UNPAID CARERS & EMPLOYMENT

AUGUST 2022

Research for Carers Trust exploring the support needs of unpaid carers when searching for work, or balancing their caring role with paid work
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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About Carers Trust

Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes and raise awareness and influence policy. Carers Trust’s vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

We partner with our network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes, raise awareness and influence policy.

We are positioned centrally to support local carer organisations to deliver localised action, whilst also influencing the environment for unpaid carers UK-wide.
Wavehill undertook research on behalf of Carers Trust and the Working for Carers partnership to understand more about the support needs of unpaid carers when searching for work or balancing unpaid caring responsibilities alongside paid work. A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.

Working for Carers supports carers and former carers in London to move closer to employment. The project is delivered by Carers Trust in partnership with four Network Partners (local carers centres), and is jointly funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund until June 2023.

This report was informed by a mixed-methods research approach. All fieldwork was conducted between April and June 2022, including online surveys and follow-up interviews and focus groups with carers and staff from carers centres.

The research identifies a range of barriers and challenges that need to be overcome in order to improve the support for carers who are looking to enter work or extend their hours, or who are already balancing paid work alongside their unpaid caring role. The findings in this report are of relevance to a wide range of stakeholders involved in provision of support for working carers, including carers organisations, government and policy makers and employers.

Key Findings

1. **Most carers who are currently looking for work say concerns about household finances and the cost of living are a major reason why they want to find work.**
   73% reported this as one of the key motivators for looking for work now.

2. **Carers seeking work have specific support needs.**
   Over and above the need for general employability provision, such as job-searching skills, there is a high level of demand for support that is specific to carers. For example, 43% of carers who were seeking employment reported that they wanted advice on balancing work with their caring role, and 48% reported that they wanted help identifying employers with carer-friendly policies.
3. A lack of access to alternative care support is one of the key barriers to carers progressing into employment or balancing existing roles with their caring responsibilities.
29% of carers say this barrier has made it difficult for them to access employment, education and training. Carers report a range of barriers to accessing alternative care, including the high cost of external care, reliability issues and local skills shortages.

4. Carers are concerned about stigma in the workplace.
Many carers were worried about disclosing their caring responsibilities due to concerns that they would miss out on employment opportunities, and both carers and staff from carers centres gave examples of where carers had been rejected from jobs as employers did not believe they would prioritise their job role.

5. Financial challenges are a barrier to carers looking to enter work or looking to increase their hours.
23% of carers report that financial concerns, such as the loss of Carer’s Allowance or other benefits, are a barrier to entering employment, education or training.

6. The current Carer’s Allowance provision appears to be restricting carers’ choices when it comes to employment.
Many carers were concerned about the working hours threshold and low level of entitlement provided by Carer’s Allowance. The risk of losing Carer’s Allowance was deterring some carers from increasing their hours, due to difficulties offsetting the loss of this benefit against an increase in work. A worker on the minimum wage would need to work an additional seven hours per week to match the corresponding loss in Carer’s Allowance.

7. Access to flexible working is very important to carers looking to enter or sustain employment.
85% of carers report that access to flexible working is very important to them when considering a potential employer. However, 61% of carers reported that finding work flexible enough to fit around their caring role had been a barrier to accessing the workplace.

8. Working carers are in need of more support, with more than 1 in 3 reporting that they are struggling to balance their caring role with their employment.
Indeed, 30% of respondents reported that they ‘feel overwhelmed by the situation and are struggling to balance the two’, and 5% report that they are ‘really struggling to cope’.

9. Carer’s Leave appears to be well supported among carers, and may help carers to balance their caring responsibilities with employment.
68% of carers said that access to Carer’s Leave is ‘very important’ to them when they consider a potential employer.
Recommendations

The barriers faced by carers when looking to enter or sustain employment highlight that more support is needed from carers organisations, government and policy makers, and employers.

This requires a more joined up approach which recognises that without improvements in employment, social care and welfare provision, carers’ involvement in the workplace will remain limited. In this research there were a number of instances where carers highlighted a lack of join-up between employability support and social care support, resulting in carers “hitting a brick wall”, for example where employment advisors were trying to help them move towards employment but were unable to resolve the key barrier to them accessing work: an absence of alternative care support.

Below we have set out a series of recommendations for carers organisations, employers and government that we think have the potential to turn the tide.

Carers organisations

● Collaborative conversations are needed between local carers centres, employability providers and employers to agree on an approach to ensure that carers’ needs are being met by current provision. Examples like the Working for Carers programme could be used to provide an illustration of possible approaches that could be adopted by other areas. This needs to be backed by additional funding to ensure that carers’ employability needs are supported as European funding is withdrawn.

● National organisations like Carers Trust could develop awareness campaigns that support employers to become more carer-friendly and help them to understand and address the barriers that carers face when balancing work and care.

“It’s hard when you’ve been away from work for so long, I’ve lost all my confidence… It needs to be a slow and steady transition back into the workplace, some kind of mentoring, some kind of coaching for carers.”

(Carer, Interviewee)
Employers

- Employers should seek to become accredited, e.g. as Carer Friendly (1) organisations, and put the necessary policies and processes in place to support carers in the workplace. Accreditation can help carers to identify carer-friendly employers.
- Employers should be clearer about the extent of flexibility within a role, so carers can avoid having to disclose their caring responsibilities or ask for adjustments at application where they may not want to do so.
- Employers should proactively offer roles that can be accessed on a flexible or job-sharing basis.
- Where possible, employers should offer roles that can be performed on an output basis rather than on a set working hours pattern to enable carers to participate in the workplace.
- Employers should provide carers with access to flexible working arrangements wherever possible.
- Employers should help carers to balance their roles by implementing flexible paid leave that enables carers to respond to ad-hoc or emergency caring needs, and they should ensure that carers are aware of the support available to them.
- Employers should ensure carers have access to support in the workplace that enables them to share challenges around balancing their roles, and ensures adjustments can be made that better support carers to stay in work.
- Employers should ensure these opportunities remain available to support continued access to work amongst carers.

“There will be a multitude of skills... sat on the shelf because people like myself can’t go to work because the job opportunity doesn’t exist, because employers go no you can’t do this, you don’t fit with our hours.”
(Carer, Interviewee)

(1) Carer Friendly is an organisation that aims to provide information to carers. Their accreditation helps to celebrate employers who support carers in the workplace. https://carerfriendly.co.uk/accreditation/employers
Government and policy makers

- The Government should extend Carer’s Allowance. At a minimum we would suggest the Government provides an uplift in Carer’s Allowance, which would create parity in the level of entitlement received by carers in England with those in Scotland and Wales who currently receive around an additional £500 per year. In addition to this, provision across the UK should be uplifted to respond to the additional cost pressures carers are facing in the context of the increased cost of living, and increased costs that have emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The Government should increase the working hours threshold to ensure that carers are not deterred from increasing their hours due to concerns over losing their entitlement. The Government should also consider removing the threshold, recognising that working carers are still providing care support alongside their employment, and this could play a key part in ensuring they are able to access respite and stay in work.

- The Government should review local care provision to ensure that local skills shortages are filled.

- The Government should review the funding provision for care to ensure that carers are not prevented from accessing employment due to affordability issues.

- The Government should bring forward the proposals to implement Carer’s Leave which have currently been delayed.

- The Government should expand its current Carer’s Leave proposal to ensure carers have access to paid leave, to prevent low take-up caused by financial concerns.

- The Government should implement a more joined up service that would enable employability advisors to work with carers to access care support when they are looking to move into employment.
This report explores the support needs of unpaid carers when they are looking to move into paid work, or where they are balancing paid work with their caring role. It also seeks to understand current employability support provision, and gaps in this provision when it comes to supporting unpaid carers.

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.

In 2011 there were approximately 5.8 million unpaid carers in England and Wales, which suggests more than 1 in 10 people are providing unpaid care (Office for National Statistics, 2013). In 2019 it was estimated that 1 in 7 of those providing care were juggling paid work with unpaid care and, in addition to this, 2.6 million people had given up work to provide care (Carers UK, 2020 (a)).

This report highlights a range of barriers and challenges faced by carers when balancing paid work and care, or when searching for paid work. It provides recommendations for carers organisations, employability services, employers and policy makers on what is required to better support choice among carers, ensuring that carers who want to work can do so.

Background to the research

Since 2016, Carers Trust has worked with four Carers Trust Network Partners to provide support to unpaid carers through a London-wide programme called Working for Carers. Working for Carers supports carers, aged 25 or over, to move closer to employment. The project is being delivered up to June 2023 with funding of £4.27 million from The National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF).

In January 2022, Carers Trust and Working for Carers commissioned Wavehill: Social and Economic Research to undertake research to gain a deeper understanding of the support needs of unpaid carers to move closer to, and retain, employment, to help shape future service delivery. This report summarises the findings from this research.

Please note that 2011 is currently the most recent Census data available. Data from the 2021 Census will become available later this year.

Network partners are local carers organisations. The following four Network Partners have been involved in the delivery of Working for Carers: Camden Carers Service; Carers Lewisham; Harrow Carers; and Redbridge Carers Support Services.
The key aims of this research were to:

1. Understand what support carers need to move into employment, and the support required to help carers retain employment;
2. Find out about the types of support being delivered by Carers Trust Network Partners across the UK, to identify existing support for carers and gaps in provision; and
3. Identify key findings and recommendations to help support the development of future employability support for carers.

This report explores carers at two different stages in the employment journey.

**Chapter 1** explores the experiences of carers who are searching for work to better understand what support is needed to help them access paid work opportunities.

**Chapter 2** looks at the experiences of carers who are currently balancing their caring role with paid work and explores the support needs of working carers.

**Chapter 3** then explores the types of employability support already being delivered.

This culminates in a series of recommendations for providers of employability support, employers and policy makers to ensure that carers are better supported to access and retain employment.
METHOD

This report was informed by a mixed-methods research approach. All fieldwork was conducted between April and June 2022. This included:

**An online survey of 200 carers**
This was completed by carers who are thinking about entering paid work, currently looking for paid work, or balancing a caring role and paid work. The survey was conducted in April 2022 and disseminated by carers centres and via social media.

**Follow up telephone and video interviews and focus group with carers**
- A focus group with carers who are currently balancing paid work and a caring role (n = 7), and a follow-up interview with one carer who was unable to attend the group meeting.
- Follow-up interviews with carers who are currently looking for paid work or thinking about entering paid work (n = 17)

**An online survey of 25 carers centres**
This online survey was disseminated by Carers Trust and via Wavehill’s social media.

**Follow up virtual focus groups with representatives from 13 carers centres**
Carers Centres were invited to participate via Carers Trust’s communications channels, including e-newsletters and emails.

Further detail on the profile of participants involved in the work is provided in Annex 1.
CHAPTER 1: CARERS EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT NEEDS

This section explores the employability support needs of carers when they are looking to enter paid work or change roles.

What are the main reasons carers are looking for paid work?

Where carers reported that they were looking for paid work they were asked what factors had prompted their decision to look for work now. Most frequently carers reported that they were concerned about household finances or the rising cost of living. This was reported by 73% of respondents. Related to this, 27% of respondents reported that they had experienced a recent reduction in income, and 20% reported that they had been prompted to look for paid work due to the removal of the Universal Credit uplift. (4)

Figure 1: Have any of the following prompted your decision to think about looking for paid work now?

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 44)
In addition to these financial motivations for seeking employment, many carers (70%) reported that they were interested in the opportunity to explore new career or work opportunities. Additionally, 27% of carers had been motivated to look for paid work following a recent change in their caring responsibilities.

“I’d love to have a job... I still have a lot to give, a lot of skills but I’ve not been able to use them. I did work when [the person I care for] was younger, but it started to get too difficult to work. For the last 11 years I’ve not had paid work, I do voluntary stuff. I’d love to work but it’s not possible at the moment.” (Carer, Interviewee)

In interviews and focus groups, carers frequently reported that they were interested in moving into work, in part, for the benefits they believed it would bring to their personal wellbeing, through access to a wider social network and by providing them with something they could enjoy and an opportunity to use their skills. This was often a key motivator, alongside financial reasons, for looking to enter work.

Most carers had been employed in the past, and many of them described having to give up work due to difficulties balancing paid work with their caring role.

**Barriers to entering paid work among unpaid carers**

This section highlights the key barriers to entering paid work experienced by unpaid carers.

The key barriers encountered by carers are summarised in Figure 2. These are further discussed throughout this section.

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(4) The Universal Credit uplift provided recipients of Universal Credit with an additional £20 a week from March 2020 to help families manage the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was withdrawn in October 2021.
Figure 2: What barriers, if any, have made it difficult for you to enter the workplace or access training or education opportunities? Please tick all that apply.

- Finding opportunities that fit around my caring role: 61%
- Unpredictable nature of caring role: 49%
- Low confidence: 36%
- Lack of time to take on or think about paid work: 29%
- Lack of access to alternative care to meet caring needs whilst I am at work: 29%
- Unsure how to identify carer-friendly employers: 29%
- Wanting to change career: 23%
- Financial concerns, such as loss of Carer’s Allowance or other benefits: 23%
- Concerns about stigma in the workplace due to my caring role: 23%
- The person I care for wants me to continue caring for them: 22%
- My skills were not up to date: 21%
- Lack of available work relevant to my skills: 20%
- Difficulties accessing an appropriate care package from the Local Authority: 19%
- Difficulties accessing online resources to support job-searching, applications or remote interviews: 12%

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 133)
Caring responsibilities are unpredictable

49% of carers reported that the unpredictable nature of caring, and when they need to provide care, was a barrier to them accessing paid work opportunities.

“\nNo two days are necessarily the same. You always have to be prepared for something to happen on the day [...] You never know what’s going to come up”
(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

For some carers this meant that entering employment does not feel possible unless there is a change in their caring responsibilities, as carers often felt that employment was not flexible enough to respond to the unpredictable nature of their caring role.

Many carers are concerned that their skills are not up to date

A large proportion of carers had been away from the workplace for a long time, as illustrated in Figure 3. Indeed, 45% of carers who responded to the Carers Employment Support Survey reported that it had been six or more years since they were last employed.

“\n[I need] for employers to understand that I’ve not been in work for a long time and will probably have to re-learn everything.”
(Carer, Interviewee)

As a result of this time away from the workplace, in interviews carers frequently reported that they were concerned that their skills were out of date. This commonly came up in relation to technology, where some carers felt they did not have a good awareness of the systems that were being used now.
Figure 3: When were you last in paid employment?

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 100)

Related to this issue, some carers also reported that the time away from employment meant that they were unsure what roles would be suitable for them or what kind of work they would enjoy.

"I don’t have as much of a caring responsibility now so I can go back to work, but I don’t know what I’d want to do."

(Carer, Interviewee)

**Alternative care is not readily available**

Around one third (31%) of carers who were looking for work or currently employed reported that a lack of access to alternative care that meets the caring needs of the person they look after when they were at work, had been a barrier to entering or retaining employment or accessing training or education.

Similarly, this was a common issue that was raised by interviewees, who had encountered difficulties obtaining care that would enable them to access employment.
Some specific challenges were raised by carers who provided care for disabled children and young people within interview and focus group feedback. These carers frequently raised issues around a lack of wrap-around support to provide care for their child after school, difficulties covering school holidays due to an absence of support when the school was closed, and specific challenges accessing childminding provision due to a lack of specialist staff. In addition, a small number of parents who had two or more children with disabilities or health conditions reported that they faced additional barriers as their children were not always based within one school.

“The biggest thing for myself is there’s no out of school hours wrap-around care. There’s nowhere for her to go. The assumption is most teenagers look after themselves but in my case she can’t.”

(Carer, Interviewee)

Parents of children with disabilities frequently reported issues around the time they had to spend trying to understand their rights and navigate a complex care system. As a result of this, they often reported that they felt a large amount of time was taken up by trying to advocate for their child and their own rights as a carer, which limited the time they had to think about employment opportunities. It is not clear from the Carers Employment Support Survey how many carers were registered with a carers centre, but one potential avenue to support may be connecting carers to their local carers centre to help reduce the time they spend navigating the care system.

“You have to ring a lot of services, arrange appointments [...] there’s a lot of work involved. It’s not just caring, you have to be a coordinator for your child.”

(Carer, Interviewee)

The quote below illustrates some of the challenges faced by these carers, including navigating access support through the Personal Assistant system. [5]

(5) It should be noted that Personal Assistants and Direct Payments are not benefits that carers are directly eligible for, but benefits that the person they care for may be entitled too. However, our work with carers highlights that this often becomes blurred, as the entitlements for the person requiring care may impact on the support an unpaid carer is otherwise providing. For example, where individuals cannot access PAs, family members may be providing unpaid care to fill the gaps.
A Personal Assistant (PA) is someone employed by a disabled person or their family to help support day-to-day activities. The role may include personal care, but also other aspects of support, including tasks like preparing meals, or support attending appointments and activities. Someone might employ a PA where the person requiring support is in receipt of direct payments from the Local Authority. Not everyone is eligible for this support.

“Special needs childcare should be made more available [...] There are a lot of myths and assumptions from employers or from schools or from clinical services that it’s just a matter of putting your hand up and a lot of stuff just rushes into your life. In fact parents are now expected to become employers and expected to do [...] a lot of admin to just get one hour. So there could be a lot more education about what it means, it means you can’t leave the house, it means you can’t go to a playgroup etc. [...] In the past] I kind of assumed that people with disabled kids had lots of care because I’d seen the posters etc., and couldn’t understand why these parents were so driven but they have to be to get anything.”
(Carer, Interviewee)

As illustrated by the quote above, some carers felt the PA system required them to take on a lot of work involved in employing someone to provide support. Additionally, several carers highlighted issues recruiting PAs with the required skills and specialisms in their area, due to local shortages, which saw them having to provide additional unpaid care for the person they support. This seemed to be a particularly key issue for those supporting someone with a mental health condition.

Previous research undertaken by Think Local Act Personal and the Local Government Association also suggests that recruitment of PAs has become more challenging since the Covid-19 pandemic (Think Local Act Personal & LGA, 2022). One of the key driving influences appeared to relate to pay rates, which meant that potential PAs were moving into other employment. For example, their research found that 77% of people who needed to recruit a PA had found it more difficult, and 69% reported that people were taking jobs with better pay rather than PA roles.
Many carers are concerned about facing stigma, prejudice or discrimination from employers

As illustrated in Figure 4, fewer than half of carers (46%) reported that they were likely to disclose to a potential employer that they were a carer at application and offer stage (47%) when seeking employment. Around one in ten carers also reported that they were unlikely to disclose their status as a carer to their employer when in employment. Given that it is estimated that around 5 million people in the UK are combining paid work and a caring role (Carers UK, 2019) this could be a very high number, potentially hundreds of thousands of carers who are choosing not to disclose their caring role.

Figure 4: Likelihood of disclosing caring status at each stage in the employment journey. (6)

![Figure 4: Likelihood of disclosing caring status at each stage in the employment journey.](image)

In interviews several carers reported that they were reluctant to share this information. Often this was because they worried about preconceptions and judgment that could harm their job prospects. However, a small number of carers reported that they did not want to share this information as it was private.

(6) Please note that figures do not total 100% as the remaining proportion of carers reported that they were ‘unsure’.
“I can only imagine how the stigma would be [...] the attitude of other employees if you’re the only one that’s a carer in the office, and the rest aren’t, and they feel that you’re not pulling your weight maybe, because suddenly, you’re going to have to dash off or something.”
(Carer, Interviewee)

One carer described accessing support from Jobcentre Plus where they were advised not to include reference to their caring status in their CV, due to concerns that this could prevent them from being hired. This example indicates that employability advisors are also concerned that carers may experience prejudice in the workplace, which may suggest more work is needed with employers to reduce stigma towards carers to ensure they have fair access to work. Whilst refusing someone work because they are a carer could be regarded as discrimination by association under the Equalities Act (Commission, 2011), our research highlighted that this discrimination is still taking place. For example, staff from carers centres reported that they had worked with individuals who had been rejected from jobs as the employer did not believe they would prioritise their job role.

Financial barriers make it challenging for carers to access employment

Around one in five (21%) carers who were seeking employment reported that financial concerns (including the loss of Carer’s Allowance and other benefits) were a barrier to them entering work.

Carer’s Allowance is currently paid at £69.70 per week (GOV.UK, 2022). Carers are only eligible to receive this benefit where the person they care for is eligible for certain benefits, and where they provide care for at least 35 hours per week. In addition to this, the carer must earn less than £132 per week after tax, National Insurance and expenses. They also must not be in full-time education or studying for 21 hours or more per week.

Within survey responses, interviews and focus groups, carers frequently questioned the fairness of the Carer’s Allowance system, which was often felt to be a deterrent to carers who wanted to move into work. Carers reported that the system was “unfit for purpose”, and frequently criticised the level of benefit paid.

Carers frequently called for a higher threshold limit on the amount of work a carer could do before losing their entitlement to Carer’s Allowance, as the current threshold enabled them to work just 13 hours a week at minimum wage before losing their allowance. This also means that carers working in more highly-paid roles would work far fewer hours before losing their entitlement to Carer’s Allowance. This is particularly key as people are most likely to be providing care when they are aged 45 and above, where they may be more established in their career (Carers UK, 2020 (a)). This may mean that highly skilled workers are being lost from the workplace due to systematic barriers to work faced by unpaid carers.
Carers also frequently reported difficulties finding jobs that were advertised at this level of hours, and questioned the fairness of losing this entitlement when in order to work, they may have to pay for external carers to provide support in their absence, and many of them would still be providing care alongside their employment.

“[A big barrier is] finding office or admin work under 13 hours [...] to keep carers allowance. I can’t live without it [...] I worked 8 hours a week in 2020 and I hardly earned anything a month.”

(Carer, Carers Employment Support Survey)

Many carers reported that they felt Carer’s Allowance was paid at too low a level. It should be noted that carers in England currently receive a lower level of support than their counterparts in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland and Wales, carers in receipt of Carer’s Allowance are entitled to an additional supplementary payment. (7) In 2022 this will provide carers in Scotland and Wales with an additional payment of around £500 per year.

Carers frequently highlighted a mismatch in the level of allowance paid in comparison to the cost of bringing in external care. For example, carers frequently found that external care cost more than £15 an hour, meaning Carer’s Allowance would cover fewer than five hours of care per week. Some carers reported that they felt that this made moving into employment practically unaffordable for all carers except those who were able to enter very highly paid roles.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hourly minimum wage</th>
<th>Hourly cost for paid at home care support (8)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£9.50</td>
<td>£20</td>
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(7) In Scotland this is called the Carer’s Allowance Supplement. In Wales this is the Unpaid Carer Financial Support Scheme.
(8) From NHS UK: Help at home from a carer - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
Indeed, one carer reported that the cost of bringing in care was more than double their hourly wage. In some cases loss of Carer’s Allowance may be off-set by direct payments to the person being cared for, but households may not always be eligible for direct payments, or the level of support provided by direct payments may not be sufficient to cover the number of hours of support required to off-set the need for unpaid care support. Additionally, the financial benefit of returning to work may need to be balanced against the impact this would have on other household entitlements (such as Universal Credit).

In some cases, even where carers were eligible, there were issues accessing the external care needed to meet the support needs of the person requiring care. In particular, carers highlighted shortages in care workers and Personal Assistants in mental health, and several carers reported that the level of funding provided by direct payments was not always able to keep pace with the amount of money they needed to pay to recruit someone – an issue also highlighted in recent research into PA recruitment (Think Local Act Personal & LGA, 2022).

“\[I think that the threshold is pretty low [...]\ it’s not as if you stop caring when you go out to work, so I think that’s pretty mean of them too. I think the Carer’s Allowance needs to be increased [...] if they made Carer’s Allowance higher people would feel more able to go back to work because they could use some of that money for a carer. It feels like there’s zero support from the Government for carers to go back to work.\]

(Carer, Interviewee)

Feedback from carers often highlighted that they felt these issues around welfare entitlement and care provision meant that the choice to work was taken away from them. This has significant impacts on their personal wellbeing, with many carers expressing a keenness to return to their career or return to the workplace for the benefits they felt it could bring to their mental health and social wellbeing.

Some carers reported that they had been pushed to make the decision to work more hours and forego Carer’s Allowance, as they would be unable to meet their living costs if they earned less than £132 per week. However, as highlighted in the quote below, this could mean that carers felt they were not able to provide the level of care the person they cared for needed:
“[We need] a higher limit on the amount a carer can work and still receive Carer Allowance. I have not applied for the allowance because we could not pay our bills if I reduced my hours that much [...] I have to work full time to pay bills. A higher cap on Carers Allowance would mean I could reduce my hours to part time and spend more time providing the care my husband desperately needs.”
(Carer, Carers Employment Support Survey)

In addition to this issue, carers faced challenges navigating the complexities of the benefits system, with a level of “ambiguity” and uncertainty around how their working hours would impact upon Carer’s Allowance, and other benefits their household may be eligible for including Universal Credit and Council Tax reductions. For example, one carer described facing difficulties combining income from employment with income from Carer’s Allowance and Universal Credit, due to uncertainties around whether Carer’s Allowance was based on weekly earnings or average weekly earnings. This carer had been undertaking some ad-hoc work for a temporary staffing agency and found that her Carer’s Allowance has stopped being paid, although her hours over the year were less than the threshold. This suggests that the eligibility rules for Carer’s Allowance may limit carers from picking up flexible or short-term contracts due to the impact it could have on their allowance. As carers frequently report they need work that is flexible, this limitation in the allowance, may prevent carers from accessing work which, due to its flexibility, may be more appealing.

The challenges carers are facing in relation to Carer’s Allowance and affordability and access to alternative care appear to be restricting carers’ rights to choose when it comes to balancing work and care.
What support do carers need where they are searching for paid work?

Carers need support identifying flexible employment opportunities

Access to flexible employment – for example employment that enables carers to adjust their working hours or patterns – was one of the key issues raised by carers when exploring the support they needed to help them access employment. Indeed, 85% of carers who responded to the survey reported that access to flexible working was ‘very important’ to them when considering a potential employer. A further 9% of carers reported that this was ‘slightly important’ to them.

Figure 5: When considering an employer how important are the following to you?

- Access to flexible working - this includes access to adjustments around working days, times patterns or locations
- Ability to work from home
- Part-time employment opportunities
- Access to Carer’s Leave - this allows carers to leave work temporarily to provide full-time care to someone. It may be paid or unpaid
- Access to a Carers Network or support group

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 119)

Flexible working was defined to include ‘access to adjustments around working days, times, patterns or locations’. 
For many carers flexible opportunities were crucial to enabling them to take up work, both to allow them to continue their caring role on an ongoing basis, and to enable them to respond to more ad-hoc needs such as taking the person they care for to medical appointments or responding to emergencies.

Related to this, many carers reported that the ability to work from home was key to enabling them to access employment. More than half of carers (56%) reported that the ability to work from home was ‘very important’ to them when considering an employer. A further 26% of respondents reported that this was ‘slightly important’. This emphasises the importance of home-working for carers, though it is recognised that this is not something that can be accommodated across all sectors, which may restrict the pool of roles that carers feel they can apply for.

“**We can’t leave my mum for more than an hour and a half on her own. That’s the situation. So at the moment I can’t be dashing around doing work here, there and everywhere.”**

(Carer, Interviewee)

However, several carers raised concerns that there were fewer working from home opportunities now that Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted, which meant more employers were requiring staff to work on-site some days. This created a range of additional challenges for carers. Firstly, the need to work on-site may reduce the hours a carer can work, due to additional transport time. Additionally, several carers who were caring for someone with poor mobility or who were caring for someone who needed continuous supervision, reported that they were unable to leave the person they cared for alone in the home.

In these cases, without working from home opportunities some carers reported that they would be unable to access employment or would have to work fewer hours than they required so that they could afford to bring in external care. However, some of these carers reported that the circumstances of their caring responsibilities were such that they could perform a role where working from home was permitted and where the employer could provide flexibility over their hours of work to enable them to respond to support needs throughout the day.

The pandemic context also elevated the importance of working from home for carers who were supporting individuals who were clinically vulnerable.

“**I was highly concerned about the expectation to work on-site when Covid cases were raging and my husband is clinically extremely vulnerable.”**

(Carer, Carers Employment Support Survey)
Staff from carers centres reported that flexible working and home-working opportunities could be even more challenging to access for young carers, who may be looking to enter employment for the first time. Staff reported that entry level roles may offer less flexibility and noted that the sectors where commonly young people might seek out part-time opportunities (such as work in hospitality or retail) may not be able to offer the flexibility carers require.

However it should be noted that carers are not a homogenous group, and whilst some carers may have caring responsibilities that could practically be balanced with home working, many do not. Additionally, in some cases working from home appeared to be a way to access work for carers who lacked the social care and/or financial support to take a job out of their home, for example where the person they cared for was not eligible for direct payments or could not find appropriate support in their area. As a result, this finding cannot be divorced from the context of issues with the social care system and welfare system that had left many carers without access to alternative support. This emphasises the need for change within both employers and the social care sector to ensure carers’ choices are not restricted.

**Employers need to be clearer about the extent of flexibility in advertised roles**

Carers frequently reported that the way that jobs are advertised can make it very challenging for them to understand whether roles are flexible enough to meet their needs. For example, carers found that employers were often not very clear about what “flexible” means or advertised a set number of hours per week but did not provide clarity over when these hours would need to be worked and whether this could be adapted. These issues were critically important for carers in understanding whether a particular role would work for them, for example carers for individuals with long-term health conditions may be required to take that person to health appointments on particular days that it might not be possible to move.

> Most of the jobs that are advertised are all specific hours [...] so you’re actually excluded from the job opportunity so you don’t get to apply [...] as there’s no flexibility shown by the employer right at the outset, so employers don’t support carers trying to get back into the workplace. There will be a multitude of skills that are sat on the shelf because people like myself can’t go to work because the job opportunity doesn’t exist because employers go no you can’t do this, you don’t fit with our hours.”
> (Carer, Interviewee)
Several carers reported that they felt this could place the burden on them to seek out more information to understand whether they could apply for a role, and often carers were worried about the consequences of doing this, as many felt that disclosing caring responsibilities could lead to prejudice within the recruitment process. As a result, carers often reported that they wanted employers to be more proactive in considering carers in the design and advertising of roles. Whilst accreditations like those for Carer Friendly employers could be an avenue for overcoming this issue, current accreditation criteria does not stipulate how employers should advertise roles. This could be something that could be evolved to better support carers to spot supportive employers at application stage.

**Carers need support navigating the jobs market as carers**

Some of the support needs reported by carers were more generic in nature. For instance many carers reported that they wanted support with interviewing skills (41%), help with job-searching (41%) and help with basic employability skills like creating a CV or cover letter (34%), and access to financial support to attend interviews or access interview appropriate clothes (27%). Many carers were also interested in access to work-related training (50%) and support with digital skills (27%). Indeed, one carer who had accessed digital support through their carers centre highlighted that this had been beneficial.

“Training has been so helpful after such a long gap of unemployment, technology has now changed, how processes at work have changed and things like that, so it’s good to have training.”
(Carer, Interviewee)

Many of these employability support needs may be met by more general employability services. However, there was also interest from carers in support that was more specialised to their needs as carers. For example 43% of carers who were seeking employment reported that they wanted advice on balancing work with their caring role (See Figure 6). Additionally 48% of carers reported that they wanted help identifying employers with carer-friendly policies. This suggests there is a need for employability support that is more bespoke to carers.
Figure 6: Do you require any employability support to help you feel work ready? Please tick all that apply.

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 44)
The most dominant support need from carers related to building their confidence. Indeed, 52% of carers reported that they wanted support with this. This appeared to be influenced by the fact that many carers had been away from the workplace for several years.

“It’s hard when you’ve been away from work for so long, I’ve lost all my confidence. I was managing teams of 25-30 people across the globe and from doing that to just looking after a child I’ve lost all my confidence, I don’t even want to be in a room with 20-30 people. It needs to be a slow and steady transition back into the workplace, some kind of mentoring, some kind of coaching for carers.”

(Carer, Interviewee)

Related to this, many carers reported low confidence regarding searching for and securing work. Indeed, 48% of carers reported that they were either ‘not very confident’ or ‘not at all confident’ about searching for and finding work.
Figure 8: How confident do you currently feel about searching for and finding work?

As highlighted in the previous section, many carers had been away from employment for a long period of time. Within interviews carers reported that they needed more support with understanding systems and processes that had changed a lot since they were last employed. Carers also faced additional barriers due to their time away from the workplace such as having to navigate how to explain a gap in their employment history within job applications, or difficulties obtaining references when they had been away from the workplace for several years. This was another area where carer-focused employability support may be beneficial.

“[The employability support I accessed was] very good, the fundamental flaw in it was they’d ask ‘what do you want to do?’ and I really didn’t know. After 25 years of not being in employment, I don’t know what I can do. They said you may have transferrable skills, might be able to do a carer role but I said no. I don’t want to be a carer after doing it for 25 years.’”
(Carer, Interviewee)
Related to these issues, some carers expressed an interest in being able to access work experience opportunities, both to enable them to identify what work they might want to access now and to help them demonstrate more recent work history.

Within interviews and focus groups many carers reported that they would find it beneficial to have a carers focused job-search portal. Whilst initiatives like Carer Friendly accreditation for employers might help carers to identify potential employers, some carers were keen to have access to this information in one place when job-searching. For example, one carer suggested that it would be beneficial to have a job-searching website or app specifically for carers, where employers could advertise roles, including those available through job-sharing. This is potentially something that could be implemented through existing job-searching sites. It was felt this would help to alleviate challenges carers faced in understanding whether roles were carer-friendly and offered the flexibility they needed, and would help to level the playing field for carers who otherwise felt they were sometimes pushed into having to ask about flexibility which they worried could prejudice them at application.

Some carers were also interested in receiving support that would help them to understand their rights in employment, such as understanding what flexible working adjustments they may be able to access.

The support needs above highlight the importance of employability support that is carer-focused, and sensitive to how the needs of carers may be different from other groups seeking employability support. These support needs are not just important for supporting carers to enter the workplace, but also for supporting retention of carers in the workplace.
CHAPTER 2: BALANCING PAID WORK AND CARING

This section explores the experiences of carers who are currently balancing paid work with a caring role. It is drawn from the Carers Employment Support Survey and in-depth qualitative work with eight carers, including a virtual focus group and interviews. This section also draws on the experience of 17 carers who were interviewed for the project, many of whom had left work due to challenges with balancing paid work and their caring responsibilities.

Carers’ experiences of balancing paid work and caring

77 carers who responded to the Carers Employment Support Survey reported that they were currently working alongside their caring role. More than half of these carers reported that they worked 31 hours a week or more (56%), in addition to their caring role.

Figure 9: How many hours per week do you usually work?

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 75)
It should be noted that previous research suggests that a higher proportion of carers are balancing full-time work with care. Indeed, research by CIPD found that 72% of working carers are working full-time in addition to their caring role (Austin & Heyes, 2020).

It is anticipated that the discrepancy in the sample in this research may in part be due to the focus on understanding employability support needs. As a result, it is possible that many of the individuals who chose to take part may have been part-time workers who were looking to expand their hours. The sample included in this research should therefore not be assumed to be a representative sample of carers. Nevertheless, the triangulation of responses between the survey, interviews and focus groups suggests that the themes identified in the research are robust.

**Many carers are struggling to balance their caring role with paid work**

Whilst many carers are managing to balance their caring role alongside paid work, a substantial proportion of carers reported that they were experiencing difficulties balancing the two, as illustrated by Figure 10. Indeed, 35% of respondents reported that they ‘feel overwhelmed by the situation and are struggling to balance the two’ or are ‘really struggling to cope’.

**Figure 10: How well do you feel able to balance your caring and work responsibilities?**

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 76)
Many carers also appear to lack support in the workplace that would help them with balancing their work with their caring role. For example, just 35% of carers agreed that their employer has good structures and processes in place to support working carers (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident talking to my manager about any challenges I face related</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balancing work alongside caring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer has good structures and processes in place to support working</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer is understanding when I need to take time off work to support</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the person I care for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer is understanding of my caring role</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Carers Employment Support Survey (Base = 76)

Additionally, 29% of carers reported that they do not feel confident speaking to their manager about challenges they face related to balancing work alongside caring. This may in part relate to a reluctance to share these difficulties with employers, as many carers highlighted concerns about stigma in the workplace and may therefore worry about admitting that they are struggling. This suggests more support is needed for carers, and that more needs to be done to support employers to cultivate environments that are accommodating of the needs of working carers. Where this is not done effectively there is a risk that carers leave the workplace. This could have substantial impacts on the carer’s personal, social and financial wellbeing, and may have wider economic implications in the context of labour shortages.
Findings from a focus group with carers who are currently balancing paid work alongside a caring role highlight some of the challenges that are making it more difficult for carers to balance the two roles. These issues are explored in detail below.

The social care system is not working for working carers

Several carers reported that they had faced challenges accessing appropriate care in their local area. The absence of appropriate support had limited the extent to which carers were able to take up employment opportunities. This aligns with the challenges faced by carers who were searching for work described in the previous chapter.

One focus group attendee had contacted care agencies to obtain care support for two months so they could take on a temporary work contract. However, they had faced challenges obtaining appropriate care. Some carers services had turned down the opportunity because they did not want to commit to delivering short-term care, and others had been unable to provide assurance that they would be able to provide the required care until closer to the time. This suggests that there is a lack of flexibility in social care support that limits the extent to which it can meet carers’ needs.

Another carer reported issues over availability of care from social services, that had resulted in accessing care through a private provider. However, this came at considerable cost (around £750 per week), and they reported that they had been expected to pay for many weeks in advance. This included paying for off-weeks where they had not wanted carers to attend but were required to pay to retain the slot.

“There’s not enough carers. And they’re really stuck for finding sufficient carers to come round. They’re all fully booked. You go to the social services and they say there’s no spaces available in any of the ones that we deal with. You have to go private.”
(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

In addition to these issues around the cost of private care, several individuals raised issues in relation to the reliability of external care support. For example, one individual had experienced issues where carers had not attended at the required time. However, they found that when carers attended after they had undertaken the support themselves, they were still required to pay the agency for support that had not been delivered as agreed.

Another carer had been unable to access any support within the local area. This carer was supporting someone with complex needs, requiring 24-hour support. Despite attempts to access support, the carer had been told by the Local Authority that there was no one who could meet their needs, as the person they cared for had needs that were deemed “too complex”. This has left the family without any support from the social care system.
One carer had experienced a lack of understanding from employability support providers, who were looking to support them into further employment, when it came to this barrier. They described it as like “coming up against a brick wall”, as at each assessment they were asked what support was needed to help them work more hours, but each time they explained that they were unable to access external care they were met with no solutions to this barrier. This same issue was described by an interviewee who was currently searching for employment.

“We always come up against a brick wall, because there is no one else to do my caring job [...] I can’t go to out to work. There is nothing really that they can offer me [...] it’s all quite structured in what they think they can offer you, like a college course [...] and it’s like, no, I can’t do any of that.”

(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

The carers who attended the focus group were from different parts of the country which suggests that difficulties accessing appropriate support from the social care system are not restricted to particular geographic areas. Indeed, this was also an issue reported by many survey respondents.

“I can’t find a care agency that is reliable and does the care [...] especially since COVID there has been a lack of agencies with carers. So I end up doing the caring and everything else as well as hold down a full time job [...] Agency carers now charge over £25 which the council don’t pay.”

(Carer, Carers Employment Support Survey)

As highlighted in the previous section, 29% of carers who responded to the Carers Employment Support Survey reported that a lack of access to alternative care, to meet their caring needs whilst they are at work, was a barrier to them accessing the workplace. Additionally, 19% of carers reported they’d had difficulties accessing an appropriate care package from their Local Authority. These figures do not exclude those who may not be eligible for a care package, and, as such, this may represent a level of underreporting.
Employers do not have a strong enough understanding of unpaid care

Whilst many carers who responded to the Carers Employment Support Survey appeared to have positive experiences when it came to their employers being understanding of their role, a large proportion of carers faced difficulties. For example, almost 1 in 3 carers (32%) reported that they do not feel well supported as a carer in the workplace.
Additionally, 18% of carers reported that they disagreed with the statement ‘my employer is understanding of my caring role’, and 23% disagreed with the statement ‘my employer is understanding when I need to take time off work to support the person I care for’ (see Figure 11). From the data available, it is not clear if the extent to which carers feel supported differs by sector/industry, and this could be an area for further exploration.

Within focus groups and interviews many carers raised concerns in relation to the extent that employers understand their roles, and the challenges faced by unpaid carers. Carers raised issues about employers not recognising how widespread unpaid care is or understanding the rights of unpaid carers in the workplace.

“Employers just don’t know what an unpaid carer is. They don’t know you exist.”
(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)
As a result of this lack of understanding from employers, carers reported that they could be at the discretion of individual line managers’ decisions about how to support them. This could leave carers even based within the same organisation with different experiences of support.

“Historically, I’ve had bad experience with employers [...] so training for employers would be a really beneficial, and them not understanding the rights of a carer that’s been really, really difficult.” (Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

Many carers also worried about facing stigma in the workplace due to their caring role. More than 1 in 5 carers (23%) reported that concerns about stigma have made it difficult for them to access the workplace (see Figure 2).

A small number of interviewees and focus group attendees also reported that they were worried that employers would make judgments about them if they knew they had caring responsibilities. They were concerned that employers may not think they could be “reliable” and might be “reluctant” to employ them or promote them to other positions.

Staff from carers organisations similarly highlighted that they felt employers have limited understanding of carers. They reported that recognition was stronger of those caring for older people, but there was a weaker understanding of those who care for individuals with a mental health condition or those who support someone with addiction. Both carers and staff from carers organisations suggested that further awareness raising campaigns could be beneficial to improve employer awareness of carers and the challenges they face.

**Carers have lost employment opportunities due to lack of support from employers and the social care system**

Several carers shared experiences of losing out on employment opportunities due to the lack of support afforded to them. This theme also emerged in interviews with carers who were currently searching for work, who reflected on the reasons they had left previous roles.

One carer had been forced to give up her previous role as difficulties balancing paid work and her caring role were making her unwell, and she was unable to access any external care support.

“I actually ended up in hospital purely because of caring and working. It just became too much [...] but I really miss it. I really miss going out to work. It is sad, but there is no other way I could work. I have to be here 24/7.” (Carer, Focus Group Attendee)
Two carers reported that they had left roles after their employers failed to make appropriate adjustments to their workload, to support them to balance their work alongside their caring role. For example, one carer had encountered issues after they had switched from full time to part time hours. Whilst their working hours were reduced this was not matched with a reduction in the required output for their role.

“It was the same workload on four days rather than five, so I ended up going off work with stress. And eventually I ended up leaving [...] I just hope that I can stay in work, because I’ve lost two jobs because I was a carer. So hopefully I won’t lose a third.”

(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

In a separate interview, one carer reported that the absence of appropriate support had meant they had made the decision to become self-employed, as they felt traditional employment opportunities would be unable to give them the flexibility they needed to meet their caring responsibilities. They emphasised that this had not been their preferred choice, and that they felt this had prevented them from working in their chosen industry.

Staff from carers organisations also shared experiences of individuals they have supported that have had to leave roles due to a lack of support within employment or due to issues accessing alternative care.

**Carers are frequently having to use annual leave to meet their caring needs**

There were several instances where carers reported that they had to rely on annual leave in order to meet their caring responsibilities.

“[The main barrier to work is] employers not being understanding enough. I was having to take annual leave for hospital appointments, if mum or my dad or my son weren’t well, it just got too much so I didn’t go back”

(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

Staff from carers centres reported that this was an issue that they had encountered frequently, and one member of staff reported that they found that carers frequently accessed support when this had reached a crisis point, for example where carers had exhausted their annual leave, and were left without recourse to enable them to support ad-hoc needs or emergencies. This was an issue that was also causing substantial challenges for carers who were balancing paid work alongside their caring role, as this meant that carers were sometimes left without leave to use for respite.
What support do employers currently provide to working carers?

Most carers who responded to the online survey reported that they had access to flexible working arrangements (70%) and opportunities to work from home (64%). Additionally, 29% of working carers reported that they had access to unpaid Carer’s Leave, and a further 14% reported that they had access to paid Carer’s Leave. The latter is broadly consistent with findings from Carers UK’s research, which found that 12% of carers had access to paid Carer’s Leave in 2019 (Carers UK, 2020 (a)). (10)

23% of working carers reported that they do not know what support their employer provides for carers.

14% of carers reported that their employer has carers champions or a carers network. However, many carers (34%) reported they were unsure if any such thing existed.

Where carers reported that they were able to manage their caring role or were well supported, they appeared more likely to have access to a combination of the support above (such as access to flexible working, work from home opportunities and Carer’s Leave). In contrast, carers who reported that they were ‘struggling to cope’ or ‘overwhelmed’ were less likely to have access to all of these forms of support, especially Carer’s Leave.

For example, 37% of carers who reported that they were ‘struggling’ or ‘overwhelmed’ had access to flexible working, whilst 74% of carers who reported that they were ‘managing’ had access to this. Additionally, just 4% of carers who reported they were ‘struggling’ or ‘overwhelmed’ had access to unpaid Carer’s Leave. In contrast 32% of carers who reported they were ‘managing’ had access to unpaid Carer’s Leave. It should be noted that this segmentation is based on small numbers of respondents, but these findings may reflect potential trends.

(10) This research included polling of over 4,000 individuals.
All the working carers who attended our focus group reported that they were working either fully from home or through a hybrid model where they were based predominantly at home. For many of these carers the availability of remote working opportunities had been essential for enabling them to access paid work, and without these opportunities they would not have been able to continue to work or work the same number of hours.

“I work six hours a week. So it’s not much but it’s enough. The person I care for gets six hours respite with a PA […] that’s when I can get the bulk of my work done. But of course, it has to be at home. I couldn’t possibly… work where I had to go a job, where I had to leave the home and go out, it’s just impossible.”

(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)
The expansion of remote working approaches through the pandemic had been beneficial to working carers. However, a small number of attendees were facing uncertainty over what the future of roles in their area of work would look like. For example, one carer who provided tutoring reported that there were fewer online teaching opportunities available, and they were unsure whether these opportunities would still exist next year. This highlights a risk that as the country emerges beyond coronavirus restrictions, carers could be left behind in employers’ decisions to reduce or end remote or hybrid working opportunities.

“Even though there’s been the downside of the pandemic, I think moving into much more hybrid type of work has been particularly useful and given me a phenomenal amount of flexibility.”
(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

Whilst carers were positive about the opportunities remote working had afforded them, several carers also reported that they missed having opportunities to work outside the home, which would provide them with more social connection. However, without appropriate external care support, this was not necessarily something that was accessible to them, highlighting the importance of resolving issues with accessing social care support.

As highlighted in the previous section, just 35% of carers who responded to the Carers Employment Support Survey reported that they feel their employer had good structures and processes in place to support working carers. It should be noted that there was a high level of ‘neither agree or disagree’ responses to this question (36%), which in part may be reflective of an uncertainty among carers around what support they can expect, in order to understand what ‘good’ support looks like. However, the high level of respondents who disagreed with the statement (28%) suggests more support is required within employment for working carers. The following section will explore some of the support needs that were identified in this research.
What support do unpaid carers need when they are balancing paid work and caring?

Carers need access to flexible work opportunities

Many carers emphasised the importance of having access to flexible working, both to help them to manage their caring responsibilities on a day-to-day basis, but also to enable them to respond to unexpected support needs.

Carers who had accessed flexible working reported that this had been beneficial in enabling them to support the person they care for, in particular, freeing them up to attend medical appointments.

Where carers fed back that their employers had been supportive in this regard, they reported that their employers tended to trust them to complete their work and felt that a task-orientated approach to work, rather than an hours-based approach, may be more accommodating for unpaid carers.

Carers need support to meet their caring needs

As the previous section highlighted, one of the key aspects of support carers require to help them access work is appropriate care support, to free them up to participate in work. Whilst this was an issue for carers supporting individuals with a range of support needs, there are also specific challenges faced by parents of children with disabilities or other health conditions, who may have access to support throughout term-time which then disappears during the school holidays.

Whilst carers face challenges accessing care support, this may lead to both higher levels of economic inactivity among this group, as well as higher levels of under-employment where carers are not able to work to the extent they would like.

Carer’s Leave can support carers to meet their caring needs

Many carers expressed a need to be able to access temporary leave from employment to enable them to attend emergencies or take the person they care for to medical appointments.

In response to the Carers Employment Support Survey, 68% said that access to Carer’s Leave is ‘very important’ to them when they consider a potential employer. A further 16% reported that this was ‘slightly important’ to them.

“We need] more flexibility around WFH, part time opportunities and how the working hours are completed. Carers leave, this stops carers burning out from using their own leave to complete medical appointments/additional caring responsibilities with their cared for.”

(Carer, Carers Employment Support Survey)
In 2021, the Government announced that it would introduce a right for employees to take one week of Carer’s Leave each year. This entitlement will enable carers to take leave on a planned basis to provide care or make care arrangements (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2021). However, it has not yet been enacted.

Under current Government proposals, Carer’s Leave is an unpaid benefit. Both Carers Trust and Carers UK have encouraged the Government to “go further”. Carers Trust has asked the Government to ensure that unpaid carers have access to paid leave so carers do not have to rely on their annual leave or unpaid leave to manage caring needs (Carers Trust, 2021). Carers UK has similarly argued that carers would benefit from access to paid leave and has asked the Government to commit to 10-days paid leave, in addition to a longer period of unpaid leave (Carers UK, 2021).

Carer’s Leave has not yet been formally launched. However, some employers do have their own existing policies that offer either paid or unpaid leave.

Two focus group attendees reported that their employer gives them access to one-week of paid Carer’s Leave each year and also enables them to apply for additional unpaid leave. Neither carer had yet taken up this opportunity, but both reported that knowing it was there had been beneficial.

“I haven’t used it. But it has been suggested when I was struggling [...] And I thought, oh, gosh, I can’t afford to, but actually, she said ‘we’d pay you - we pay any carer at least one week paid leave’ which I thought was brilliant. I didn’t need it but it’s knowing that it’s there if I need it, which is crucial.”
(Carer, Focus Group Attendee)

As the quote above highlights, access to paid leave was important for this carer as they felt able to rely on the leave. Otherwise, they may have had to forego it due to concerns about whether they could “afford” to take time off. This highlights gaps in the existing proposed statutory entitlement, which may leave Carer’s Leave out of reach to carers with lower household incomes.

In addition to this, within a small number of free-text comments, survey respondents suggested that Carer’s Leave is limited where it has to be booked in advance, which means that carers are unable to use it to respond to unexpected issues. This may result in carers having to use annual leave or sickness leave to take time away from work – the latter in particular may result in carers foregoing pay where they are only eligible for Statutory Sick Pay. (11)

(11) Individuals are only eligible for Statutory Sick Pay where they have been ill for at least four days in a row.
Staff from carers centres also raised concerns about the requirement for leave to be booked in advance. It was felt that this requirement did not align with the experience of caring, as carers may not be able to predict what needs are going to arise.

“You can’t predict when you’re going to be needed or when a crisis is going to happen.”
(Staff member, Carers Centre)

However, a staff member from one carers centre reported that, whilst they felt the current proposal is limited, the existence of a universal entitlement to Carer’s Leave may help to raise awareness of carers among all employers.

“It would hopefully encourage everybody to have a slightly clearer definition of what a carer is [...] we’ve worked with some quite enlightened employers who’ve got lovely care policies that will let people have paid time off for quite extensive times, but their definition of who a carer actually is, is very narrow”
(Staff member, Carers Centre)

Previous research has also highlighted how the implementation of Carer’s Leave could support carers to retain work. Indeed, research by Carers UK found that 40% of carers who had given up work to care said that Carer’s Leave would have helped them to stay in employment longer had it been available (Carers UK, 2020 (b)). Additionally, previous research has found that 80% of carers said that Carer’s Leave of between five to ten days would support them to balance work and unpaid care (Carers UK, 2020 (a)). This suggests that this should be a priority area for supporting carers to stay in work.

Peer support networks can help carers to navigate the challenges they face

70% of carers who took part in the Carers Employment Support Survey reported that having access to a Carers Network or support group was important to them when considering a potential employer, suggesting that support networks are highly valued by carers.

In addition to this, several carers who attended the focus group for working carers as part of this research emphasised that they had found it personally beneficial to have the space to talk about their experiences with others. This suggests that wider networks can help to support carers, by providing a space to talk about shared challenges.
CHAPTER 3: WHAT SUPPORT DO CARERS CENTRES ALREADY OFFER?

This section summarises the findings from a survey of 25 carers centres and focus groups with representatives from 13 carers organisations.

Of the 25 organisations surveyed, 92% reported that their organisation provides some employability support for carers. Most of these organisations (90%) provided support for all working age carers, whilst 10% focused exclusively on young adult carers.

Identifying carers who need employability support or support balancing work and care

Within focus groups, representatives from carers centres were asked to share how they identify if a carer needs support to move into or retain employment. Carers organisations employed a range of strategies to identify these needs. In many cases this appeared to be quite light-touch. For example, several carers centres reported that they issue welcome packs and facilitate one-to-one conversations with carers when they first access the carers centre, which can be used to identify any support needs the carer might have, including any that might relate to employability or support balancing caring with employment. Other carers centres had a more direct approach, for example including a question about whether the carer was searching for work as part of their registration.

In a small number of examples, carers centres reported that carers were signposted into them from other services when their need had been initially identified, for example where a carer had been in touch with a local social prescribing organisation or had been signposted into the service after having contact with their GP.

Staff otherwise reported that carers were most likely to seek out support from them where they had had a recent change of circumstance (such as a change to their caring role or a change in household finances) that had led to them seeking out paid work. When it came to carers who were balancing paid work and their caring role, staff reported that they were more likely to access the service where they were experiencing an issue balancing the two.
Current employability support for carers

Of the carers organisations who reported they did offer employability support, 39% offered what was described as “formal” support, such as an employment advisor role within the organisation or a specific employability service. For the remaining 61% of surveyed organisations, this was described as “informal” support, such as light-touch signposting to local employability support initiatives, or one-off sessions on employability.

Several organisations who reported that they provided formal employability support were delivering this support through the Working for Carers programme, but a small number of carers organisations reported that they offered one-to-one or bespoke support for carers looking to enter or sustain employment outside of the Working for Carers programme. For example, one carers organisation reported that they offer bespoke advice, including job-searching and interview advice, support for carers who are in work and facing difficulties managing their role, benefits and financial advice, and assistance identifying care support to enable carers to return to work. However, more commonly the support available appeared to be more informal in nature, and where carers organisations were able to offer more formalised support, in several cases these were grant-funded programmes that were soon due to come to a close.

Within focus groups, a representative from one carers centre reported that they had good links with external partners, which meant that instead of offering employability support within the centre, their advisors were kept up-to-date on local employability support, so that they could signpost to JobCentre Plus, and other services provided by organisations such as the library, housing associations and the adult education service. In most cases, however, representatives from carers centres reported that they felt there were gaps in local employment provision for carers. These are discussed below.

Gaps in support for carers

Employability provision differs across Local Authority areas, but common challenges were identified in relation to the extent to which carers’ needs were being met by pre-existing employability support.

Staff highlighted areas of local provision where carers may be excluded. For example, many European Social Fund (ESF) funded projects exclude individuals in employment from accessing support, but in some areas these were the predominant source of employability provision. This was felt to be an issue that may disproportionately impact carers, as many carers may be employed on a part-time basis (in part, this is possibly due to the Carer’s Allowance thresholds). However, the exclusion of employed individuals from accessing support could prevent carers from seeking support where they are looking to move into full-time or different employment.

Staff from carers organisations also reported that some large employability programmes had come to an end which had left gaps in local support. This included grant-funded projects that had been concluded after several years.
Alongside this, staff from carers organisations raised concerns about the approach taken in some large employability programmes which are outcome/target driven. For example, some attendees had negative feedback around a large-scale programme, which they felt did not allow enough time to support carers, given the support needs carers presented and their distance from the labour market. In particular, staff reported that it could take a long time to build up confidence among carers, which could mean that short-term support that was outcome-driven may be unsuitable for carers. It was felt that carers, instead, needed access to more long-term support that could help to take steps closer to being ready to enter employment.

“*We found with carers it can be quite a long journey from the point of saying ‘I think I’d like to work’ to having the time or confidence and all the rest of it to be able to go out to get a job.*”  
*(Staff member, Focus group attendee)*

In many localities, staff were aware of a range of organisations that offered general employability support, for example help with CV-writing, but felt that this sometimes lacked a specific understanding of carers and their experiences. One member of staff reported that they felt there was a gap when it came to “carer-focused return-to-work programmes” that centre on the carer’s experience as opposed to generic support. This aligns with the reported support needs of carers (explored in the previous chapter) that suggest carers are often looking for support related to the caring role.

“We could identify locally a level of generic service around return to work employability, but none of that is carer-specific. And I’m preaching to the converted here, I know, but we just know the value of getting carers together to share in those particular journeys. So I think for us, there is a gap. There is a gap in carer-focused, return-to-work employability programmes that really hone into that unique caregiving role rather than trying to sort of fit a carer into a more generic programme.”  
*(Staff member, Focus group attendee)*

Another staff member reported that they felt there were particular gaps in relation to support for young adult carers (aged 25-35), for whom they felt there was limited provision. Other staff reported that they felt there was limited employability provision being delivered that was focused on employers – although there was evidence that some carers organisations were delivering activity in this area. For example, one carers centre had developed a local employer network to help employers support carers in the workplace.
Other gaps in specific provision, such as work experience, were identified. As highlighted in the previous section on carers’ employability support needs, this was an area that some carers felt would be helpful due to their time away from employment.

Staff from carers centres often reported that they did not feel there was appropriate support for carers available locally, and reported that dedicated capacity and funding was required to drive this forward, as dedicated specialist staff were needed to deliver the support effectively. This is likely to be particularly key as the employability support carers require may also require navigation of issues that affect them as carers, such as understanding the impact employment will have on their benefits, and understanding policies that are there to help them retain employment.

**Support for working carers**

When it came to carers who were balancing paid work with their caring role, the existence of support varied between areas. However, where carers organisations reported that they did offer support, they often highlighted that engagement was challenging and mostly driven by the time pressures faced by working carers. As a result, some carers centres were trying to pivot towards creating more online resources, and offering drop-in sessions rather than set meetings.

Carers centres reported that they predominantly saw engagement from working carers where they had reached a crisis point. Many carers centres had worked to support individuals to identify solutions where they were experiencing stress due to the difficulties balancing their caring role with employment, or where they had used up all of their annual leave providing care support. For example, one carers centre who had been delivering support for working carers, reported that when they first set up their project they anticipated its main focus would be around proactive support to help carers balance their caring role with employment. However, in reality, they had found that the service was operating in a much more reactive way. For example, carers might approach the service for support understanding their rights where their employer was trying to prevent them from taking more time off for their caring responsibilities.

As a result, the service had found that they were being asked by carers to play more of an advocacy role between carers and their employers. Staff from carers centres reported that this could also put them in a challenging position, as they were not positioned to provide legal advice and, as a result, may have to signpost carers to other organisations like their relevant Trade Union.

The pressures on working carers’ time may mean it is unlikely that some of this group will reach out for support at earlier stages. As a result, some carers organisations who were developing support for working carers, emphasised the importance of focused work with employers that could drive culture change to help prevent these issues from arising. However, some staff reported that they felt work at national level was needed to help boost efforts with employers, to help employers to see the benefits of embedding carer-friendly policies, and to help reduce stigma and prejudice that can be directed to carers in the workplace.
Supporting this point, one carers centre who had been delivering work locally with employers (including set-up of carer-friendly policies), had found that it was difficult to secure buy-in from employers.

Related to these issues, some staff from carers centres emphasised that more needed to be done at a system level to reduce the pressures on working carers. For example, a staff member from one carers centre highlighted that they were frequently encountering carers who were signed off sick with stress as a result of challenges balancing their caring role with their employment. They reported that in the absence of the employer providing flexibility, sometimes carers were left with little option but to be signed off work. They felt that national provision of Carer’s Leave could help to alleviate this challenge. This emphasises the importance of work at national level to help overcome some of the complex challenges faced by carers balancing work and care.

Despite the engagement challenges that carers centres had faced when trying to provide support to working carers, the carers who participated in the focus group for working carers reported that they had found value in sharing their experiences. This may suggest there is an appetite for informal opportunities for carers to come together. Carers UK already play a role in facilitating some informal discussions through their online forum and online events such as Care for a Cuppa zoom meetings that provide carers with weekly opportunities to talk. However, the timing of sessions may not always mean they are accessible to working carers and they may benefit from spaces that enable them to come together specifically as a group.
This report highlights that there are a range of overlapping areas of policy and practice that require change in order to provide carers with fair access to work, and to support carers to stay in employment for as long as they would like.

Effective policy in this area relies on carers having access to:

- A social security and social care system that supports them to meet their caring needs
- Good support from employers to help them retain employment; and
- Targeted employability support that can go beyond generic employability support, to providing guidance, advice and training that is bespoke to carers and the barriers they face.

Set out below are a series of recommendations targeted to each of these audiences.

**Carers organisations and employment support providers**

The range of employment support needs that are carer-specific (discussed in Chapter 1) suggest that there is a need for bespoke carers employability support, that can help carers to balance paid work with their caring role, identify carer-friendly employers, and navigate challenging conversations such as how to ask for flexible working and how to explain gaps in employment history. Existing evidence suggests that there are currently gaps when it comes to provision of support that is focused on the needs of carers. The specialist nature of this support - which requires a strong understanding of support available to carers - suggests this may be best situated within carers centres, or at least delivered through a strong partnership with carers organisations.

Many carers who are looking to move into employment have been away from the workplace for several years, and may therefore require additional support with confidence-building and upskilling, which may not be as relevant for other groups. This also supports the case for bespoke support for carers looking to move closer to employment, and may have the added benefit of providing a peer network for carers. This has also been highlighted as a key support need through the Working for Carers programme evaluation, which has emphasised the importance of pre-employability support provision for carers, particularly those who may be described as economically inactive. These carers may benefit from initial support to help them make informed decisions about whether to enter work, and help
build up the foundational levels of confidence they may require to help the move into employment.\(^{12}\) This kind of support might also be most appropriately provided through carers support organisations. These organisations may be more approachable to carers in the first instance, as carers may be looking for more gradual support, whereas formal employability provision may feel more targeted around employment as a goal.

**Recommendation**

- Collaborative conversations are needed between local carers centres, employability providers and employers to agree an approach to ensure that carers’ needs are being met by current provision. Examples like the Working for Carers programme could be used to help provide an illustration of possible approaches that could be adopted by other areas.

This work will require funding. At present there are concerns that there is a potential gap in the available funding provision to meet carers’ employability support needs, as European Social Fund (ESF) and Building Better Opportunities (BBO) come to an end. Whilst the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) launches in 2022 as a successor to European Union structural funds, funding for the People and Skills strand will not become available until 2024/2025. Additionally, funding through UKSPF is determined at a Local Authority or Combined Authority level, whereas support for carers to access employment may, instead, benefit from a more joined-up national approach to prevent the emergence of a “postcode lottery” in provision.

More work also needs to be done with employers to ensure that carers are better able to stay in work. This is potentially an area that could be supported by local employment services and carers services. However, consultation with carers centres suggests that current levels of resource are a barrier to them being positioned to deliver this work.

**Recommendation**

- National organisations like Carers Trust could develop awareness campaigns that support employers to become more carer-friendly, and help them to understand and address the barriers that carers face when balancing work and care.

**Employers**

Carers need employers to play a more proactive role in supporting them to access employment. There are some straightforward adjustments that employers can make which will help them to attract carers to their roles.

These adjustments could help employers to attract new talent, which could help to address current vacancies. Supporting working carers can also bring about a range of key benefits for employers, as carers who work for carer-friendly employers are less likely to reduce their hours or give up work (Austin & Heyes, 2020).

**Recommendation**

- Employers should seek to become accredited as carer-friendly organisations and put the necessary policies and processes in place to support carers in the workplace. This accreditation can help carers to identify carer-friendly employers.

- Employers should be clearer about the extent of flexibility within a role, to prevent carers from having to disclose their caring responsibilities or ask for adjustments at application where they may not want to do so.

- Employers should proactively offer roles that can be accessed on a flexible or job-sharing basis.

- Where possible, employers should offer roles that can be performed on an output basis, rather than on a set working hours pattern, to enable carers’ participation in the workplace.

It is also clear from this research that carers need more support to help them balance their caring responsibilities with employment. Employers can better support carers by taking the actions below.

**Recommendation**

- Employers should provide carers with access to flexible working arrangements wherever possible.

- Employers should help carers to balance their roles, by implementing flexible paid leave to enable carers to respond to ad-hoc or emergency caring needs, and should ensure that carers are aware of support available to them.

- Employers should ensure carers have access to support in the workplace that enables them to share challenges around balancing their roles, and ensures that adjustments can be made that better support carers to stay in work.
It is clear from this research that the availability of working from home opportunities has been crucial in enabling some carers to access employment who may otherwise not have access to paid work.

**Recommendation**

- Employers should ensure working from home opportunities remain available to support continued access to work among carers.

**Government and policy makers**

This research suggests that the level of Carer’s Allowance is deterring carers from entering employment or increasing their hours. This is in part driven by a mismatch in the level of Carer’s Allowance and the comparatively high cost of bringing in external care workers, which suggests a greater level of funding is required to support carers into work. The current level of investment in Carer’s Allowance also undervalues the incredibly important work of unpaid carers, which contributes £132 billion per year in economic value (Buckner & Yeandle, 2015).

Carers are also coming under increasing financial strain. Indeed, the 2021 State of Caring report found that 31% of carers were struggling to make ends meet (Carers UK, 2021).Related to this, 18% were in or had been in debt as a result of caring, and 6% of carers reported that they cannot afford utility bills. This report preceded the additional cost of living pressures that have emerged over 2022, including soaring energy costs. Carers are less likely to be able to mitigate against these costs through reduced energy usage due to the importance of heating the home or powering electrics to support the health of the person they care for. This means that carers will be facing increased living costs as energy costs continue to rise.

(13) This report was based on the experiences of more than 8,000 carers.
The social care system is currently not working for carers and is a key barrier to carers accessing and staying in work. Carers are facing difficulties accessing appropriate, affordable and reliable care to enable them to access work. The current system also results in carers who want to work being pushed out of the workforce due to difficulties managing the cost of caring. As a result, skilled workers are being lost, and this has an impact on carers who feel they have no choice but to give up work or significantly reduce their hours.

Recommendation

- The Government should review local care provision to ensure that local skills shortages are filled.
- The Government should review the funding provision for care to ensure that carers are not prevented from accessing employment due to affordability issues.

This research suggests that Carer’s Leave has the potential to improve the support for working carers. However, the current proposal is limited in scope, and delays in allocating parliamentary time to this initiative means that carers are being left unsupported.

Further information on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted carers financially is available in ‘State of Caring 2021: A snapshot of unpaid care in the UK’ (Carers UK, 2021).
There were a small number of instances where carers highlighted a lack of join-up between employability support and social care support. This resulted in carers “hitting a brick wall”, where employment advisors were trying to help them move towards employment but unable to resolve the key barrier to them accessing work: an absence of alternative care support.

**Recommendation**

- The Government should bring forward the proposals to implement Carer’s Leave which have currently been delayed.

- The Government should expand its current Carer’s Leave proposal to ensure carers have access to paid leave, to prevent low take-up caused by financial concerns.

There were a small number of instances where carers highlighted a lack of join-up between employability support and social care support. This resulted in carers “hitting a brick wall”, where employment advisors were trying to help them move towards employment but unable to resolve the key barrier to them accessing work: an absence of alternative care support.

**Recommendation**

- The Government should implement a more joined up service that would enable employability advisors to work with carers to access care support where they are looking to move into employment.
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Austin, D. A. & Heyes, P. J., 2020. Supporting working carers: How employers and employees can benefit, Sheffield: CIPD.


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Available at: https://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance
[Accessed 21 July 2022].

Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthcaresystem/articles/2011censusanalysisunpaidcareinenglandandwales2011andcomparisonwith2001/2013-02-15
[Accessed 27 July 2022].

Online carers survey

This section provides an overview of profile characteristics of carers who participated in the online survey as part of this research.

200 carers participated in the online survey. The majority of participants (93%) were current carers, whilst 7% reported that they had provided care for someone in the past. The tables below provide an overview of the profile of respondents.

Female carers were overrepresented within the survey sample, accounting for 81% of respondents. Whilst women are more likely to be carers than men (Carers UK, 2016) (Adult Social Care Statistics Team, 2022), women are still disproportionately represented within the sample of this survey.

Table 1: Sex

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sex</th>
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Base: 186

White respondents accounted for 65% of survey participants, whilst 31% of participants were from ethnic minority groups.

Table 2: Ethnicity

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Base: 186
Within the respondent sample some regions were overrepresented, particularly London and the South East of England. This is likely to have resulted from the survey dissemination strategy, where some carers centres were more responsive to requests to sharing the survey than others.

### Table 3: Age

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Age group</th>
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<td>30-39</td>
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Base: 185

### Table 4: Region

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<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
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Base: 182
Most frequently the carers who responded to the survey reported that they were caring for an older relative (48%), a child or children (34%), or a partner (27%). The majority of carers (64%) reported that they cared for one person, whilst 36% reported that they were caring for two or more people. Often this included examples where carers were providing care to both a disabled child and a parent. In addition to this, 30% of respondents also had parental responsibilities.

**Figure 1: Who do you provide care for?**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of care recipients]

**Interview participants**

The tables below provide a demographic breakdown of the participants who took part in one-to-one interviews. It should be noted that whilst 17 participants took part in one-to-one interviews, only 14 provided demographic data.

Female participants were overrepresented among interviewees, as were carers aged 50–59, and carers based in London.

**Table 5: Sex**

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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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Base: 14
**Table 6: Ethnicity**

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**Table 7: Age**

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<td>50-59</td>
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Base: 14

**Table 8: Region**

<table>
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<tr>
<td>South East England</td>
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<td>Scotland</td>
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Base: 14
Carers organisation focus groups
The table below provides a breakdown of the regions that the carers centres who participated in this research were based in.

Table 9: Region

<table>
<thead>
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Base: 13
Please visit carers.org/workingforcarers to download research and evaluation reports, and find out more about the Working for Carers project.