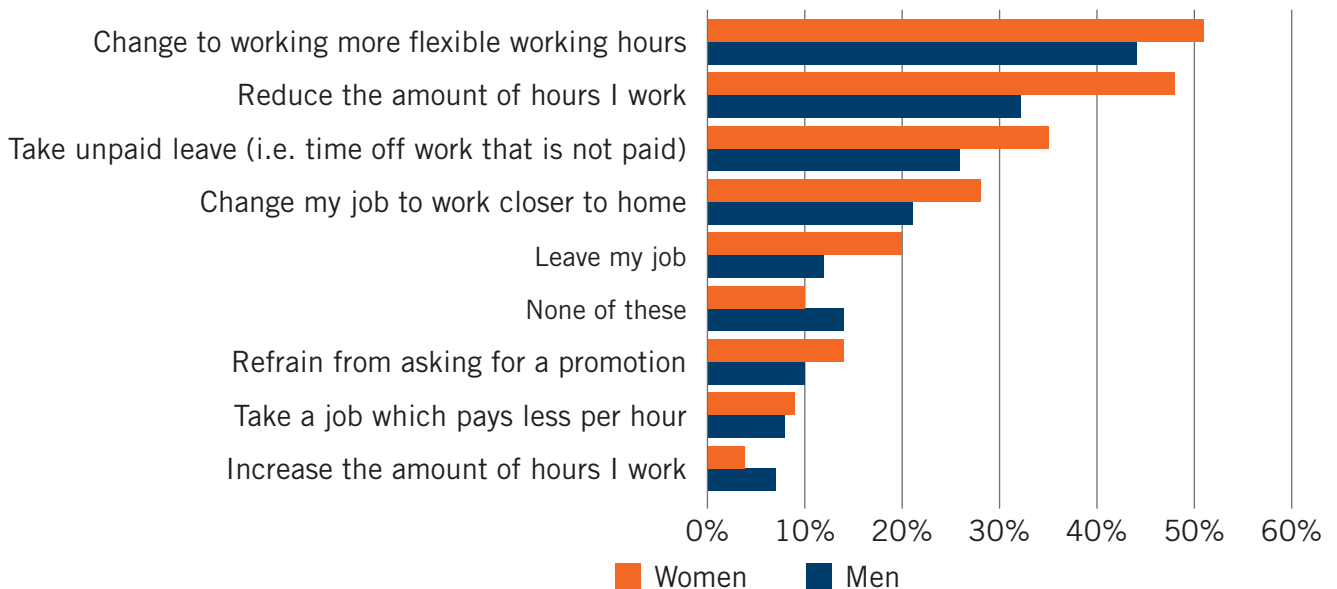
Working part time is not necessarily the same as working flexibly – a school lunchtime supervisor may work about ten hours a week in term time, but have no choice about when they work. Conversely, people may work full time hours in four long days, or ‘make up time’ spent on caring during the week in the evening or at weekends.

Having caring responsibilities makes it more likely that people will work part time – particularly mothers with dependent children. 53 per cent of mothers who are in employment work part time, compared to 32 per cent of employed women who do not have children and 7 per cent of employed fathers (ONS, 2017a). In a survey, 16 per cent of parents of disabled children said they had reduced their hours at work, and 7

per cent said that they had reduced their responsibilities at work (Contact, 2017). A survey of woman trade union members aged 50 and over who worked part time found that 16 per cent did this to allow them to care for a child, and 15 per cent to allow them to care for an adult (Labour Research Department, 2014).

Two fifths (40 per cent) of the public think that if they were a carer and/ or parent working full time they would have to reduce the amount of hours that they work to manage their caring responsibilities. Women were 50 per cent more likely to say that they would have to reduce their working hours to balance work and care, while men were more likely to say that they would have to increase their hours (see Fig. 2). Among the UNISON members we polled, working part time was a common response to having caring responsibilities. Two fifths of those with experience of caring reported that they had altered their working pattern (39 per cent) or reduced their working hours (43 per cent).

Fig 2: Proportion of the public who think that if they were a parent or carer in work they would have to make a change to their work in order to manage their caring responsibilities, by gender.



Case study: Amanda, who found it hard to access part time work

It is not always straightforward or easy to access part time work. When Amanda’s husband’s condition deteriorated and she required more time to care for him, she had struggled to convince her employer to let her work part time.

“I asked for part time for about the last year and my employer said ‘yeah yeah we’ll look at that.’ And then eventually ... after asking quite a few times ... my GP signed me off work, and then my employers immediately started listening to me a bit more.”

Had her employer not hesitated for so long, Amanda says that “I probably wouldn’t have been off sick ... I would probably have got some strategies in place a bit sooner, I would have maybe got some counselling organised, I wouldn’t have waited and waited until it was the very end.”

Becoming a carer is associated with reducing working hours for older (50+) adults, but this varies by occupation: the higher the occupational group, the lower the reduction. Among full time workers in unskilled or partly skilled occupations, becoming a carer is associated with working three hours less per week, but for those in higher occupational classes the average reduction is only 1 hour and 20 minutes. This seems to be because people in higher occupational classes are more likely to be able to successfully request flexible working – discussed in more detail below (Carers UK, 2016).

Working part time is often seen as a ‘natural’ choice for mothers of young children but the UK is fairly unusual in having such a high part time employment rate among mothers. Among the 34 OECD countries for which data is available, only three (The Netherlands, Germany and Austria) have a higher proportion of employed mothers working part time. On average, less than a quarter of employed mothers in OECD countries work part time (OECD 2016).

Working part time has a double impact on incomes, as it means people are working fewer hours but also for less per hour: average hourly pay in the UK was £16.95 for people working full time and £12.09 for people working part time, a gap of 40 per cent (ONS, 2017b).

“I gave up well paid work and took a job in a school whilst caring for my children: dinner lady, breakfast/after school club/ teaching assistant. I have stayed there to help look after my grandchildren.”

Parent and grandparent

“I’ve had to take a part time job 20 hours a week. Just so I can manage my wife’s mental health issues at home. But taking a pay cut and reduced hours doesn’t help pay my mortgage and bills.”

Carer for an adult

Women are much more likely than men to work part time due to caring, with 80 per cent of women working part time when they return to work after a break for caring, compared with 56 per cent of men (Paull, 2018). This is reflected in our survey: almost half (48 per cent) of women think they would have to reduce the amount of hours that they work because of a caring responsibility compared with under a third (32 per cent) of men.

Working flexibly

Parents and carers often use flexible working to help them manage their caring responsibilities. This may be through a formal flexible working request (described in more detail below), it may be agreed specifically in their contract, or it may be a more informal arrangement. Of course, not all flexible working arrangements are about caring – they can be about study, accommodating other hobbies or interests, managing a disability or long term condition, phasing in retirement, or simply personal preference – the law does not distinguish between these reasons.

Nearly half (47 per cent) of adults in Great Britain think that if they were a carer or a parent they would have to change to more flexible working hours to manage their caring responsibilities. Of the UNISON members we polled, two fifths (43 per cent) of those with experience of caring had altered their working pattern to cover their hours.

Many employees work in organisations which offer some sort of flexible working, but far fewer make use of it – it is hard to say whether this low take up is down to not wanting to work flexibly, or down to believing that a request would not be looked on favourably in practice even if it was allowed in theory. For example, more than one in ten of the population say that compressed hours are available at their workplace, but only about 2 per cent use them (Understanding Society, 2017). About one in five workers use flexi-time. Men are more likely than women to say that home working is available to them, and significantly more likely to use it: about one in ten men work from home some of the time, compared to about one in twenty women. A quarter of adults in Great Britain think that they would have to change their job to work closer to home if they were a carer and/ or parent working full time, although in practice this is not always easy.

“In the service that I work in they put you in a particular location but they don't take into account if you're a carer. Why?”

Carer for an adult

About one in ten jobs paying more than £20,000 a year (full time equivalent) are currently advertised as flexible: this figure has been rising, but slowly (Timewise, 2017). Jobs are less likely to have flexibility mentioned at recruitment stage if they are higher paid: one in five jobs paying £14,000 to £19,999 FTE are advertised as flexible, compared to one in 14 paying £60,000 to £79,999 FTE. Alongside lower rates of pay for part time work, this will tend to lead to people with caring responsibilities tending to have lower paid jobs.

Once someone is in the workplace, the benefits to the employer of keeping them there will generally be higher if their skills are more valuable to the organisation. People with specific technical or professional skills, or considerable experience, are the hardest to replace so there is the most incentive to keep them in the workforce, even if this involves compromise. People who work in better paid office jobs may also find it easier to work flexibly than people who do manual or customer service jobs – it is impossible for a cleaner to work from home, and it may be very difficult for a factory worker to be contactable at work during the day (Peters and Wilson, 2017).

Case studies: Experiences of accessing flexible work

Janet, who was not offered any flexibility when her daughter developed a health condition

Janet's young daughter had an operation on her hip which meant she had to spend prolonged periods in hospital. Janet's manager expected her to have found childcare by the time her daughter was released from hospital, but the cast on her daughter's leg and related health conditions meant that the childcare available locally was not suitable for her.

Alongside this, Janet experienced a lot of anxiety due to the uncertainty surrounding her daughter's health condition. Her manager did not offer Janet any flexible work options, forcing her to choose between working without being able to care and caring without being able to work.

“I did feel like the pressure that put me under really was quite considerable. Because the only solution is now for you to come back to work. And that's not a solution that was within my grasp.

“For a lot of parents, they would end up actually saying, look “Do you know what? I cannot work any longer, all I can do is walk away from my job now and just not work at all because that's all I can do if they're not offering any flexibility.” Janet was signed off from work temporarily with anxiety.

Several years later, when Janet's daughter experienced a health issue which required Janet to take time out of work to care for her, Janet's new manager was much more supportive.

“My manager said ‘Let's get you a laptop, let's see where you can work from.’ He definitely took a much more flexible approach ... With the alternatives he gave me, I was able to continue to work. It was really helpful for my mental health because it gave me something else to focus on. Having something occasionally to think about that's other than this health thing that you can do nothing about – that was really helpful.”

Sarah, who works flexibly to fit work around caring for her son

When Sarah had her son, her employer declined her request to reduce her hours to part time. With the help of a union, she was able to reduce her hours to part time and has gradually increased the hours that she works so that she almost works full time again now. She likes to be able to work overtime so that she can take time out in the day to take care of her son or attend a medical appointment without sacrificing her salary or her holiday allowance.

“I say, can I have such and such morning off but I’ll stay a bit later on the Friday or I’ll make the time up, it’s fine as long as I can prove that I’m doing it. Otherwise I’ll say I’ll take this time off my overtime, or I’ll book it as leave. They’re very flexible now.”

Her manager allows her to work this overtime from home in the evenings if she wants to, which Sarah finds very valuable.

“I only really do it on an evening because I have a four year old... It means on an evening I can be getting on with work, still be in the house in case anything happens with my husband or my son ... it means I can still be earning money, doing my work, but be around if an emergency were to happen.”

“It’s worked on a two-way relationship. I’m quite open and honest about what’s going on and I think it helps them understand why I need time off. I’m very good, I don’t take it for granted. I’m always on time if not early. I don’t take the mick with the flexibility that I’m given.”

Section 2: Statutory entitlements for parents and carers in the UK

Rights for carers and parents in the workplace

Employees with caring responsibilities – whether they are for children or adults – have some statutory entitlements to help them with their responsibilities. Broadly, these divide into rights to time off work, and rights to work in different ways.

On top of the support already offered by Government, the vast majority of UNISON members we polled said that they want Government to do more to support parents and carers. However, carers felt more strongly that government should do more. While 82 per cent of non-carers agreed that the government should do more to help carers to balance work and care, this rose to 95 per cent of carers.

“Maybe some government mandatory regulations would be a good idea because you wouldn’t be at the mercy of individuals, you would just know that there were certain rights you had and you’d know where you stood.”

Carer for an adult

In practice many people with care responsibilities told us that the attitude of their immediate line manager was far more important than their statutory or contractual rights. If their manager was not sympathetic, they did not always feel able to use what they were entitled to. Conversely, a good manager would go beyond strict entitlements to find a solution that worked:

“During my time as a carer (5 years) I had 17 different team leaders. This meant I had to explain my situation to each one of them. They each had very different views on the matter.”

Carer for an adult

“I have no doubt that my employer would have been very supportive to my needs and would have helped any way they could, I feel VERY fortunate to work within this department under my supervisors who have been nothing but incredibly supportive to me.”

Carer for an adult

“The more it is ‘normalised’ in the workplace to have to structure your life around your caring responsibilities, the easier it is to do so. Colleagues sighing every time you have to leave a meeting early, or take a day off at short notice, really doesn’t help.”

Parent

Management attitudes have a double effect: as well as directly impacting the employee, they set the tone for how others in the workplace respond to someone balancing work and care.

Time off work entitlements

Time off during pregnancy and in the first year of life

During pregnancy, and in the first year of a child's life, parents have rights to time off work for antenatal appointments and to care for their child, and to return to their job at the end of their leave. Some of these rights are based on having been in employment for a certain length of time, or earning a certain amount of money, whereas others are 'day one' rights. Many people feel that these rights are imperfect – particularly the low levels of pay past the first six weeks of leave, and the complex and limited operation of the shared parental leave system which requires mothers to transfer some of their entitlement to their partner. However, they are comparatively generous compared to the arrangements which are possible later in a child's life.

“I think carers should have the same rights as everybody else. Maternity, you know – maybe carers should have a statutory right to six months paid leave, and six months unpaid leave.”

Carer for adults

International example: Paid leave for carers in Denmark

In Denmark, employees have the right to take paid leave for up to six months to care for a close relative who is disabled or seriously ill. The carer enters into an employment contract with the local authority who pays them either the salary they were receiving from their previous employer or DKK 22,504 (£2,600) per month, whichever is lower. They will continue to accrue holiday pay and pension benefits, and may divide the care leave up into two shorter periods of three months, or share it between several individual carers, if their employer agrees.

Employees who take up paid leave to look after sick relatives do not have a statutory right to return to their old job, though they cannot be fired for taking care leave either. The right to return to the same role tends to be specified in collective agreements, which cover the vast majority of Danish workers.

The closest policy to this found in the UK is the right to emergency leave for dependents. The UK's policy covers a broader range of carers, who are eligible to take leave if they are caring for family or friends, anyone who is dependent on them for care. However, emergency care leave in the UK is unpaid, making it much costlier to make use of.

Parental leave after the first year

At the end of their maternity or paternity leave, parents can take unpaid leave until their child turns 18. This is capped at 18 weeks in total per child, and up to four weeks in a given year. Parents must have been with their current employer for at least a year to take leave, and must give at least three weeks' notice. Employers can postpone leave if they have a 'significant reason' to do so. Most parents must take their leave in increments of at least a week, but parents of disabled children may take individual days.

International example: Leave for carers and parents in Italy

Parents in Italy are entitled to six months leave, to be used at any time from the end of maternity leave until a child is twelve years old. Parents can take leave at the same time as each other, and may break it up into smaller chunks including on an hourly basis (Moss, 2013). Parents with children under six who take this leave are paid at 30 per cent of earnings, but parents with older children are not paid – in either case they receive pension credits for the time they are on leave.

In addition, employees working full time are entitled to up to three days of paid leave per month to assist a frail relative (Eurofound, 2015). Part time workers are granted leave pro-rata for the hours they work). In the private sector, employees can spread this leave by hours or half days. It is fully paid by the National Institute for Social Security, but is only available for the care of relatives up to the third degree (e.g. great grandparents, first cousins) who are deemed ‘severely disabled’. Flexible leave which is fully paid enables carers to take time off for things like attending appointments with those they care for, which is something the UK system does not currently accommodate.

Emergency dependents’ leave

Emergency dependents’ leave is for employees with someone dependent on them – this includes children and also spouses, parents and grandparents. According to the government, ‘you’re allowed a reasonable amount of time off to deal with the emergency, but there’s no set amount of time as it depends on the situation’ (gov.uk, 2018). The leave does not have to be paid. It cannot be used if the situation was known about in advance, for example a planned hospital appointment.

Flexible work entitlements

Employees who have been working for their employer for at least six months have a right to request flexible working – this applies whether or not they have a caring responsibility. Their employer does not have to accept their request but they must give a business reason for turning it down. Flexible work requests might include working part time or compressed hours, working term time only, starting or finishing early or late, job sharing, home working, or phased retirement.

“With my last employer, you could only make a flexible working request once every twelve months – that is a joke, because your life can change every three months. I think the flexible working policy should be once every three months as a statutory right.”

Carer for adults

Most of these rights apply only to employees and not ‘workers’ or self employed people. Workers, who may work ‘casually’ for an organisation but who are required to work particular hours at certain points, and people who are required by an organisation to accept self employment although they would prefer to be an employee are at particular risk as they are not entitled to flexible working or time off for emergencies. ‘Genuine’ self employment, where someone works for a number of clients at mutually convenient times, is sometimes seen by people with caring responsibilities as a positive way to manage work and care.

In many cases, employers will go beyond these entitlements – for example, by making jobs ‘flexible by default’ or offering flexibility soon after people join, by giving staff paid time off for emergency or parental leave, or by offering some form of carers’ leave. These are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Parents, caring and the benefits system

All families with children receive Child Benefit, unless their income is above the maximum threshold. Families with children who are on Universal Credit or Tax Credits get an allowance for children as part of their benefits package, and can also get support with childcare costs – this pays a maximum of 85 per cent of costs but in practice is generally less, because income tapers mean that parents get less in benefits as they earn more money. Parents who do not claim Universal Credit or Tax Credits can get help with their childcare costs through the tax free childcare system and its predecessor Childcare Voucher system, which pays up to 20 per cent of costs. There are also additional benefits for disabled children, which are paid to their parents.

If carers are providing more than 35 hours of care a week for someone who receives certain disability related benefits, they may be able to claim Carers Allowance – currently £62.70 per week. For people in areas where Universal Credit has not yet been rolled out, they can earn up to £116 a week after tax and expenses for providing care while they are working and still claim the credit, but if they earn more than this they lose all of it. For people claiming Universal Credit, Carers Allowance is rolled into their overall benefit entitlement, which means the cliff edge of £116 per week is not relevant – instead, their overall award will taper down as their earnings increase. Carers who cannot get Carers Allowance may be able to get Carers Credit, which protects their national insurance contributions for state pension entitlement.

The benefits system is complex and it is often difficult to say what rules apply to people in different circumstances. www.entitledto.co.uk offers a free benefits calculator for individuals which includes carers' and parents' benefits.

Section 3: The case for change

The majority (65 per cent) of adults in Great Britain think that the Government should do more to help parents and carers to balance work and care. The same proportion (65 per cent) think that employers should do more. Here we outline some of the reasons for changing the support available for those trying to balance work and care.

Doing the right thing

There is a moral case for supporting people who want to balance work and care as people should not be denied the opportunity to work and earn because of their family circumstances, or because they have chosen to offer help to someone. Work is not just about money – it is also about the opportunity to use and develop skills, be part of a team, and spend time with like-minded people.

Equality

Care is an equality issue. The majority of parents who take time out of the workplace, and of carers for adults, are women. If it is difficult to balance work and care, it is largely women's incomes that suffer both at the time of caring, and in the future because of the propensity of those who return to work to work fewer hours, restricted career progression and gaps in pension contributions.

Making it difficult for parents and carers to work will often impact the finances of the people they care for as so many carers live with, and share finances with, the person they help. By definition, this is likely to affect the incomes of people with disabilities and long term conditions.

Women in work are more likely than men to think that it would be difficult for them to balance work and care (48 per cent vs 44 per cent). Perhaps as a result, women are a lot more likely than men to think that the Government and employers should do more to help parents and carers to balance work and care (71 per cent compared to 59 per cent and 72 per cent compared to 57 per cent respectively).

The business case

There is also a strong financial case, both for businesses and the wider economy. If people leave the workplace in the medium term or permanently because of their caring responsibilities, their skills and experience are lost to the economy. They will pay less to the exchequer in taxes. In some cases, they will need benefits to meet their and their families' living costs. As the number of parents and carers in the workplace increases, it will become increasingly important to accommodate them in order to avoid skills and labour shortages – particularly in a difficult recruitment environment which is likely to follow Brexit (Partington, 2018).

The peak ages for caring responsibilities lead to their own particular problems for businesses. Mothers tend to leave the workplace temporarily or permanently in their late twenties or thirties, when their earnings and skills would otherwise be on an upward trajectory – it is often difficult or impossible to get their progress back. The peak age for carers is 55 to 64 – when people's professional skills and experience are generally at their highest point.

For individual employers, the business benefits of accommodating parents and carers will need to be weighed against the impact on their organisation. The balance will be different in every case, depending on the role of the individual and the change they have requested. In general, business gains will be to do with:

- ▶ Keeping someone in the workforce now
- ▶ Knowing that someone will be returning to the workforce in the future
- ▶ Attracting or retaining staff who do not currently provide care, but think that they might in future
- ▶ Attracting customers on the basis that they are an ethical business

Whether it is out of concerns about fairness and equality or the health of businesses, there are good reasons to support people to balance work and care. To act on these reasons, we need institutions and employers which provide practical support and a culture which recognises the value of carers. We discuss how to achieve these in the next section.

Section 4: Good practice in the UK and internationally

Within the UK, many organisations go beyond statutory entitlements to offer adjustments which make a real difference to carers' and parents' lives – both formally and informally. There are also good examples of international practice which show how carers' needs can be accommodated so they can stay in the workplace.

Taking time out of work

Some organisations offer enhanced time out of the workplace for carers. This ranges from the seemingly common practice of paying emergency dependent's leave to allowing regular or longer term time out of work. In some cases, employers' responses can be led by practicality – it can be a considerable administrative effort to cut pay for a couple of hours of time off work. Current examples for shorter term or 'adjustment' periods include:

- ▶ 'Matched annual leave' where the organisation will give an additional day of paid leave for each day of annual leave spent caring for someone. This process is used by Centrica as part of its caring policies (Centrica, 2014).
- ▶ Carers' leave entitlements, usually paid and generally up to a fixed amount of time every year. Aviva offers 35 hours (about a week) per year of time off for appointments plus 35 hours of time off for emergencies for carers in the workplace (Employee Benefits, 2017).
- ▶ Offering employees the opportunity to 'buy' more holiday and spread the payments over time, as at Brand Learning (Working Families, 2017).

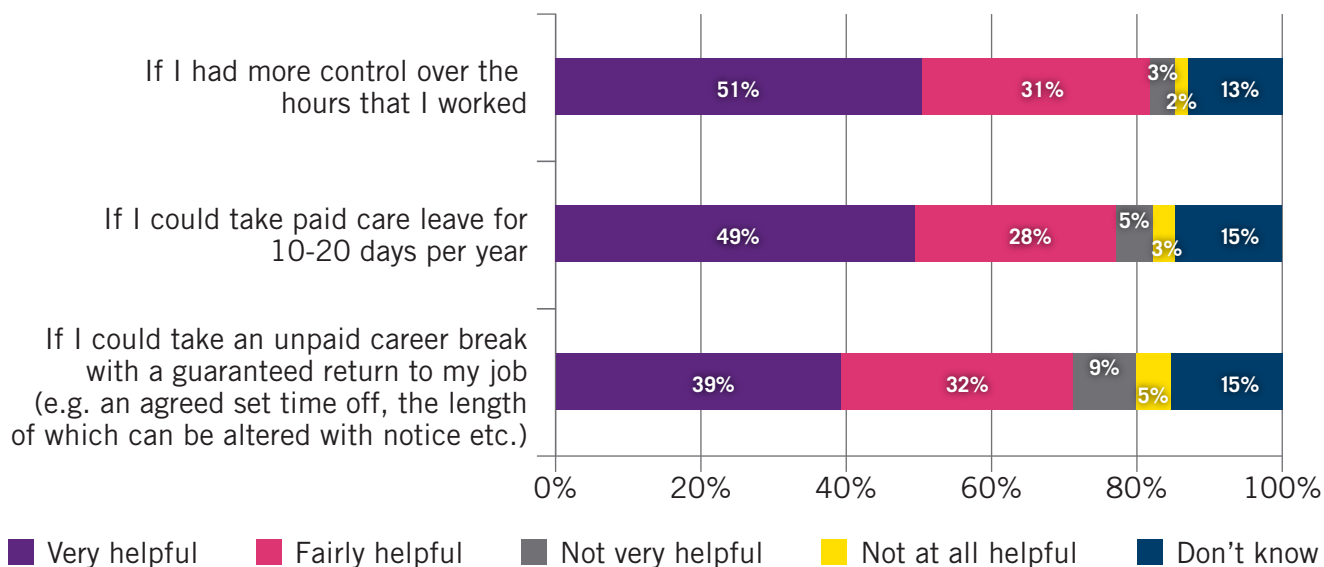
More than three quarters (77 per cent) of adults in Great Britain think that if they were a parent or carer, access to paid care leave for 10 - 20 days per year would help them to balance work and care. Women are more likely to think they would find paid care leave helpful, with 81 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men saying that it would help them to balance work and care.

"A problem at the moment is we have to take leave as half a day or one day and it would help if you could take just an hour. Say I had to take my mother to the doctor's, if I could just take an hour's leave which might be all I need, that would obviously be far more time effective from my point of view, wouldn't it?"

Carer for an adult

Figure 3 shows the support among the public for three interventions, chosen because they correspond to the most common changes people thought they would make to balance working and caring (see Fig. 2 in section 2).

Fig. 3: Proportion of the public who think that particular interventions would be helpful or unhelpful if they were trying to balance work and care.



When people are out of the workforce for months or years, they may not be paid for the whole time but can be offered a guaranteed return – similar to the guarantee that applies at the end of maternity leave. This might be after a previously agreed amount of time – making the arrangement similar to a career break or sabbatical – or for an open ended period. Almost three quarters (71 per cent) of adults in Great Britain think that if they were a carer and/ or parent working full time, having an unpaid career break with a guaranteed return to their job would help them to balance work and care. One parent we spoke to talked about her experience of returning to work after taking maternity leave:

“I didn’t feel safe in the care I was delivering because I felt like I had gone on the Sunday from being a full time mum for 14 months... to all of a sudden I’m in charge of running a ward.”

Parent

To avoid problems like this, the right to return ought to be matched with a ‘settling in period’ to help staff to readjust to their role.

Working part time or flexibly

Four fifths (82 per cent) of the public said that if they were a carer and/ or parent working full time, having more control over their hours would help them to balance work and care. This option was more likely to be seen as helpful by women than men (86 per cent vs 79 per cent).

“Instead of working fewer days I’m [now] working fewer hours over five days. And that I think is going to work out very well because it means I don’t have to leave the house until about ten in the morning and I’m back at four. So it means I can go to work with a bit more peace of mind that [my partner’s] all right.”

Carer for an adult

Employers can respond in two ways to parents' and carers' need for flexible working – they can offer it to someone who is already in their workforce, or they can offer it at the point of recruitment by default.

Only a minority of jobs in the UK are advertised as flexible, although the proportion has been growing in the last few years (CIPD, 2014). Of the UNISON members we polled, we found a correlation between having caring responsibilities and working part time, with those who had caring responsibilities being more than twice as likely as those without caring responsibilities to work part time.

Some employers are signed up to schemes which offer 'flexible work by default' or mark job advertisements as 'happy to talk about flexible working'. Barclays, BT and Lloyds Bank are all companies offering flexible working from day one to all of their employees, with the latter naming specific types of flexibility available on advertisements. West Dunbartonshire Council went one further by extending flexible recruitment to proactively ask candidates what flexibility they desire.

One way of enabling employees to balance working with caring responsibilities is to offer the opportunity to work from home. At Highlands and Islands Enterprise, all staff are offered to work from home and provided with the technology to do so, and informal local flexibility such as occasionally working from home is encouraged too (Working Families, 2017). Lloyds Bank, too, have invested hugely in technology to support 'agile' working. Many working carers and parents told us that either regular or ad hoc home working made it much easier for them to balance work and care, although this was easier in some jobs than others.

International example: Flexible working in Japan

The Japanese Government introduced the right to at least one of a range of flexible work policies being offered at their workplace. As well as a right to take up to five unpaid days off per family member in need of care per year (up to a maximum of two family members), employees are also entitled to access at least one of the following forms of carer support part time working, flexitime, or staggered working hours.

Employers may also introduce their own systems to provide financial allowances to enable working carers to pay for professional care services. Family carers have a right to request an exemption from working overtime, which can be denied by their employer only on grounds of business performance.

Informal support

Many of the case studies in this section are drawn from large employers, who tend to have formal policies and procedures in place to cover a wide range of eventualities, and who have the capacity and resources to join good practice networks and submit evidence to enquiries. This is not to say that smaller employers do not have similarly good practice – simply that it does not tend to be written about or reported in the same way.

In general, much of the day to day flexibility which is offered to carers in organisations of all sizes will be agreed between the employee and their line manager, and will depend on the approach of that manager as well as their organisation's culture. Informal arrangements are more common than contractual changes in small organisations, contrary to large organisations where the opposite is true (CIPD, 2014). This may be because small or medium enterprises (SMEs) are much less likely to see negative managers' attitudes towards flexible working as a barrier to workplace flexibility.

An understanding and trusting manager who takes an employee's caring responsibilities into account was the kind of support most valued by many of the parents and carers we spoke to. Interviewees reported that informal arrangements to support them, with a manager and colleagues who did not pass judgement on them

when their caring responsibilities clashed with their work, gave them, or would give them, peace of mind.

“I feel very supported by people at work... Both times he [my husband] has had an emergency I’ve just been able to go because everybody knows the situation regarding him... it doesn’t make me feel anxious about my work being covered or generally things like that. I just know they’ll support me”

Carer for an adult

“They [my employer] could have talked to me, taken into account simple things like my journey time to work, the days that I work, the times that I work. Not just allocate them unreflectingly.”

Carer for an adult

Overall, however, smaller organisations are less likely than larger organisations to offer some kind of formal flexible working arrangement, with one in five SMEs offering nothing compared with one in twenty larger employers (CIPD, 2014).

One example of a smaller organisation supporting working carers is digital marketing agency iCrossing. They offer flexible working to all staff and allow staff with caring duties up to two hours paid time off during the working day to attend to family matters, such as taking a relative to a medical appointment (iCrossing, 2015). Another small employer, Virtual Sales Team, advertise all roles as flexible and has set a target that full time staff will not exceed 20 per cent of the workforce (Working Families, 2017b). Surveys show that 90 per cent of staff are happy with their work-life balance.

Carers’ networks, trade unions and recognition of carers

Carers and parents in the workforce sometimes report that they feel lonely or isolated. Some employers have carers’ networks – which meet face to face or online – to help carers get mutual support: for example Sainsbury’s has an online forum (Sainsbury’s, 2018). Parent networks appear to be less common, perhaps because being a parent is a more commonly visible identity, so informal networks tend to form organically. These networks may also work to improve practice in their organisations, for example by raising awareness.

Networks depend on carers self-identifying in order to join them – they may choose not to do this, or they may simply not see what they are doing as ‘caring’. The chair of Centrica’s Carers Network reported that it took about ten years to increase their membership from 250 people to 1000. The Carers into Employment project (see boxed text below) found that ‘roadshow’ events for carers in a particular workplace were not always effective, as people were sometimes reluctant to identify as carers in front of their colleagues.

At West Dunbartonshire Council, participation in the carers’ support network has been encouraged by the management team. The council’s chief executive is a working mother and champion of the network (Working Families, 2017b). There is also a fathers’ champion for working fathers, and representatives of supporting organisations Carers of West Dunbartonshire, MacMillan Cancer Support and Money and Welfare Advice Service attend meetings of the network to foster inclusiveness.

While few of the parents and carers we interviewed raised the idea of a carers network organically, generally there was support for them among those who did. People related the benefits they could get out of a carers network, such as information about their rights and how to action them, and advice about how to care for someone.

“It would be nice to know that I could go somewhere and say, ‘look, I’m not terribly confident about what I’m doing, am I doing it right? Can you give me some advice on how I should deal with medicines, some advice on how I should provide care – the right attitude and the right way to respect my wife’s dignity?”

Carer for an adult

“I think they’re a great idea for people who work part time or people who don’t work, but for me I just can’t get the time. They’re not run at times that I’m available. It’s quite difficult to take leave where I work – you have to put in a request and you can only take a certain amount of leave.”

Carer for an adult

However, even among those who viewed them as beneficial, some doubted how supportive carers’ networks could in their own lives, when time to attend meetings is so rare.

International example: Collective agreements in Germany

German collective bargaining arrangements often include long term working time accounts (time banks) which enable employees to accumulate leave over time to be used when caring responsibilities arise, or in some cases to fund early retirement. Other common features are provisions for remote working and job sharing arrangements (Kraemer, 2017). Collective bargaining can take place at a sector level or within large companies.

For example, the steel industry has an agreement on the industry’s response to demographic change (Eurofound, 2015). The response included establishing long-term working accounts which allowed workers to accumulate up to five hours per week worked over the collectively agreed working hours to be used in connection with care duties.

Long-term working time accounts enable employees to build a buffer of time off to use for care duties without cost to the employer, who is paid in advance. However, they do not provide adequate support to those who have caring responsibilities from their first day in a job, or those without spare time, who cannot therefore save up time. In the UK, many of the carers and parents we spoke to had access to or desired the ability to take time off and then pay it back retroactively by working extra hours over the coming weeks.

Carers’ policies and training

Some organisations have specific policies which set out their support for carers in the workplace – although it appears more common for carers’ needs to be encompassed within more general policies such as flexible working and time off work. Parents’ policies seem to be much more common, as they are required to cover maternity and paternity leave, but it appears that many do not go beyond the first year of life.

Carers’ and parents’ or family policies may be useful, but only as a means to an end: having them is no guarantee of good practice in individual cases, and not having them does not mean that employees will not be treated with consideration and empathy. Indeed, most of the parents and carers we spoke to had received support mainly through informal channels, and few knew whether they had a workplace policy for carers, where to find it if they did, or what rights it might give them. Several interviewees reported finding out about support for carers only through word of mouth, and some doubted whether their managers were aware of the policies themselves.

“[Where I work,] rather than having significant drops in pay after a certain period of maternity leave, you can actually do an average so that the pay stays the same over the 12 months. But that was only through word of mouth, from people who had had children before, that I found out you could ask for that.”

Parent

Some employers have used training for line managers to address this gap between policies and practice. Governments can also work to increase awareness of carers’ entitlements.

International example: Information campaigns to help carers to know their rights in Australia

The Australian government funds national services such as the Human Rights Commission and the Carer Gateway which provide comprehensive information about the rights and roles of carers and their employers, and access to support services.

Carer Gateway's suite of online resources include easy to read descriptions of rights as a carer, complete with links to the relevant legislation, and practical advice on working while caring. For instance, there is advice about how to talk with your employer about balancing your commitments, and tools to assist with making an application for flexible working arrangements.

Networks of organisations

Some employers are part of networks of organisations which share good practice about supporting parents or carers – or indeed others who want to work flexibly – in the workplace. Some of these include:

Employers for Carers <https://www.employersforcarers.org/> – offering resources for employers and employees, and training for staff;

Working Families <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/employers/working-families-membership/> – offering evidence-based training for employers, best practice awards, and expert advice for employees;

Working for Carers <https://workingforcarers.co.uk/employers/> – offering a range of help guides and training courses, networking events and hosting opportunities, and branded membership for organisations which sign the Working for Carers Charter.

In England: The Carers into Employment project

Funded by Government from 2015 to 2017, the Carers into Employment project aimed to explore 'what works' to help carers stay in work, or return to work. Projects were based in nine English local authorities, and varied from area to area: in general, they included information, advice and guidance to carers, supplying assistive technology to help carers keep in touch when they were outside the home, and work with employers to encourage them to provide better support for carers. In some cases, this included direct brokerage by project staff between employees and employers (Wilson et al, 2018).

Overall the project reached almost 400 employers across the nine areas. Qualitative findings suggested that employers reported more supportive working cultures and less conflict over flexibility for carers; some also reported that they had changed their HR policies and practices. Project staff tended to find that employers responded better to light touch 'menus of options' rather than stricter lists, but that some employers were reluctant to engage with voluntary or public sector organisations as they felt they did not understand the needs of the private sector. Some also reported that it was impossible for them to make changes at branch level because policies were set centrally, underscoring the need for action at both central and local levels.

Conclusion

More than ten million people, making up over a third of the workforce, are trying to work while caring for family, friends or neighbours. Better support for people to balance work and care would contribute to a fairer, less unequal, and more prosperous society. It would do this by alleviating the costs imposed on those who take on caring responsibilities, by reducing the disadvantage faced by women who are more likely to take on and face costs associated with caring, and by keeping skilled workers in the workforce.

The original research described in this report found large gaps in the support currently offered to working parents and carers, but also distilled what kinds of support the public as well as parents and carers themselves think is most helpful. An appetite for the Government and employers to do more to support working carers came through clearly, and our review of good practice in the UK and internationally offers some promising ways to achieve this.

While workers in Great Britain are split about whether it would be easy or difficult for them to balance working and caring (41 per cent in comparison to 46 per cent), more than two thirds of the public think that they would have to make some change to their work in order to do so, and we know that these changes are not available in many workplaces. For instance, almost half (47 per cent) of people think that they would have to move to working more flexible hours. Some 82 per cent of the public think that it would be helpful to have more control over the hours they work if they were a carer and/ or parent and working full time. So long as many parents and carers do not have access to these changes at their workplace, we risk forcing them to choose between working and caring.

Recommendation: We are calling for employers to adopt best practice in meeting the needs of employees with caring responsibilities, including, recruiting flexibly by default, putting in place policies and procedures for carers in the workplace and providing training for managers on supporting carers and implementing these policies.

Many of the parents and carers we spoke to did not know what rights they had in their workplace, and had never been offered the opportunity to work flexibly. There was a strong consensus among interviewees that having an understanding manager, who trusts you and does not make you feel guilty for trying to balance working and caring, is essential to support parents and carers in work.

Recommendation: We are calling on Government to develop and disseminate resources including an e-platform and deliver training for managers on how to support working parents and carers.

One issue many parents and carers struggle with is having the time to deal with regular but unavoidable responsibilities such as attending medical appointments with the person they care for. The most common way to cope with these without access to paid time out of work is for carers to use their annual leave entitlements, reducing the amount of time they have available to rest – time that is especially important given the stress experienced by carers. More than three quarters of the public (77 per cent) think that if they were a parent or carer in work then it would be helpful if they could take paid carers' leave for 10-20 days a year.

Recommendation: We are calling for Government to provide funding for employers to provide carers' leave of up to ten days per year, to be taken as a single block or individual days, paid at the same rate as maternity and paternity leave.

For some carers, especially those with caring responsibilities which arrive suddenly or come to a head temporarily, a period out of work may be the best or the only option. When they return to work, many of these parents and carers will have to accept a lower wage or work in a lower skilled job.

To ensure that taking time out of work to care for someone does not cost someone their career, to help to reduce the gender pay gap, and to keep valuable skills in the workforce, parents and carers need a right to unpaid leave and to return to their job. More than two thirds of the public (71 per cent) think that it would be helpful for parents and carers to be able to take an unpaid career break with a guaranteed right to return to their job.

Recommendation: We are calling for Government to grant carers a right to unpaid leave and the ability to return to work for up to twelve months, modelled on maternity leave.

There remains a lot we do not know about the experiences of parents and carers who are trying to balance working and caring. The barriers to entering, staying in and progressing in work that carers and parents face will change over time and we need them to be closely inspected by a body which can address them.

Recommendation: We are calling for The Government Equalities Office to prioritise understanding and addressing the issues carers and parents face in retaining, entering and progressing in work.

With the number of people trying to balance working and caring set to grow over the coming decades, the Government and employers must act so that parents and carers are not pushed out of the workforce.

Methodology

This report was written by Coram Family and Childcare (previously Family and Childcare Trust) in summer 2018, and funded by UNISON. It is based on:

- ▶ A literature review of British data and reports on people combining parenting or caring with work, including those who drop out of work permanently or for extended periods.
- ▶ A review of domestic and international policy and practice on supporting carers and parents in the workplace, focusing on interventions which have some evidence of effectiveness and/or support.
- ▶ A survey of members of the trade union UNISON conducted in April and May 2018. This was sent by UNISON to 10,000 randomly selected members across the UK who had opted in to being contacted for this purpose. We received 2,933 responses. A large majority were in work and most of these (88%) were combining this with caring or being a parent, or had done so in the past. Most questions were quantitative, but there was also a qualitative text box, which received around a thousand responses.
- ▶ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2057 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th - 10th August 2018. The survey was carried out online. This used similar questions to the UNISON members' survey but was shorter. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).
- ▶ Two focus groups with a total of 19 people who combined, wanted to combine or had combined caring and/or being parents with paid work. These were recruited with support from local Family Information Services (part of the local authority) and run in two areas of London in May 2018.
- ▶ 22 telephone interviews with UNISON members who had agreed to take part in further research and who were combining being a parent or carer with paid work, conducted between May and July 2018. These were purposively sampled to give a mix of women and men, part time and full time workers, and people who cared for children or adults. They lasted 20 to 25 minutes on average.

People who participated in focus groups or interviews were offered shopping vouchers as a thank you for their time.

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