



## **Working Carers**

Helping carers get into work,  
and stay in work

### *Executive Summary*

Arundhati Dave, Emily Kramers,  
Dom Hewitt, Alison Carter, Harry  
Fox, Nick Litsardopoulos and  
Jane Mansour

**May 2025**

# The ReAct Partnership

## About Us

The ReAct Partnership is a new, industry-led, active collaboration to support a continuous improvement community in the Restart programme through action research, shared and iterative learning, and the development of applied, evidence-based resources.

The Partnership is co-funded by eight of the 'prime providers' for the Restart programme — FedCap Employment, G4S, Ingeus, Maximus, Reed, Jobs22, Seetec and Serco — and is being managed by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), working alongside the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP) and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).



### The ReAct Partnership

City Gate ,185 Dyke Road , Brighton , BN3 1TL UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400

Email: [askIES@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:askIES@employment-studies.co.uk)

Website: [www.restartreact.co.uk](http://www.restartreact.co.uk)

Copyright © 2024 The ReAct Partnership

## Executive summary/key findings

### WHY A FOCUS ON UNEMPLOYED CARERS IS IMPORTANT

Restart is an employment support programme launched in June 2021 in England and Wales aiming to provide tailored and intensive support to unemployed individuals to help them achieve sustained work. 540,000 people (participants) have received 12 months of support on the scheme as of October 2024.

An ageing UK population and a combination of other socio-demographic factors have resulted in unpaid carers being one of the fastest growing demographics within the UK working age population.<sup>1</sup> In general, carers are less likely to be in paid employment and less likely to work full-time than the rest of the population. It is also difficult to re-enter the workforce once caring has finished, an issue which worsens the longer carers are out of the workforce.<sup>2</sup> Employment support services are expected to have an increasingly important role to play in supporting carers into employment. The research described in this report aims to better understand the experiences of carers, highlight good practice and improve support by taking a multi-stakeholder approach to examining current activity within the Restart programme and amongst employers. In this research we have used the Carers Trust definition of a carer, that is anyone who provides unpaid care to a family member or friend “who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.”<sup>3</sup> We have not included parents caring for children, unless the child has a long-term condition or disability.

A multi-method approach was taken comprising: an evidence review; interviews with carers, employment support advisers and employers; and analysis of programme management data. Examples of effective employment support and work arrangements for carers found in our research are highlighted as recommendations at the end of each section below.

### THE IMPACT OF CARING ON CARERS – INTERSECTIONALITY AND COMPLEXITY

We found that carers can face a range of complex barriers, many of which intersect. Chief among these was a lack of time, and a lack of control over their own time. Findings from our

---

<sup>1</sup> Pickard et al. (2015) *The effectiveness of paid services in supporting unpaid carers' employment in England*.

<sup>2</sup> Brimblecombe et al. (2018) *Review of the international evidence on support for unpaid carers*.

<sup>3</sup> Carers Trust (2025a) *About caring*.

evidence review show that, as a result, carers often need to reduce their hours, take jobs that are less demanding or leave the labour market altogether.<sup>4</sup> In particular, we found unpredictability of availability to be a barrier to employment which made even traditional flexible jobs unsuitable. For example, a part-time job may be unsuitable if the lead time for determining shifts/patterns of hours is too short to arrange for replacement care.

*“If you sign a contract with an employer for part-time work... I don’t think you’d be able to guarantee that you’ll be able to meet all the contractual obligations.”*

Participant

Carers may also suffer practical challenges such as housing, transport, and geographical location, affecting their ability to successfully enter work. Hence, we recommend that while this group certainly benefit from flexible work options, availability and individual circumstances need to be considered. In many cases, carers would benefit from informal flexibility arrangements with their employers to account for unpredictability.

#### **EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES** <sup>5</sup>

We analysed records from 300,000+ programme participants and found that 14% of programme participants have non-childcare caring responsibilities. However, we also found large variance among providers in the number of carers which may be reflective of how data is collected. Analysis found poorer outcomes for carers on the programme compared to non-carers.

---

*Approximately 13% of participants who were carers were placed in their first job, compared to 43% on average within the scheme. <sup>6</sup> And approximately 5% of carers achieved a sustained employment outcome compared to 29% for all participants on average. <sup>6</sup>*

---

---

<sup>4</sup> Williams and Bank (2022) *Support for working carers across the globe: the development of international standardised guidelines for the workplace.*

<sup>5</sup> As of October 2024

<sup>6</sup> DWP (2024) *Restart Scheme statistics to October 2024*

Further analysis found that both caring status and a participant's gender add to the time taken to achieve a first job and sustained employment outcome. These effects are additive in nature. In other words, females with caring responsibilities take longer to achieve a first job and sustained employment milestones on average as compared to those without caring responsibilities and males with caring responsibilities.

Hence, carers spend longer on the programme without achieving a milestone, if they achieve one at all. The issue worsens for females. While poor outcomes for carers may be a result of systemic issues, they also suggest the role of effective employment support and work arrangements in supporting employment and retention.

1. It is recommended that Prime providers maintain standardised data on caring responsibilities and update this periodically to reflect any changes while participants are on the programme.

#### **INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT**

Interviewed advisers most often reported taking a case-by-case approach to supporting participants who were carers. The approach to identifying caring responsibilities differed among Prime providers but was most commonly part of an initial diagnostic assessment. We also found that some participants' caring statuses change while on the programme, pointing to the need for ongoing conversations with participants to capture these changes.

We also found an uneven understanding of the carer's allowance and working time limits for carers among advisers. Our research found some specific examples of effective practice for carers, including:

2. Where this does not already exist, it is recommended that Prime providers look to establish signposting to external groups and resources, particularly when accompanied by good working relationships at the local level.

---

*Advisers often worked with participants to identify transferable skills related to their caring to boost their employability after a career break. Employers also highlighted the importance of transferable skills such as problem-solving, negotiation, communication, resourcefulness and the ability to remain calm during a*

*crisis. Our study found this process allowed participants to find value in what was sometimes a difficult experience and learn to better articulate their skills in language relevant to employers.*

---

3. Unemployed participants with caring responsibilities may benefit from peer networks and workshops to allow them to build back confidence and benefit from peer relationships and guidance.
4. Offering virtual and telephone appointments may work better for carers.
5. It is recommended that adviser training around the barriers carers' face and the 'shifting landscape of carer's allowance be regularly provided. This should be delivered by staff with their own experience of caring where possible.

#### **TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT**

Advisers reported working with carers to explore various forms of flexibility. Disclosure can be important in order to avoid unexpected impacts of a carer's commitments. Advisers and employer engagement teams were both usually involved in having conversations with employers about placing carers in work. In some cases, the employer engagement team was seen to be playing a key role in brokering flexibility for participants with caring responsibilities. Building relationships with employers can lay the basis for having conversations about specific needs. However, labour market conditions were also seen to play a role in how flexible employers were willing to be.

6. It is recommended that advisers conduct practice interviews with participants to rehearse disclosure where needed. Early disclosure of caring responsibilities is important to employers but carers struggle with this.
7. It is recommended that as part of conversations around availability, advisers explore the full range of working arrangements and both formal and informal type of flexibility that may enable a carer into employment. Conversations on availability need to be accompanied by alternative care considerations.
8. It is suggested that advisers use employer accreditations to focus participant's job search where helpful as identifying carer-friendly workplaces is important to carers.

#### **THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS**

Carers are at a particularly high risk of falling out of employment, so employer action is crucial to help carers stay in work. Evidence shows that a supportive and understanding line manager was found to increase the likelihood of carers staying in employment.<sup>7</sup> We found that all the employers interviewed offered multiple types of support to all their staff, many of which were thought to be of most benefit to staff with caring or parental responsibilities. The two primary levers for support were flexible working and additional leave. Employers explain flexibility in terms of the number of days/times/locations worked but also compressed working hours and part-time working. Flexible working policies are negotiated via managers (sometimes informally). In addition to policies, a wide range of supportive practices were identified which, in combination, were designed to create a workplace and culture that was supportive of carers.

Carers' charities were also found to help employers with implementing a range of policies and measures to support carers in the workplace. Organisations like Carers UK and Carers Trust assist employers in the process of building a supportive and inclusive workplace for working carers and Employers for Carers who offer a benchmarking scheme and accreditation for employers who have shown that they have done this well.

9. Employers also found it difficult to identify which staff had caring responsibilities. There is a need to collect better data on carers within an organisation, similar to other protected characteristics. Better data on the caring status of applicants and employees ensures that appropriate policies are implemented, and success understood. Any data driven approach needs to account for the limitations of self-categorisation and aggregate categories with parental caring responsibilities. A combination of survey metrics and manager discussions on the topic can work well.
10. It is suggested that employers put effort into publicising their carer-friendly policies and practices, to increase awareness of what they already offer. There is an opportunity to encourage recruiters and HR functions to collaborate across their internal boundaries to provide consistency in messaging between jobseekers and newly appointed staff, to make it easier for jobseekers to assess how carer-friendly an employer may be.
11. It is suggested that employers at the early stages of building a more carer-friendly workplace be sign-posted to specialist charities, such as Employers for Carers.

---

<sup>7</sup> Carers UK (2023) *Carers' employment rights today*.