

# Unlocking the door

How to make paid employment a meaningful choice  
for unpaid carers in Scotland

June 2024



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## Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go to all our research participants who generously gave their time to contribute to this research by sharing their insights and experiences. We are grateful also for the support of our Steering Group members who supported the research by providing valuable feedback and advice:

- James Calder – Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP)
- Ruth Cooper – Renfrewshire Council
- Marion Davies – One Parent Family Scotland
- Diane Goodman – Renfrewshire Carers
- Carolynne Hunter – Carer and Promoting a more inclusive society (PAMIS)
- Jamie Livingstone – Oxfam Scotland
- Richard Meade – Carers Scotland
- Sharon McGuire – Scottish Government
- Sue McLintock – Carers Scotland
- Rachel Tedeschi – Scottish Government

Lastly, we would also like to thank Oxfam Scotland for providing the funding for this research.

This project was funded by Oxfam Scotland



# Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
Background	8
Aims and objectives	11
Methodology	12
Findings	16
Recommendations	40
Conclusions	49
References	50

# Foreword

## **Richard Meade**

Director of Carers Scotland



There are around 800,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, of which around 270,000 are juggling paid employment and their caring role. There are many more who would like to be in paid employment but owing to the increasing demands of their caring role, a lack of support from social care services, and some employers lacking the support and understanding that carers need, they are unable to. There are also those carers who have been out of employment for some time, often because of many years of caring, who wish to return to employment, but feel unsupported to do so.

Being employed offers unpaid carers not only the opportunity to earn much needed income and financial security, but the chance to do something outside of their caring role that is important to them. Many people invest time, energy and passion into their careers, and it is a vital part of who they are and their ambitions in life, so the ability to continue with their career alongside their caring role is hugely significant to them.

Supporting carers into employment is also good for the economy with more people contributing to taxation and productivity, and for employers who can access skilled and experienced workers in a time where there are significant labour shortages.

At Carers Scotland and through our work with the Carer Positive initiative we speak with many unpaid carers who want to be employed, but for many reasons struggle to stay in employment or to return to paid work. This is why we have commissioned this research project, so that we can understand more about the enablers and barriers that unpaid carers face, and so that we can start to think more about what could be done to increase their opportunities.

It is in everyone's interests that we support all those unpaid carers who want to and can be in employment to be so, we hope that this research helps us take a significant step forward in how we achieve this.

# Executive summary

Unpaid carers currently make up 1 in 7 people in Scotland, a significant proportion of the general population. Being able to take up paid employment alongside their caring role can have a substantial individual and societal impact for unpaid carers: it can provide them with the necessary financial means and help them to live a life beyond their caring role while making a significant economic contribution. However, many unpaid carers face barriers when accessing and sustaining employment often as a result of demanding caring responsibilities and further fuelled by a lack of support considering carer specific needs for securing employment. We need to know more about the experiences and perceptions of unpaid carers surrounding employability support and how such services can be improved to better support them into paid employment. The University of Strathclyde undertook research on behalf of Carers Scotland to explore the key barriers and enablers to employability for unpaid carers, while identifying gaps and helping to prioritise future areas of research and development, including those around: support, resources, skills and training.

This was a rapid research project informed by mixed methodology consisting of an online survey with 320 unpaid carers and focus groups with 12 unpaid carers and 12 employability stakeholders. All data collection activities were carried out between January and June 2024.

## Key findings:

1. Carers value options for part time paid work, flexible hours as well as hybrid work settings as part of their working arrangements. In addition, employment status varied significantly across carers with over half of carers who completed the survey currently not in employment while others were in part-time roles (22%) or full-time (21%).
2. Carers want to be in paid employment and cite a variety of reasons for this. These include to (1) 'lead a life beyond their caring role' (69%), 'increase household income beyond paying bills' (55%), 'put skills and education into use' (46%), 'meet new people' (39%), 'pursue their passion for a specific field' (37%), and 'increase their household income so that it covers bills' (22%).
3. Carers experience a range of barriers that make it difficult for them to secure employment and to subsequently balance this with their caring responsibilities. These barriers most frequently manifest themselves through a lack of time and demanding caring responsibilities: 62% of our survey respondents stated that the caring role is too demanding to allow employment to take place alongside it. Furthermore, unpaid carers experience a lack of flexible working options and employer understanding which is often paired with carer stigma as reported by 32% of our survey respondents:

*"You know a lot of the conversations you hear around care are (around) unskilled work, low paid work, and it feeds into a narrative which then bleeds into certain employers. Attitudes that because you've had time at being a carer, you haven't got skills to offer."*  
– Carer (focus group).

Lastly, carers have serious concerns about the financial implications of taking up paid employment and are worried about their lack of future financial security:

*“My poverty is forever now.”* – Carer (focus group).

4. Carer positive employers, access to replacement care and community support and resources can help to overcome these barriers. Employability stakeholders also suggest making additional funding available to employers to create opportunities for unpaid carers.
5. Carers varied in their experiences of using employability support services but were generally unaware of the support available to them. 32% of our survey respondents had personal experiences with programmes or services for employability support but this finding did not translate to our focus groups with unpaid carers who had little to no experience with employability support. Positive examples were shared of community engagement events and carer empowerment programmes, and employability stakeholders cited additional support services including to gain educational qualifications, skills development, grants, and opportunities for work placements.
6. Carers have valuable transferable skills than can help them in paid employment such as project management and multi-tasking, but they experience barriers in attending study or training opportunities to secure employment: 71% of survey respondents had not previously accessed a programme that had enhanced their employability in terms of skills and training. Unpaid carers were also worried about outdated degrees and keeping up with developments in their field:

*“I’m a qualified engineer, ok? I couldn’t do that now. I am so out of touch with engineering that I could not just go back and get a job in that.”* – Carer (focus group).

Carers want to build and expand on their skills, and employability stakeholders shared a range of training opportunities available to carers to support their skills development through on-line and offline courses.

7. The majority of unpaid carers feel both a lack of confidence and a lack of support surrounding their future employability which is caused by the aforementioned barriers: 41% of our survey respondents felt ‘not at all confident’ for their future employability while 53% did not feel supported ‘at all’.

## Recommendations

Our findings suggest that carers are motivated to be in paid employment but experience a range of barriers that prevent them from doing so ranging from their caring responsibilities, financial implications, and a lack of carer-specific employability support. Below we have included a set of recommendations with a summary of key approaches which can be a first step to tackle these barriers and support unpaid carers to secure paid employment. For many of these suggestions for change and improvement, we require a strategic and co-ordinated approach from national and local leaders in Scotland. This includes the commissioning of an employment action plan for unpaid carers with clear milestones

toward achieving a greater proportion of unpaid carers who want to be in employment being in fair, sustainable work that meets their needs.

- Raise awareness of unpaid carers currently seeking or in paid employment, while reducing stigma over their contribution. This should include public and social media awareness campaigns to demonstrate to unpaid carers that employment is a viable option and that initiatives are available to support them. Furthermore, public awareness initiatives need to be launched to reduce both public and employer negative perceptions of unpaid carers regarding their skills, responsibilities, and their contributions to society.
- Enable greater integration with social care services. There needs to be a substantial increase in the investment in social care and other services to ensure adequate replacement care and respite services, reducing the level of unmet need among unpaid carers and to support them to have the time to be in employment.
- Address the financial barriers that prevent and/or act as a barrier to unpaid carers seeking paid employment. A Job Start Payment should be introduced for unpaid carers to reduce the financial pressures faced by those seeking and entering paid employment, covering, for example, clothing and transport costs, and the cost of replacement care.
- Reform and improve social security entitlements for unpaid carers. An urgent review of UK-wide Carer's Allowance is needed and, as a first step, lifting the earnings threshold to allow unpaid carers to work more hours before losing their benefit. Introduction of a taper system can help ensure there is no cliff edge loss.
- Invest in and reform employability services so they are more visible and can better support unpaid carers. Carers should be made aware of employability services through targeted communications and outreach. Existing employability support needs to be enhanced via local employability services which can include the exploration of establishing a specific employability service specialised in unpaid carers to deliver more tailored support.
- Use all available tools to require and encourage employers to make it easier for unpaid carers to enter and progress within paid employment. There should be a consideration of how UK employment law could be amended to require employers to make the working environment more conducive to unpaid carers, including via recruitment and job design requirements. Investment and support for the voluntary Carer Positive scheme should be deepened with financial incentives introduced to encourage employers to participate within it.
- Guarantee a statutory entitlement of 10 days paid carer's leave per year. The current system of carers leave from 5 days of unpaid leave should be expanded to 10 days of paid leave

## Background



The opportunity to take up paid work can be an important part of life. It is widely recognised that employment brings a wide range of benefits, not just limited to financial security and stability but also opportunities to establish broader needs such as a fulfilling career, positive mental health and regular social interaction (van der Noordt et al., 2014). However, for several groups in society, finding and staying in work can prove significantly challenging with additional barriers meaning that individuals are not on an equal footing. For these individuals, access to high quality employability support that meets their needs is crucial to maximise their chances of entering the labour market.

A particularly prominent group - in terms of both the number of people and the barriers they face to entering paid work - is unpaid carers for people with additional support needs. In Scotland, it is estimated that there are approximately 800,000 unpaid carers which represents 1 in 7 of the population (Scottish Government, 2024). It is further estimated that currently there are around 270,000 people in paid employment who are also carrying out an unpaid caring role (Scottish Government, 2024). While the nature and depth of this caring role will vary significantly, activities often include: cooking, cleaning and shopping for the cared-for person (82%); looking after them generally (76%); keeping them company (68%); personal and physical care (38%) alongside financial support (49%) (Sanders, 2020). Carer hours can vary considerably: in 2020/21, over half of carers (54%) reported providing 50 or more hours support per week (Scottish Government, 2022).

Unpaid carers of working-age people are less likely to be employed than non-carers (Aldridge & Hughes, 2016). For many carers, paid employment is difficult to access and sustain, if not impossible, because of their caring role (Spann et al., 2020). However, there are many unpaid carers who want to enter paid work but face multiple barriers accessing the labour market. For those that are in paid employment, staying in the role can be difficult. Carers UK research published in 2019 found that nearly 7% of carers had been forced to give up employment to care (nearly 1 in 10 in the preceding 12 months) and a further 5% had reduced their working hours to provide care for someone (Carers UK, 2019). A recent report found that 48% of carers said caring had a negative impact on their ability to work and have a paid job (Carers Week, 2024).

This lack of equal employment opportunities for carers compared to non-carers is a concern to all of society: employment can often represent a lifeline, not only financially, but also as an important part of having a life outside of caring. Unpaid carers in employment also make a huge economic contribution. The Centre for Social Justice estimates that supporting unpaid carers to remain in employment potentially saves the UK economy £6 billion annually through tax contributions and less reliance on social security (The Centre for Social Justice, 2024).

Given such challenges, and the importance of supporting people into employment and to remain there, there are a range of employability services and programmes delivered across Scotland designed to help people both out of work and in work. These provide information and support to develop people's skills and learning to access jobs, education or training opportunities, or to progress within their current careers. Such services can and sometimes do offer help to unpaid carers to address some of the barriers and challenges they face and identify the best routes to future career options. Furthermore, such services aim to be in line with the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind policy which sets out to transform employment support in Scotland (Employability in Scotland, 2024). It is designed to help people prepare for employment, training, education and/or volunteering. Through No One Left Behind, they deliver an approach to employability that is flexible, person-centred, and integrated and aligned with other key services including health, justice, housing provision and advice services, support is offered to individuals regardless of age or background. Over the years every savings decision relating to employability funding has been taken with the aim of protecting investment in front line services. Despite a reduction from 2023/24 levels, up to £90 million has been agreed for 24/25 delivery.

However, following previous engagement work with these services, there remain key questions around the experiences and perceptions of unpaid carers utilising such services alongside a lack of multi-stakeholder perspective on how such services could be delivered to better support unpaid carers. Moreover, unpaid carers have previously stated that current employability support is often not able to meet carer specific needs to help them identify employment opportunities, or to develop the skills they might need to pursue their goals (Maughan et al., 2022). It is also apparent that systemic challenges, including lack of confidence, insufficient experience (e.g. gaps in CV), lack of flexible working practices, as well as the financial challenge of balancing income from social security entitlements and from paid work, may currently combine to create a largely insurmountable barrier for many carers seeking to access and sustain paid employment (Spann et al., 2020).

There remains a surprisingly sparse body of literature around unpaid carers and employability. The development of both a broader and deeper understanding of the employability landscape in Scotland would be advantageous for all stakeholders. This rapid research project was commissioned by Carers Scotland and conducted by the University of Strathclyde to help address this knowledge gap. It seeks to collate current knowledge on the key barriers and enablers to employability for unpaid carers, while identifying gaps and helping to prioritise future areas of research and development, including those around: support, resources, skills and training. Crucially, the project is grounded in the experiences of unpaid carers themselves.

## Aims and objectives

This project sets out to explore issues relating to the effectiveness of employability support available to unpaid carers in Scotland through primary research.

Our objectives were to:

- Develop, test and distribute an online survey with unpaid carers to explore key topics around employability;
- Collate findings from the online survey and conduct a number of focus groups with unpaid carers and employability stakeholders to explore findings in more detail including a final corroboration meeting; and
- Evaluate collective findings above to develop a future outlook that includes key recommendations that could help influence future policy.



# Methodology

## Research design

The research was a rapid response project taking place between January and June 2024 consisting of two phases adopting mixed methodology. Phase 1 consisted of the primary data collection activities and included (1) an online survey for unpaid carers, (2) focus groups with unpaid carers, and (3) focus groups with employability stakeholders. Phase 2 was comprised of a collective corroboration meeting with unpaid carers and employability stakeholders to review the draft findings flowing from Phase 1. The overall structure and major themes of both the survey and focus groups were pre-defined by the research team based on existing literature and related projects as well as discussions with Carers Scotland and members from the Project Steering Group.

## Participants

Unpaid carers were required to meet the following inclusion criteria to participate in the survey and focus groups:

- Aged 18 years or above;
- Current or previous experience of being an unpaid carer (including former or bereaved carers) irrespective of amount of time spent in caring role;
- Ability to provide informed consent;
- Ability to read and write in English; and
- Must be based in Scotland.

The following inclusion criteria applied to employability stakeholders who participated in the focus groups:

- Aged 18 years or above;
- Currently working in a role relevant to employability support for unpaid carers e.g. employability services, carer centres, local Government (irrespective of amount of time spent in working role);
- Ability to provide informed consent;
- Ability to read and write in English; and
- Must be based in Scotland.

## Recruitment and ethical approvals

We obtained ethical approval from the University of Strathclyde's Department of Computer and Information Sciences in January 2024. A link to the survey for unpaid carers was distributed by Carers Scotland who have a membership of over 2,000 unpaid carers. In addition, invitations to participate in the survey were also shared by members of the Steering Group, representing: Renfrewshire Council, Oxfam Scotland, the Scottish Government, Promoting a more inclusive society (PAMIS), Minority Ethnic Carers of People

Project (MECOPP), and One Parent Families Scotland. Each Steering Group member had connections with carer groups and stakeholders in employability services or brought wider expertise to the project.

Unpaid carers who participated in the survey were given the option to leave their contact details at the end of the survey, if they were interested in taking part in the subsequent focus groups.

All research participants in Phase 1 were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and their written informed consent was sought prior to any data collection activities, either as part of the survey or by email in preparation for the focus groups. Participants of the corroboration meeting were not asked to provide informed consent as this meeting did not include any formal data collection.

## Data collection

### *Phase 1A: online survey with unpaid carers*

We designed an online survey for unpaid carers including bereaved and former carers with questions related to participants' motivations for seeking work, any concerns they have in doing so and any barriers (perceived or otherwise), their experience of seeking work, and on their use, or otherwise, of employability services (supported through the use of Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2005)). A draft version of the survey was tested for usability by two carers as well as members of the research team and the Steering Group. After incorporating the relevant feedback, the final version of the survey included a mix of 37 closed and open-ended questions which took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Data collection for the survey ran from mid-February 2024 to mid-March 2024. The survey was briefly reopened for two weeks in April 2024 in an attempt to collect more responses from unpaid carers with a minority ethnic background.

### *Phase 1B: focus groups with unpaid carers and employability stakeholders*

Following the survey, we organised two focus groups with unpaid carers and two focus groups with employability stakeholders from employability services, carers centres, local government and other relevant partners. The aim of the focus groups with unpaid carers was to obtain more detailed information/data on topics included in the survey. As such participants were asked to discuss similar themes e.g. their motivations for seeking work, any barriers and enablers, and their experiences of employability services.

For the focus groups with employability stakeholders, we asked participants to discuss various topics including their views and experiences of (assisting) unpaid carers seeking employment, the barriers they have come across, any enablers that can or have helped, and ideas to provide better support to unpaid carers to seek or remain in employment. All focus groups were carried out virtually using Microsoft Teams and lasted for 90 minutes each. The groups were audio-recorded using the Microsoft Teams software and the data were transcribed for analysis by the research team.



### *Phase 2: corroboration meeting*

Following data collection as part of Phase 1, we drafted preliminary findings and recommendations to be presented at a corroboration meeting with a selection of unpaid carers and stakeholders. The sample was made up of participants who had taken part in the previous focus groups. The aim of the corroboration meeting was to review and provide feedback on the draft findings, and to discuss any proposed recommendations flowing from the survey and the focus groups. The corroboration meeting was carried out virtually using Microsoft Teams and lasted for 90 minutes. The meeting was not audio-recorded or transcribed but rather, the research team took notes of the main points and any amendments to be made to the findings and recommendations.

### **Data analyses**

Numerical data from the survey was presented descriptively using the inbuilt descriptive summary reporting tools in Qualtrics. This included the frequency of responses in each category. Free text responses from the online survey were examined by two researchers to collate into groups of thematically similar perceptions per question. The free text analysis for both the survey and focus groups was mostly deductive in nature as our themes were pre-defined by previous research and wider discussions with Carers Scotland and the Steering Group. Any emerging themes that were additional to our pre-defined themes were included as part of our data and analyses. Data from the focus groups were transcribed and analysed thematically by two researchers and compared for similarities and discrepancies. Lastly, for the corroboration meeting, detailed notes were summarised according to the

emerging feedback. Data from the online survey and the semi-structured interview guides are available on request. The University of Strathclyde research team conducted the analyses independently leading to the final research findings. Future recommendations flowing from the data were a collaboration between the Strathclyde team, Carers Scotland and the Steering Group.

# Findings



## Overview

Analyses (for both survey and focus group data) were guided by the following pre-defined themes: (1) demographics, (2) depth and nature of caring responsibilities, (3) employability and career goals, (4) perceptions of barriers and enablers, (5) support and resources, (6) skills and training, and (7) future directions and planning.

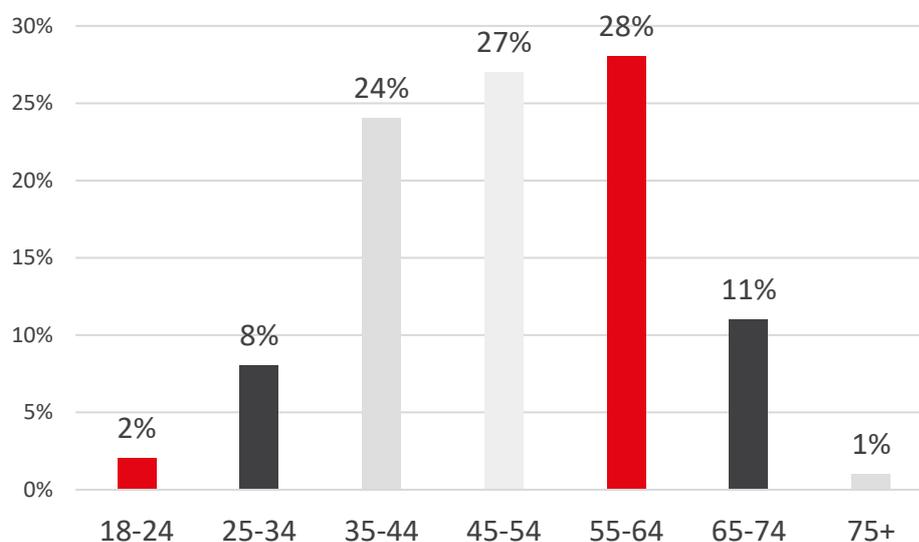
Please note that throughout this report the number of online survey responses will vary as no questions were mandatory. In total, 320 respondents completed at least part of the survey. For context, in latter parts of the survey, the total number of respondents generally remained above 200 for questions expected to be answered by all respondents. While some questions were multiple choice with only one answer possible, others permitted multiple answers, so totals may not always equal 100%.

## Phases 1A and 1B: Results from the survey and focus groups

### *Demographics: Survey*

Approximately 89% of survey respondents were a current carer, whereas 11% were a former carer. The age of carer respondents varied considerably, from possible groupings the most common response was between 45 and 64 accounting for 55% of our total participants (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Age group ranges from online survey respondents (n=320)**



Geographically, a total of 30 out of a possible 32 local council authority areas were represented in the data. The most common geographical areas for responses included Glasgow city (n = 37), Renfrewshire (n = 34), Edinburgh (n = 29), and Fife (n = 28). Some 83% of our survey respondents identified as a woman/female (including trans woman) and were generally highly educated, with 47% of respondents educated to degree or equivalent level. In terms of ethnicity, 95% of our sample identified as White, with 1% of respondents preferring not to answer. Other groups included 'mixed or multiple ethnic groups', 'Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian', 'African, Scottish African or British African', and 'Other ethnic group'.

The combined household income varied considerably, however there was a slight skew in our data towards less affluent groups, with 52% of the respondents earning less than £30,000 as a combined household income per year (see Table 1). Some 37% of respondents reported not being in receipt of any social security entitlements, with 43% reporting that they receive carers allowance/support payments.

Table 1: Combined reported household income from online survey respondents (n=318)

Household income	Percentage (%)
Less than £10,000	13
£10,001-£20,000	21
£20,001-£30,000	18
£30,001-£40,000	13
£40,001-£50,000	9
£50,0001-£60,000	7
£60,001-£70,000	3
More than £70,000	6
I prefer not to answer	9

### Demographics: Focus groups

A total of 12 unpaid carers took part across two focus groups. All our participants identified as female, and ages ranged from 45 to 74 years old (see Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic information of unpaid carers in focus groups

Characteristic	N	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	12	100
<b>Age group</b>		
45-54	4	33
55-64	6	50
65-74	2	17
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	11	92
Other (not specified)	1	8
<b>Education level</b>		
Degree	11	92
Higher education	1	8

Similarly, 12 stakeholders took part in two focus groups. Of the 9 stakeholders who shared their demographic information, five identified as female and four as male. All participants were White, aged 35 to 64 years old, and had either completed higher education (n = 5) or their SVQ (n = 2). Stakeholders represented various organisations involved in the delivery of employability services in Scotland, including: the Lennox Partnership (n = 2), CEIS Ayrshire (n = 2), Connecting Carers (n = 2), Jobs and Business Glasgow (n = 1), Stepwell Consultancy (n = 1) and Enable Works (n = 1).



### *Depth and nature of caring responsibilities: Survey*

In terms of caring responsibilities, respondents cared for a wide range of different groups including children under and over the age of 18 (54%), parents/parents in law (36%), spouses/partners (21%), siblings (5%), grandparents (5%), and friends (2%). Our respondents were particularly experienced in the caring role with 51% of respondents caring for 10 years or more and 62% caring for 50 hours or more per week (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Figure 2: Years caring from online survey respondents (n=312)

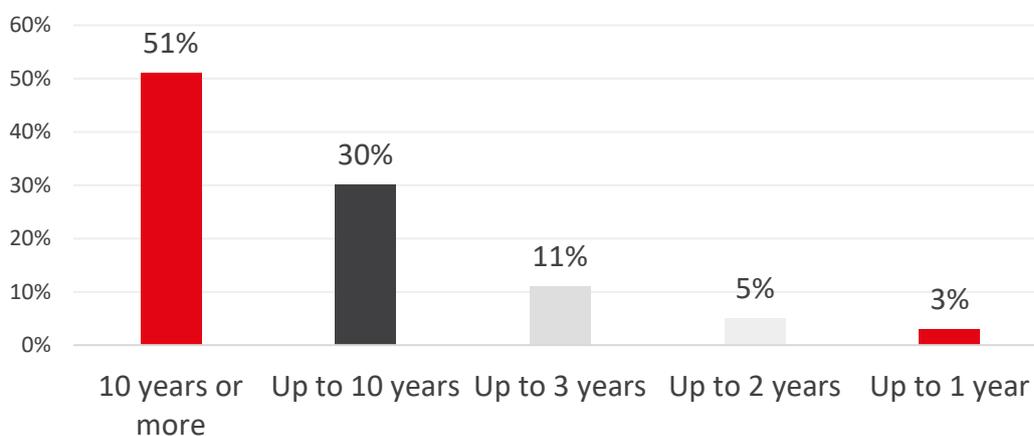
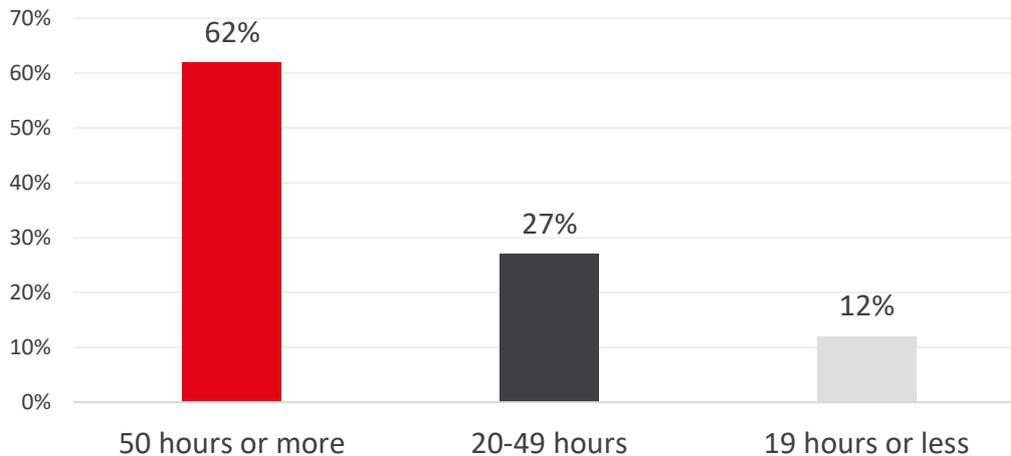


Figure 3: Hours spent caring per week from online survey respondents (n=312)



Approximately 94% of respondents considered themselves to be the primary carer, with 45% of respondents receiving 'informal' support from their personal/family network and 36% of respondents receiving support from more formal services, such as council services or private care.

### *Caring responsibilities: Focus groups*

The unpaid carers who participated in our focus groups variously cared for parents, children, spouses, and friends. The duration of their caregiving roles ranged from 2 to 30 years. Carers reported that support systems were generally lacking, with seven participants reporting receiving no support, while the remaining five received varying degrees of paid or familial support. The impact of COVID-19 was significant for half of the participants who mentioned it affecting their ability to provide care.

It is important to recognise that a significant proportion of our survey respondents and some of our focus group participants had multiple caring roles e.g. caring for a parent and a child with additional needs.

## Employability and career goals

### Key findings

- Employment status varied across participants of the survey and focus groups. 52% of survey respondents were not in employment and others in full-time (21%) or part-time roles (22%).
- Carers valued options for part time work, flexible hours as well as hybrid work settings.
- Key motivations for being in employment were related to living a life beyond the caring role, increasing household income, and putting existing skills, training and education to use.

### *Current employment status and setting*

In terms of current employment status, our survey respondents were varied with 52% of respondents currently not employed, 22% of respondents employed part time and 21% of respondents employed full time. 7% of respondents stated that they were a volunteer, while 2% held zero-hours contract or similar and 2% were studying. No respondents were on an employment support or training programme. In terms of work setting, 45% of participants stated that they were currently working in a hybrid format (i.e. both in the workplace and at home), 44% stated that they were working in the workplace only, and 11% stated they were only working from home.

The employment status varied considerably in our focus groups. A total of five carers were currently unemployed but had all been previously employed before taking up their caring role. Two carers were self-employed and two other carers were employed full time and reflected on how their hybrid or work from home setting had made this possible for them. Three carers were in part-time employment and had varied places of work, ranging from hybrid to working in a specific workplace setting e.g. as a nurse.

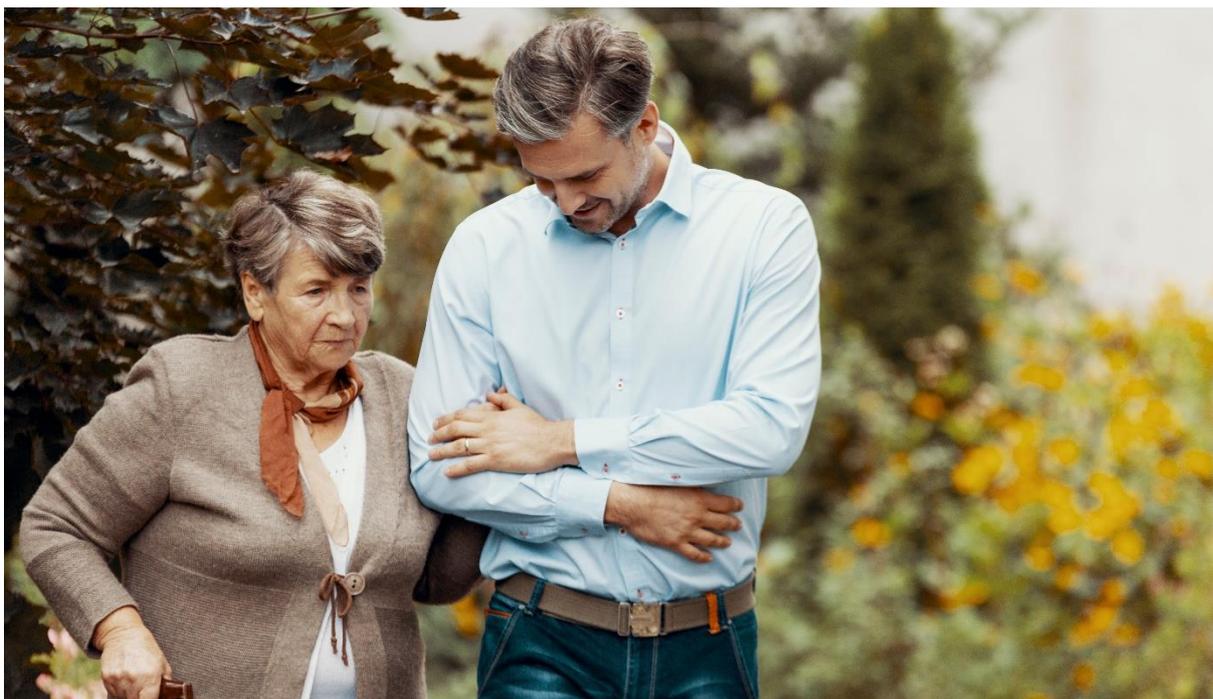
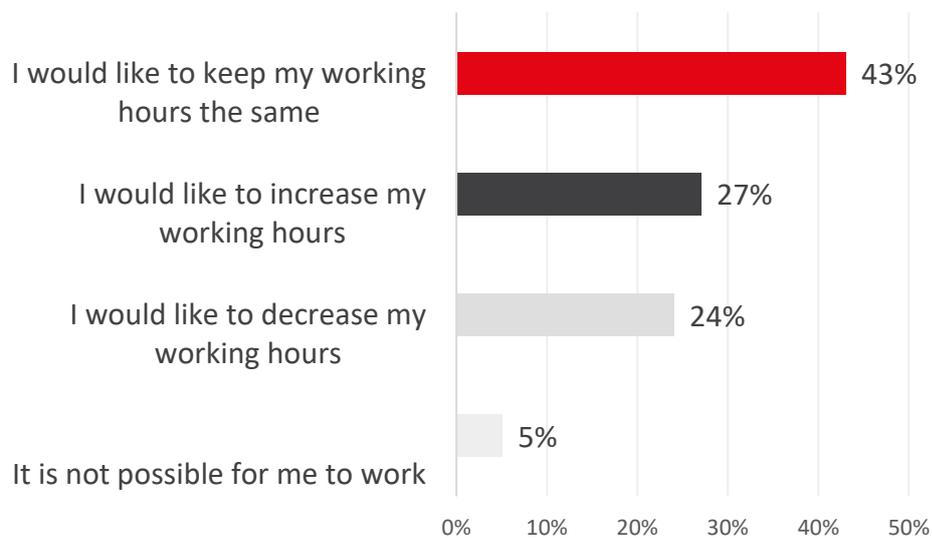
### *Employment goals*

We also asked our survey respondents about their desired future working arrangements in terms of hours and location. Approximately 43% of carers would like to keep their working hours the same, 27% would like to increase working hours and 24% would like to decrease working hours. Some 5% of respondents stated that it is not possible for them to work (see Figure 4). Carers were also interested in having flexible hours with working during school hours being preferred due to a lack of replacement care (see Barriers section).

In terms of work location, 71% of respondents stated that they would like to keep their work setting/location the same, whereas 29% of respondents would prefer to change this with the option to work in a hybrid setting being the most popular (29%), followed by remote working (26%) and working in a specific workplace (18%). Some carers were interested in working from an office as an opportunity to be outside of the home:

*"I would like to be able to work somewhere where there are other adults to speak to and be around."* – Carer (survey).

Figure 4: Desired working hours from online survey respondents (n=146)



In our focus groups with unpaid carers, we found that carers who were currently unemployed had a desire to be employed (including self-employment), with flexible hours and remote work provisions preferred in part due to a lack of appropriate transportation to reach a specific workplace (see Barriers section).

*“Lots of posts are full-time or part-time hours at 28 hours, and they're too much.”* – Carer 9 (focus group).

This was reiterated by employability stakeholders who shared that carers were generally looking for flexible and/or part-time positions and some also sought out volunteering opportunities. When speaking to both carers and stakeholders, there was no consensus on the type of roles carers seek out. For example, some carers in our focus groups were looking for paid caring opportunities as these roles would resemble their existing skills. However, stakeholders did not see this reflected in their work and found that carers would rather seek out roles unrelated to caring.

### *Motivations for seeking employment*

We explored unpaid carers' motivations for wanting to be employed. From a wide range of potential choices, survey respondents often selected several different options. Primarily, 69% of respondents wanted to 'lead a life beyond their caring role', with other popular selections including 'increasing household income beyond paying bills' (55%), 'putting skills and education into use' (46%), 'meeting new people' (39%), and 'pursuing passion for a specific field' (37%). Some, 22% said, they would like to increase their household income so that it covers their bills (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Primary motivations of online survey respondents for seeking employment (n=293)**

<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
I would like to lead a life beyond my caring role	69
I would like to increase my household income beyond paying my household bills	55
I would like to put my skills/training/education to use	46
I would like to meet new people	39
I would like to pursue my passion/purpose for a certain sector/field	37
I would like to increase my household income to be able to cover my household bills only	22
Other	14

These motivations were also reflected in the focus groups both with carers and employability stakeholders:

*"A lot of carers do use their work as an opportunity to have that break and be themselves, you know, rather than just being an unpaid carer, it gives them more of an identity."* – Stakeholder 12 (focus group).

Financial incentives were also emphasised in the focus groups with both an increase in household income and future planning in terms of retirement cited as important factors. Additional motivations for seeking employment included having the opportunity for intellectual stimulation and increased social interactions. And lastly, carers reflected on how they felt invisible as a carer and that being employed allowed them to make a societal contribution and therefore could help with feelings of worthiness and 'being seen'.



## Perceptions of barriers and enablers

### Key findings

- Carers find it difficult to balance their caring responsibilities with employment due to a lack of time, employer understanding, and flexible working options.
- Carers often experience stigma and negative employer perceptions that make it difficult to secure employment.
- Carers often feel their caring role is too demanding to take up employment, experience inflexible working practices and a lack of employer support, have concerns about the financial implications, and generally do not feel they have access to good quality replacement care.
- Important enablers that can help overcome barriers include Carer Positive employers, additional funding for employers to create opportunities for carers, access to support and resources in the community, as well as replacement care.

### *Balancing caring and employment*

We first asked carers in the survey about key challenges from their perspective around securing employment and balancing this with the caring role. While carers shared many different specific barriers across the caring role, the most prominent challenges highlighted that only limited hours of employment were possible due to caring responsibilities (62%), worries about the employer not understanding the caring role and its demands (59%), and concerns about lack of flexible working options (49%).

#### Biggest perceived challenges to employment and balancing caring and employment

**62%**

Limited hours for  
employment due to caring



**59%**

Lack of understanding  
from employers



**49%**

Shortage of flexible  
working options



These barriers also came up frequently in the focus groups. Carers felt that a lack of time prevented them from pursuing employment opportunities and, for some carers who were successful in obtaining employment, it felt like ‘having two jobs’ when balancing this with their unpaid caring role. This also brought on worries about poor performance at their employment with carers feeling that their caring responsibilities could make it difficult to simultaneously carry out their work responsibilities to a high standard:

*“I came to realize that there's a limit to how many little pieces you can cut yourself into. (...)*  
– Carer 8 (focus group).

Furthermore, a lack of flexible working opportunities was similarly perceived to be a big barrier by both carers and stakeholders in terms of hours (e.g. no flexible hours or part-time options) and location (e.g. no options to work from home). One stakeholder also mentioned that a lack of access to appropriate transportation was an issue as this could prevent carers from accessing employment opportunities if they are unable to work from home.



## Negative public and employer perceptions of carers

Approximately one third of carers (32%) in the survey stated that ‘carer discrimination’ was a specific challenge. This was reiterated by both carers and employability stakeholders during the focus groups. Carers reflected on how stigma could have an impact on employer attitudes:

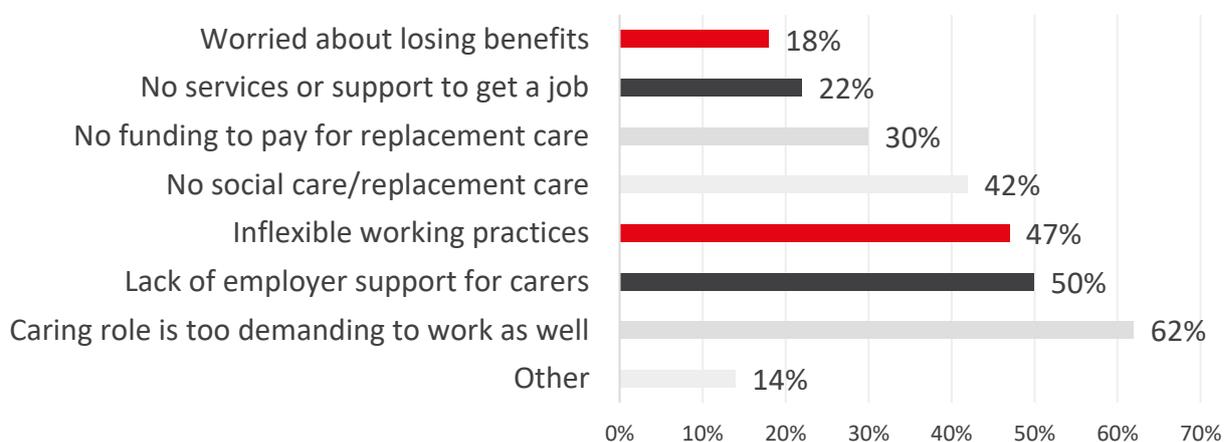
*"It doesn't help that we have such a poor image. You know a lot of the conversations you hear around care are (around) unskilled work, low paid work, and it feeds into a narrative which then bleeds into certain employers. Attitudes that because you've had time at being a carer, you haven't got skills to offer."* – Carer 1 (focus group).

The lack of recognition of skills that unpaid carers have to offer was perceived to be an additional barrier. Carers were also concerned about potentially being seen as an unreliable employee due to unpredictable caring responsibilities which reflects findings from the survey surrounding a lack of employer understanding. Stakeholders in the focus groups further reiterated this and had found, while working with employers, that some can be reluctant to recruit unpaid carers due to the risk this may pose to them being able to fulfil their responsibilities at work.

## Securing employment

We asked survey respondents about securing long-term employment and the obstacles they faced. Some 62% of respondents stated that the caring role is too demanding to allow employment to take place alongside it, 50% suggested that there was a lack of employer support for carers, and relatedly, 47% of respondents cited inflexible working practices by employers. Other barriers highlighted included not having access to social care or replacement care (42%), not having funding to pay for replacement care (30%), not having access to services or support to get a job (22%), and worrying about losing their benefits (18%) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Obstacles to securing long-term employment from online survey respondents (n=221)



These barriers were also reflected in the focus groups. For stakeholders, there was a reflection on how securing long-term employment in general after a short-term employment opportunity (e.g. a work placement) could be a challenge potentially caused by a lack of funding for employers to retain unpaid carers:

*"I suppose it's (...) when that opportunity ends after six months and then maybe it doesn't get continued. It is the sustainability of that, where does that go next? The employer or the person who has gained that opportunity. And I know funding is tight, but there is a big risk from the employer's point of view. And I know there's a funding risk as well when you've got pockets of this money coming along."* – Stakeholder 4 (focus group).

Concerns surrounding the financial impact of securing employment were brought up more frequently in the focus groups by both carers and stakeholders. Carers felt strongly about potentially losing access to benefits and not receiving any Carer's Allowance when going beyond the cap on earnings if they were employed. There were also concerns related to long-term financial planning as many carers did not have a pension plan or retirement savings which left them feeling pessimistic about their financial wellbeing in the future:

*"My poverty is forever now."* – Carer 9 (focus group).



For stakeholders, there was a reflection on how these uncertainties about the impact of going into employment could bring about fear among carers.

Further in line with findings from the survey, some carers in the focus groups found it difficult to organise consistent replacement care due to a lack of appropriate services, but also experienced difficulties with accessing these services where they were available. In addition, carers reiterated that there was a lack of support services that could help carers secure employment e.g. through small grants or vouchers to buy clothing appropriate for interviews. Some of these services had previously been available to unpaid carers but have been discontinued.

In the survey, concerns around CV gaps, a lack of experience or worries about interviews and skills were seldom reported (<20% of responses). However, these topics came up more frequently in each of the focus groups and were at times framed from the perspective of lacking confidence among carers. Carers were unsure how to present their CV or felt they did not have the necessary interview skills. In addition, some carers were worried about their degrees being outdated and no longer acceptable for current jobs:

*“But my degree is so outdated now, because I'm not continually working in that industry. I couldn't just walk into a job now. So, at the end, I'm doing nothing like I'm qualified for.”* – Carer 10 (focus group).

For several carers this had meant that they had taken up roles which were either not in line with their interests or for which they were overqualified. Obtaining the necessary references was also perceived to be a challenge. These findings feed into larger concerns regarding the job application process as a whole which was perceived to be bureaucratic by both carers and stakeholders.

Both carers in the survey and focus groups shared some individual barriers relating to their own health that could prevent them from securing employment. Some examples included cognitive or physical disabilities (e.g. a diagnosis of ADHD), mental health issues, and old age which could also be linked to ageist attitudes from employers. Lastly, one carer in the focus groups found that English not being her first language hindered her ability to secure employment and felt that language barriers should also be considered.

Lastly, stakeholders also shared some barriers specific to employability services and stated that the lack of awareness among carers of these services was a big issue and that some services can be target-driven making it difficult to offer a person-centred approach to carers.

## Enablers

Most carers in the survey did not have experience with specific enablers that had helped them to overcome any barriers. However, when asked what could help them in the future, access to replacement care, financial support in terms of keeping benefits, and flexible and supportive employers were mentioned most often:

*"Employers who don't penalise for short-notice or longer absences. Job sharing also feels like it could help me, knowing someone could easily pick up my work. Non-traditional work patterns e.g. working for a set number of days followed by a longer break or just very short shifts are things I think would help."* – Carer (survey).

In the focus groups, carers also found that having a Carer Positive employer was one of the most important enablers. These employers often had additional provisions for carers to allow them to secure and maintain employment, including options to work from home, carers leave, flexibility in terms of hours and a general understanding from the employer of their caring responsibilities. One carer had such provisions in place and shared how this has been a positive experience for her:

*"(They) have been fantastic, they've let me work from home (...) if my work doesn't allow me to work from home, then I would probably have had to, you know, stop working. My work also lets me have 5 care days a year."* – Carer 3 (focus group).



Stakeholders added that becoming a Carer Positive employer should also include adaptations to recruitment processes which could minimise barriers related to a lack of interview skills or challenges with obtaining references. One specific example was given in the form of a trial shift, whereby a carer was given the opportunity to take on the working role for a day and see whether it would be a good fit. An additional enabler identified by our stakeholders would be employers receiving funding to create employment opportunities for unpaid carers; they felt this would help to address the reluctance of employers to recruit unpaid carers. And lastly, to address some of the stigma experienced by unpaid carers as they look for employment, there was consensus on increasing awareness of carers among employers via targeted, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training.

Carers in the focus groups also said that having good quality replacement care could help them secure and remain in employment, as well as having access to support services, such as community engagement events or carer empowerment programmes. Stakeholders providing employability support agreed with this and found that having staff in place to provide carers with targeted support on how to undertake the first steps when looking for employment would be beneficial. An example could be to offer help with benefits calculations when taking up employment. This targeted support should also be holistic in nature as it was felt that employability support services often work in silos. It is important that staff members are able to signpost carers to other relevant support as needed, such as housing or mental health services. Lastly, one stakeholder also mentioned that having free bus travel initiatives in place for carers would make it easier for them to access more employment opportunities

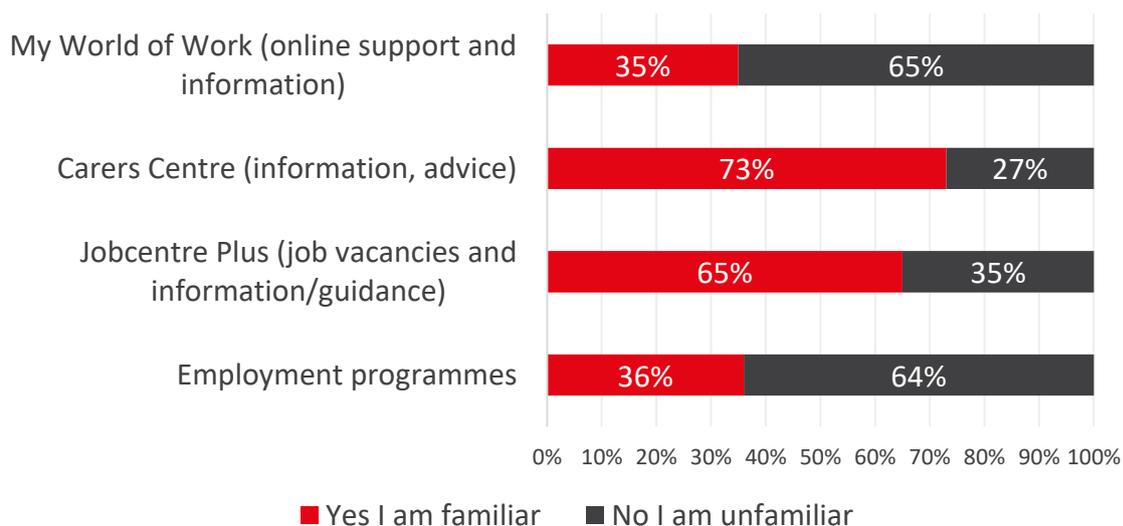
## Support and resources

### Key findings

- Around a third of carers who completed the survey had personal experience with programmes or services for employability support but, more generally, carers reported a lack of awareness of such support.
- However, some carers cited positive examples of support, including community engagement events and carer empowerment programmes.
- Stakeholders also shared a variety of employability support services and programmes which are available to carers, including those focused on carer empowerment and confidence building, gaining educational qualifications, skills development, grants, and opportunities for work placements.

Some 32% of all our survey respondents had previously used programmes or services for employability support. Where we explored overall familiarities with such programmes, we identified that 73% of respondents were familiar with support from Carers Centres around employability, 65% were familiar with the JobCentre Plus role, 36% were aware of employment programmes and 35% were Familiar with 'My World of Work' (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Use of employability support among online survey respondents (n=264)

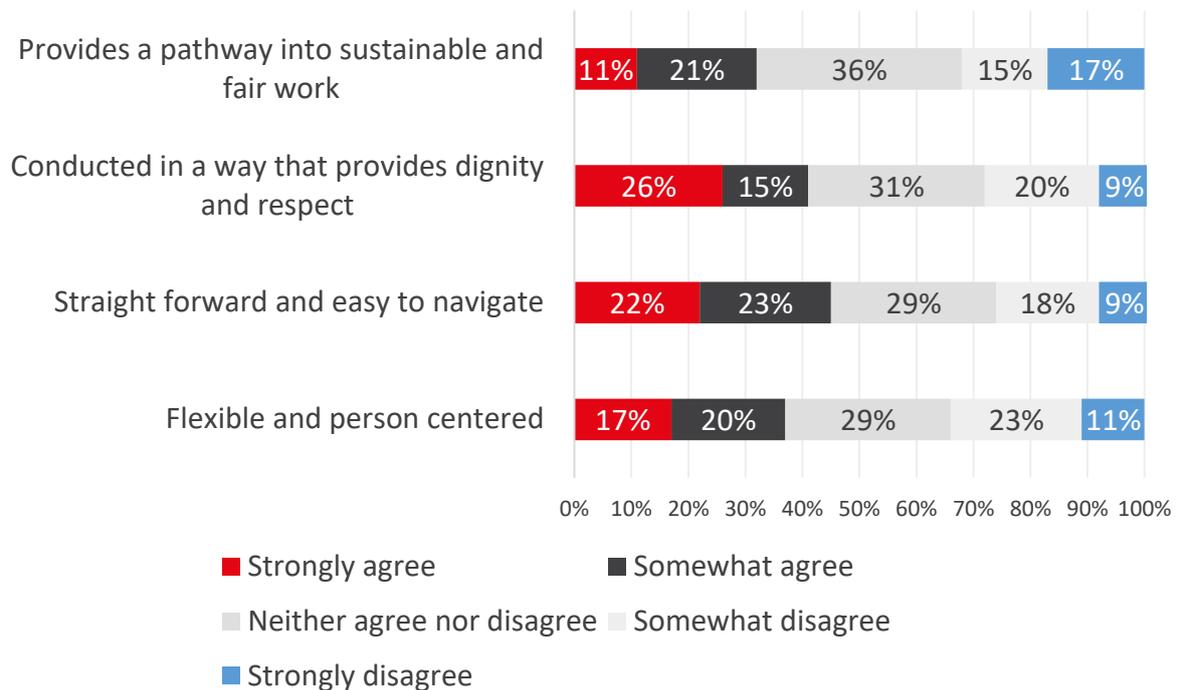




A total of 82 respondents answered questions on employment programmes and services they had used previously. For example, where respondents had used such services, they found Carers Centres particularly helpful (66% of respondents viewing such services as ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’) and to a lesser extent employment programmes (45% of respondents viewed as ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ helpful), My World of Work (44% of respondents viewing services as ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ helpful and 28% of respondents viewed JobCentre Plus as ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’.

In terms of experiences of the different services used, a minority of participants found services used to be straight forward and easy to use (44% of participants strongly or somewhat agreeing), conducted in a way that supports dignity and respect (41% of participants strongly or somewhat agreeing), flexible and person centred (36% strongly or somewhat agreeing), and just under a third (32%) either strongly or somewhat agreed that services used ‘provide a pathway into sustainable and fair work’ (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Experience of employability support among online survey respondents (n=82)



In our focus groups, we found that most carers were not aware of any employability support services and therefore had not accessed these. Participants felt that there was a general lack of support for carers to secure employment and reflected on how some support was not available to them anymore e.g. vouchers to purchase clothing appropriate for interviews. However, there were some positive examples of carers having attended community engagement events for carers as well as carer empowerment programmes, which they felt had made a real difference:

*"It's organized by the Challenges Group, and I can't speak highly enough about them. It's run by women for women. They are absolutely fantastic. It's free to go on. (...) I still hold that with me, because that was about, you know, when I've had my lowest moments, I still had all that knowledge, (...) The aim of that course is to try and get you into work."* – Carer 4 (focus group).

In one focus group, carers mentioned they preferred face-to-face services rather than being offered written information regarding any support available to them. The findings from our carer focus groups partly contrasted with those in our stakeholder focus groups where stakeholders were able to list considerable sources of support available to carers but agreed that carers are either not aware of these services or are unable to access them. When asked why carers seek out support from their services, stakeholders mentioned carers seeking benefits advice, support with enrolling in training or gaining qualifications or generally learning more about where to start with looking for employment opportunities. Stakeholders also listed the different types of support available to carers. This included carer empowerment by building self-confidence and helping carers to recognise their existing

skills as mentioned in the carer focus groups but also through funding work placements or grants for training and to gain qualifications and new skills e.g. learning how to drive. One stakeholder shared a positive story of a carer being able to secure new employment after obtaining the necessary qualifications:

*"He was working as a part-time administrator at an accountants' firm because he was working on an accountant's degree, and we then managed to secure funding to allow him to finish the one module that he was unable to complete. And he's done (...) that and he's then doubled his salary because he's now a fully-fledged accountant. And when we got the fund approved for that and we phoned to tell him that he was in, he was in tears just at what that meant for him (...) that my life's going to get better if I complete this qualification. And he had the drive and desire to do it, that he's then going to be able to provide more for his family by having an increase in an income and it was fantastic, and he still keeps in touch."* – Stakeholder 11 (focus group).

One stakeholder also mentioned they had set up a mentoring programme to provide peer support. As part of this, unpaid carers who were able to secure employment offered help or support to currently unemployed carers. Stakeholders also reflected on the importance of providing person-centred and long-term support to unpaid carers considering their changing life circumstances and caring responsibilities.

Lastly, while some of the support was provided on location at the support service, other support was offered in the community in the form of an 'employability roadshow' or other outreach activities e.g. visiting schools. It was deemed important to offer flexible working opportunities for carers seeking employability support to better meet their needs, this would include an out of hours option.



## Skills and training

### Key findings

- Unpaid carers have valuable transferable skills that can help them in employment e.g. project management, multi-tasking, problem-solving, and resilience.
- Unpaid carers experience barriers in attending study or training opportunities because of their caring responsibilities.
- There are training opportunities available to carers to support their skills development through on-line and offline courses.

Some 71% of survey respondents had not previously accessed a programme that had enhanced their employability. Carers shared their current skills which they felt may enhance their employability, including: multi-tasking, organisation, adaptability, and resilience. When asked which skills they would like to develop that could help them to secure employment, carers cited several IT skills (e.g. emails, Excel, social media) as well as gaining more confidence, communication skills, or skills related to the recruitment process, such as CV building and interviewing.

Though many unpaid carers had previously attended training as part of their working roles or degrees, both carers in the survey and the focus groups currently experienced barriers in attending study or training caused by their caring responsibilities. This had a negative impact on their career progression as they were often not able to keep up with any developments in their field:

*“I’m a qualified engineer, ok? I couldn’t do that now. I am so out of touch with engineering that I could not just go back and get a job in that.”* – Carer 10 (focus group).

Carers in the focus groups felt they had the necessary skills akin to a paid caring role and there was a general consensus that there should be better recognition of the skills inherent to caring, such as multi-tasking, problem solving, and project management which were thought to be important transferable skills. In addition to the support and resources mentioned before, stakeholders mentioned more specific training opportunities available to unpaid carers through their services such as: funded training opportunities for self-employment; short, online courses including first aid, health and safety as well as customer service training.

## Future directions and planning

### Key findings

- As a result of the barriers they face, carers experience low levels of confidence surrounding their future employment prospects.
- Unpaid carers also report feeling a lack of support to seek and enter paid employment.
- Carers are concerned about the long-lasting financial impact of taking up employment and are anxious about their future financial security.
- More employers need to have employment policies that support unpaid carers in the workplace.

The majority of our survey respondents felt both a lack of confidence and a lack of support surrounding their future employability. When asked about their confidence levels for future employability, 41% of participants said they were 'not at all confident', whereas 11% were 'very confident' and 10% 'extremely confident' (see Figure 8).

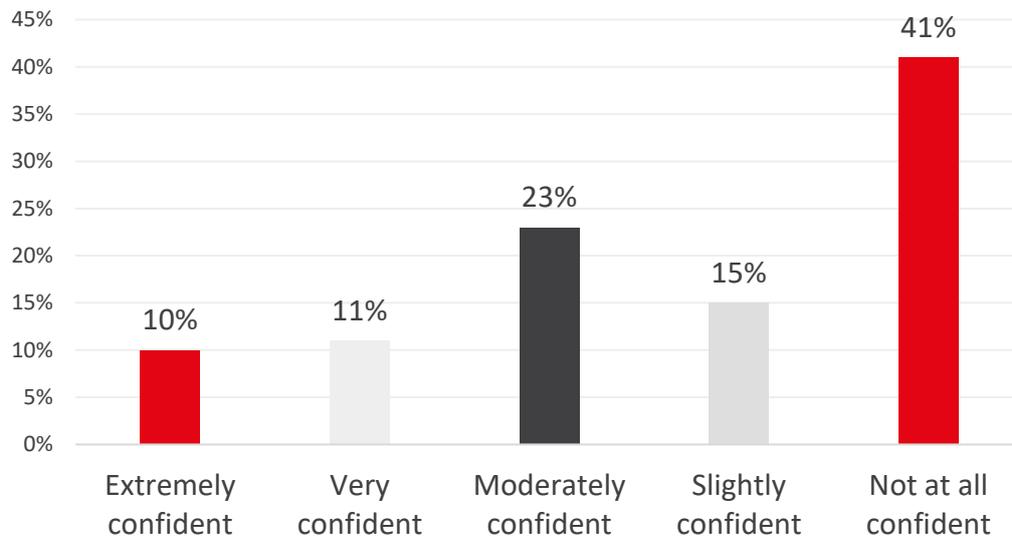
In terms of support around future employability, 53% of respondents did not feel supported 'at all', with 6% of respondents and 9% of respondents feeling 'extremely' or 'very' supported respectively (see Figure 9). From additional free-text responses in the survey, we found that low levels of confidence and lack of support are related to the aforementioned barriers faced by unpaid carers, including a lack of flexible employment opportunities for unpaid carers, a lack of understanding amongst employers, and worries surrounding the current financial model whereby some carers may be financially worse off for taking up paid employment and therefore losing their entitlement to social security benefits.

# 4 in 10

**carers are 'not at all confident' about their future employability**

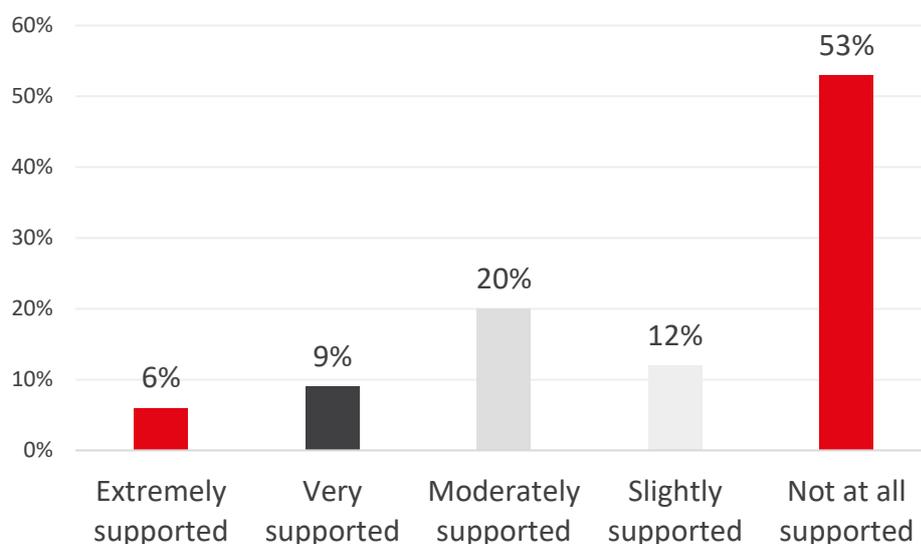


Figure 8: Levels of confidence surrounding future employability (n=216)



The long-lasting financial impact of balancing caring with employment were reiterated in our focus groups with unpaid carers reporting feeling worried and anxious about being in poverty and having a lack of pension or retirement savings. In terms of future directions and planning, stakeholders mentioned the importance of, where possible, unpaid carers upskilling while caring for someone, and the need for getting greater buy-in from both regional and national organisations to increase policies supportive of carers in the workplace to make Scottish employers fairer for carers.

Figure 9: Support surrounding future employability (n=215)



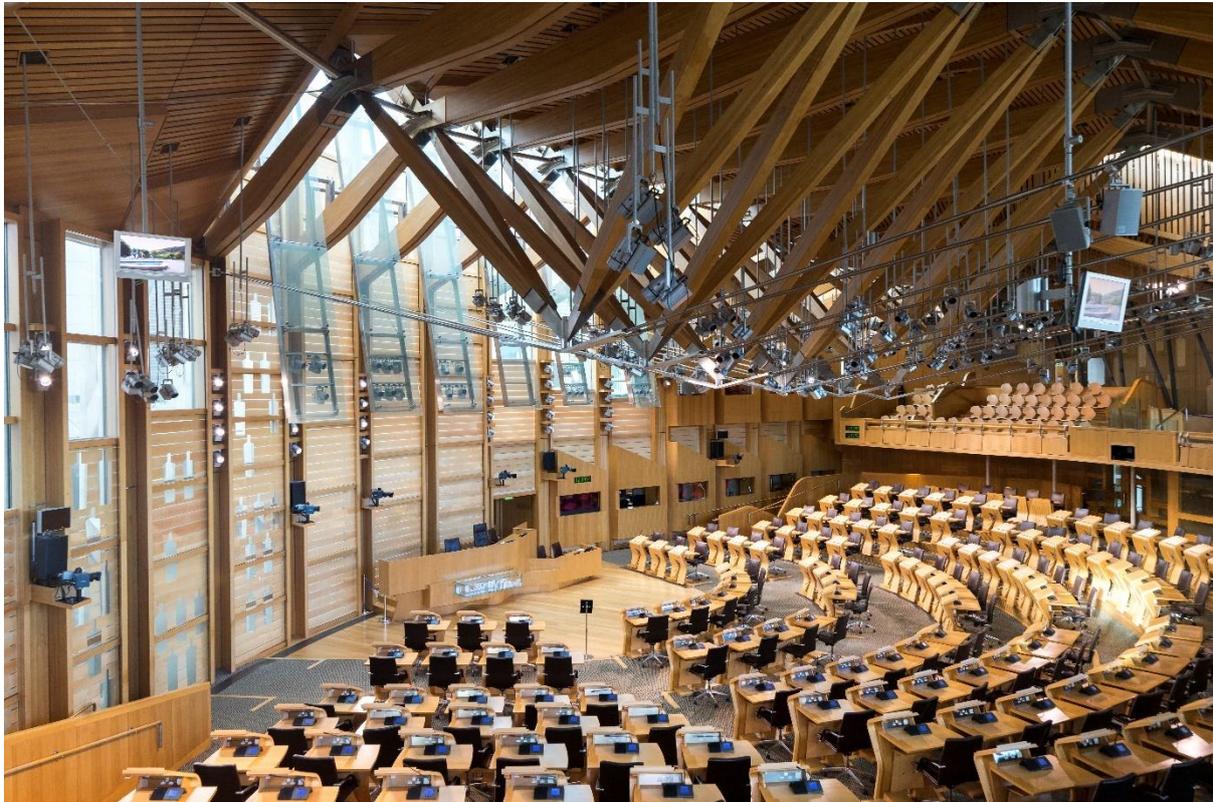
## Phase 2: Corroboration meeting

Four unpaid carers and four employability stakeholders, all of whom had previously participated in the focus groups, took part in the corroboration meeting. Participants concurred that the findings accurately reflected their experiences. However, some unpaid carers reiterated the ongoing challenges they face in planning for employment and skills training, citing the uncertainty of their caring role. They also emphasised the difficulties encountered when navigating HR procedures upon re-entering the workforce. Stakeholders highlighted the advantages of attending online skills training and educational programmes for unpaid carers, noting the flexibility and accessibility they offer by removing the need to leave home. However, concerns were voiced regarding the lack of targeted advertising aimed at unpaid carers, noting that unpaid carers are often overlooked in marketing efforts. Participants agreed upon the importance of connecting carers with, and raising awareness of, existing employment resources through further promotion.

Additional recommendations were suggested such as the establishment of a registry of employers willing to hire unpaid carers; this was suggested by a stakeholder who currently utilises a similar resource for individuals with disabilities. Other recommendations included the promotion of existing working adjustment passports for unpaid carers – setting out what measures they need in place to help them to do their work most effectively (Government People Group, 2023) – and the development of a dedicated website for unpaid carers referring them to relevant employability services.

At the end of the corroboration meeting, participants were satisfied that their voices had been accurately represented within the findings.

# Recommendations



## Overview

After the survey and focus groups with unpaid carers and employability stakeholders, research findings were collated to produce key recommendations to enhance employability for unpaid carers, each addressing a significant area of need for change including raising awareness and overcoming stigma, removing barriers to securing employment, improving employability support, and offering key provisions for support such as paid carers leave and replacement care. Table 4 includes a summary of key recommendations accompanied by suggested approaches and actors required. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the delivery for each recommendation.

Table 4: Summary of key recommendations to enhance employability for unpaid carers

Key recommendation	Suggested approaches and actors required
<p><b>Raise awareness of unpaid carers currently seeking or in paid employment, while reducing stigma over their contribution</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public and social media awareness campaigns to demonstrate to unpaid carers that employment is a viable option and that initiatives are available to support them.</li> <li>- Launch public awareness initiatives to reduce both public and employer negative perceptions of unpaid carers regarding their skills, responsibilities, and their contributions to society.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> Scottish Government</p>
<p><b>Enable greater integration with social care services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Substantially increase investment in social care and other services to ensure adequate replacement care and respite services, reducing the level of unmet need among unpaid carers.</li> <li>- Leverage the opportunity to understand employment aspirations through Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> Scottish Government, Local government</p>
<p><b>Address the financial barriers that prevent and/or act as a barrier to unpaid carers seeking paid employment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce a Job Start Payment specifically for unpaid carers to reduce the financial pressures faced by those seeking and entering paid employment, covering, for example, clothing and transport costs, and the cost of replacement care.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> Scottish Government</p>

Key recommendation	Suggested approaches and actors required
<p><b>Reform and improve social security entitlements for unpaid carers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urgently review UK-wide Carer's Allowance and, as a first step, lift the earnings threshold to allow unpaid carers to work more hours before losing their benefit.</li> <li>- Introduce a taper system to ensure there is no cliff edge loss.</li> <li>- Carers Support Payment should lift the earnings threshold and introduce a taper system if this has not been carried out by the UK Government following the complete transfer of Carer's Allowance cases to the new Scottish benefit.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> UK and Scottish Governments</p>
<p><b>Invest in and reform employability services so they are more visible and can better support unpaid carers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carers should be more aware of employability services, with targeted communications and outreach.</li> <li>- There needs to be more and enhanced employability support for unpaid carers via local employability services.</li> <li>- Explore the establishment of a specific employability service specialising in unpaid carers to deliver tailored support that better meets their needs.</li> <li>- Employability services should link better with other local carer support services.</li> <li>- Local employability services should create a bank of carer friendly employers in their local authority areas.</li> <li>- The person-centred approach advocated by the No One Left Behind approach to employability must be a reality for unpaid carers using employability services.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> Scottish Government, Local employability services</p>

Key recommendation	Suggested approaches and actors required
<p><b>Use all available tools to require and encourage employers to make it easier for unpaid carers to enter and progress within paid employment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider how UK employment law could be amended to require employers to make the working environment more conducive to unpaid carers, including via recruitment and job design requirements.</li> <li>- Deepen investment and support in the voluntary Carer Positive scheme, as Scotland’s accreditation programme for supporting employer friendly workplaces, with new financial incentives introduced to encourage employers to participate within it.</li> <li>- There are opportunities to extend the wider strategy and leadership direction around supporting unpaid carers in employability e.g. through the commissioning of an employment action plan for carers.</li> <li>- Ensure employment opportunities meet carers financial, personal, familial and caring needs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> Employers, UK and Scottish Governments</p>
<p><b>Guarantee a statutory entitlement of 10 days paid carer’s leave per year</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expand the current system of carers leave from 5 days of unpaid leave to 10 days of paid leave.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actor(s):</b> UK Government</p>

## Delivery of recommendations

The individual recommendations are outlined in detail below. For many of these suggestions for change and improvement, we require a strategic and co-ordinated approach from national and local leaders in Scotland.

More broadly achieving such multiple areas of impact is likely to benefit from the Scottish Government commissioning an employment action plan for unpaid carers to help deliver these key recommendations. This should include clear milestones toward achieving a greater proportion of unpaid carers who want to be in employment being in fair, sustainable work that meets their needs. This action plan must highlight the heterogeneous nature of unpaid caring and that a one size fits all approach would not be suitable. The complexities and divergence among unpaid carers and their needs should be at the heart of the action plan. It should also make specific reference to the fact that unpaid caring, particularly among working age people, is a gendered issue with greater numbers of women in unpaid caring roles when compared to men. Mechanisms for sharing good practice across Scotland's 32 Local Authorities should be explored in the action plan. Lastly, the action plan should also include a joined-up approach with Social Security Scotland to ensure that barriers created by the benefits system can be eased to incentivise unpaid carers to employment.

The joint Strategic Plan for employability currently being developed by Scottish Government and COSLA for 2024-27 should include unpaid carers as one of its overarching priorities (COSLA, 2024). This could be an important strategic route to increasing the visibility of employability services to unpaid carers and a way of increasing the opportunities within those services to specifically support unpaid carers.



## *1. Raise awareness of unpaid carers currently seeking or in paid employment, while reducing stigma over their contribution*

Awareness campaigns could include investment in public and social media campaigns to demonstrate to unpaid carers that employment is a viable option and that initiatives are available to support them to seek and enter the workplace, should they choose to do so. This campaign could also be focused on building knowledge and understanding among employers about the needs of unpaid carers in employment, but in addition promote the positive contribution that unpaid carers make in employment and the benefits to their organisations. This could be delivered in partnership with the Carer Positive scheme.

Potential strategies to strengthen the awareness of unpaid carers in employment could include the Scottish Government:

- Sharing information to all organisations/employers regarding the benefits of supporting unpaid carers in employment, as well as the Carer Positive scheme, which all organisations should be working toward.
- Highlighting the number of unpaid carers currently in paid employment and the roles they currently play, for example, the higher number of unpaid carers in NHS and social care roles.
- Holding an information campaign aimed at all employers and unpaid carers to support the dissemination of new employment rights legislated by the UK Parliament which came into force this year. These include the right to 5 days unpaid carers leave for carers in employment following the introduction of the Carers Leave Act 2023 and the right to request flexible working arrangements from day one of employment under Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023.

## *2. Enable greater integration with social care services*

The Scottish Government should consider investment in social care and other services to ensure that adequate replacement care and respite services are in place to ease the burden of care on unpaid carers and to give them the time and space to be able to engage with the labour market if they want to. Many services have still yet to return to their pre-pandemic level.

Local social care teams should link with employability services to support unpaid carers who wish to return to employment. This could include providing short term replacement care to allow unpaid carers to attend interviews, training and development courses, and other in-person activity to support return to employment.

This could be extended to Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements where Local Government and partners responsible for their development should outline unpaid carers' aspirations about employment, either alongside their caring role or once their caring role has finished. Information relating to local employability services and other support should be made available to the carer to maximise their chances of staying in employment or returning to the labour market. Appropriate referrals to employability services should be made as part of this process.



### *3. Address the financial barriers that prevent and/or act as a barrier to unpaid carers seeking paid employment*

The Scottish Government should consider introducing a Job Start Payment for unpaid carers. Such a fund would support more unpaid carers back to employment, with all those entitled to Carers Allowance/Carers Support Payment being eligible. This fund would support unpaid carers to access employability services, training and education to support and encourage them back into employment or to remain in employment. There should also be funding to support unpaid carers to buy appropriate clothing, use transport to attend interviews or secure replacement care, and where necessary, to allow them to go to interviews.

### *4. Reform and improve social security entitlements for unpaid carers*

There is an urgent need for a review of the Carers Allowance by the UK Government and, as a first step, the lifting of the earnings threshold to allow unpaid carers to work more hours before losing their benefit. A 'taper system' would be beneficial to ensure there is no cliff edge loss in the benefit for those who earn slightly over the threshold amount. If the UK Government fails to do this ahead of the completion of the roll out of the Carer Support Payment in Scotland, the Scottish Government could put in place a more generous threshold equivalent to at least two and a half working days (17.5 hours) at the National Living Wage and a taper system for the Carer Support Payment. This would support more unpaid carers to remain in employment and encourage some unpaid carers back to the labour market. The threshold and taper could be reviewed regularly (e.g. annually) in conjunction with feedback from unpaid carers in receipt of the benefit.

### *5. Invest in and reform employability services so they are more visible and can better support unpaid carers*

Carers should be more aware of employability services, with targeted communications and outreach. Promotional material could include unpaid carers and how employability services can support unpaid carers. Ideally, this would be included in the proposed action plan to support unpaid carers into employment with clear accountability and timelines for action.

There needs to be more employability support for unpaid carers via local employability services. The Scottish Government should increase funding to Local Employability Programmes (LEPs) to support the further development of employability services and to support greater contact between unpaid carers who wish to enter the labour market and those services.

Employability services in all 32 Local Authorities must reflect the specific needs of unpaid carers in their programmes with good practice being shared. This is why unpaid care should be included as a priority in the joint Scottish Government-COSLA employability strategy plan for 2024-27, if this is not included then LEPs must ensure that unpaid carers are considered a local priority.

Scottish Government with relevant partners could explore funding the establishment of a specific employability service specialising in unpaid carers, as a pilot programme. This would allow further examination of the specific support needs of unpaid carers both in terms of training, support and placements into employment. Results of the programme could be fed into wider employability services or used as a basis to roll out further specific employability services for unpaid carers. This should be included in the proposed action plan for employment and an outcome of listing unpaid carers as an overarching priority in the joint strategy plan for 2024-27.

Employability services should also link better with other local carer support services – employability services need to avoid working in silos and should work to establish greater links between carers centres and other local carer support services and information points. These improved links should also ensure greater visibility of local employability support as part of its place-based, person-centred approach.

Local employability services should create a bank of unpaid carer friendly employers in their local authority areas. These could be identified through Carer Positive accreditation and through outreach work with LEPs. Those included in the bank/list of employers would be willing to work with unpaid carers and be fully supportive of the various challenges faced by unpaid carers. Creating a carer specific bank of employers would be a useful resource for supporting unpaid carers into supportive working environments.

The person-centred approach advocated by the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind approach to employability must become a reality for unpaid carers using employability services. Employability services must be co-designed with unpaid carers reflecting the wide-ranging needs of the different groups of carers. Services must include individual action plans, timescales and support that reflects and takes account of their caring role and

responsibilities, as well as other standard support including CV preparation, interview skills, etc.

Access by unpaid carers to local employability services must be increased and LEPs should be required to monitor this through robust data collection. This must include recording the number of unpaid carers accessing services, as well as being supported into employment and measuring long-term outcomes reflecting a person-centred approach.

### *6. Use all available tools to require and encourage employers to make it easier for unpaid carers to enter and progress within paid employment*

UK employment law could be amended to require employers to make the working environment more conducive to unpaid carers. For instance, employers can be encouraged to adapt their recruitment and job application processes to be more inclusive of carers, this should include accommodating caregiving responsibilities during interviews, such as offering virtual interviews or suitable timeslots. Employers should also be flexible about reference requests, particularly when an unpaid carer has been out of the labour market for a long period.

The Scottish Government should provide continued investment and support in Carer Positive as Scotland's accreditation programme for supporting employer friendly workplaces as delivered by Carers Scotland. There should also be a requirement of all organisations that secure Scottish Government contracts/funding to be Carer Positive – this should be part of the procurement process. All Public bodies should be Carer Positive. Consideration should be given to the introduction of financial incentives for employers to engage in the scheme, for example, through Non-Domestic Rates.

Carer friendly workplaces should involve offering flexible working arrangements and providing clear information about carer-friendly policies and support available within the organisation. Managers of unpaid carers should be aware of the challenges faced by many unpaid carers in employment, and this should be supported through training and development where necessary. All employers should consider introducing working adjustments passports for carers. These passports help carers to lay out what they need to do their work best for example, flexible, software etc. It is helpful to have when a manager changes so the carer does not have to go through the process again.

Lastly, fair work must mean fair work for unpaid carers – Employment opportunities for unpaid carers and all those seeking employment must meet their financial, personal, familial and caring needs. This must include employment opportunities that pay well.

### *7. Guarantee a statutory entitlement of 10 days paid carer's leave per year*

Expansion is required of the current system of carers leave from 5 days unpaid to 10 days paid leave. This is likely to reduce the number of unpaid carers leaving paid employment and increase the number of unpaid carers returning to the labour market and should be a key consideration for the UK government. Employers should be encouraged to be early adopters.

# Conclusions

Here we set out to collate current knowledge on the key barriers and enablers to employability for unpaid carers, to identify key gaps and to help prioritise future areas of need. The results of our online survey and focus groups with unpaid carers and stakeholders (engaging with over 300 individuals) indicate not just the level of interest in this discipline but also capture the extent of additional benefits that carers can enjoy through realising employment goals. Many unpaid carers (and other stakeholders) highlighted the value the opportunity for employment can bring to live a life beyond their caring role. Regarding the generalisability of our findings, it is important to recognise that people from ethnic minority backgrounds were under-represented in our research and that unpaid caring is a gendered issue with women representing the majority of our research participants. There is a need for more research targeting different groups of unpaid carers and their experiences with paid employment which can be complemented by more research undertaken to ascertain the existence or otherwise of occupational segregation in relation to unpaid carers in the labour market.

While employment may not be suitable for all unpaid carers, poverty and lack of opportunity should not be a foregone conclusion for any group- including those who are caring for others. Results outlined here raise both the systemic barriers that unpaid carers who are able and willing to seek employment face, while highlighting a missed opportunity for employers to capitalise on the broad skillsets that unpaid carers can offer. We conclude this work with seven key recommendations spanning both short- and long-term actions that a multitude of stakeholders can make. This includes addressing the potential of stigma around the caring role, highlighting the value of existing success stories (such as the Carer Positive' scheme) but also raises urgent need for better integration of services, broader and more visible employability services alongside greater legal protections. Moreover, we cannot afford our employability landscape to stand still. The experiences shared and collated here demonstrate a clear urgency to move forward to realise employability goals for more unpaid carers: mirroring the knowledge, devotion and understanding that this essential societal group serves to others.

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Carers Scotland is Scotland's membership charity for unpaid carers. We work to represent and support the approximately 800,000 people in Scotland who provide unpaid care for ill, older or disabled family members or friends – fighting for increased recognition and support for all carers and to ensure they have a voice in the issues that affect them.

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