



Briefing paper

Working with participants

Lessons from ReAct: focus on Working Carers

Restart has supported a wide range of participants over the last few years, and the Restart Prime Providers have developed a deep understanding of what works to personalise employment support services to varied groups. By the end of April 2025¹:

- 970,000 individuals had been referred to Restart since its launch in 2021²
- Of these, 320,000 participants had achieved first earnings from employment gained during their time on Restart. Note that many participants had received less than 12 months of support by this date.
- 200,000 participants achieved a job outcome. A job outcome is counted when someone earns the same amount they would by working 16 hours a week for 26 weeks at the National Living Wage; or when they are in gainful self-employment for a minimum of six months.³

The ReAct Partnership, an industry-led collaboration of the eight employment service Prime providers, aims to support the continuous improvement of the Restart workforce through action research, shared and iterative learning, and the development of applied evidence-based resources.

The participant figures above should be viewed in the context of the Restart cohort's diversity and the wide-ranging, personalised support that Primes have designed and

¹ Restart Scheme statistics to April 2025; Department of Work and Pension

² 840,000 have started on Restart, of which 54% were recorded as male, and 46% recorded as female. 16% were aged between 18 and 24 years old, with 61% aged between 25 and 49 years old and 23% aged 50 years or over.

³ Providers are eligible for an outcome payment for each participant that achieves a job outcome within 18 months of starting on the scheme

delivered. The ReAct partnership has conducted research into many of the key groups that engage with Restart, with research topics, amongst others, covering:

- Working Carers: Helping carers get into work, and stay in work;
- Neurodiversity, Jobsearch and Work;
- Supporting Highly Qualified Restart Participants;
- Providing effective ESOL support;
- Supporting Restart participants into Self-employment and
- ReAct and Timewise Change Agent Programme.

ReAct research has explored ways of working with diverse participant groups to effectively tailor support. The research has highlighted the importance of adviser training, adviser skills, peer learning, building relationships and understanding the participant's needs. Through collaboration, providers have gained a deeper understanding of how to deliver the flexibility essential to for participant-centred support, recognising that needs vary across individuals and groups.

This briefing paper presents key findings from the ReAct *Working Carers* report and looks at them in the light of the policy objectives in the Get Britain Working white paper. It provides actionable insights for policymakers and employment support providers and employers to better support unpaid carers into sustainable employment. The research involved a range of data sources and methods including interviews with Restart participants who had caring responsibilities, advisers, employer engagement teams and employers. Findings from interviews were supplemented by an evidence review and analysis of programme data.⁴

The ReAct research used the Carers Trust definition of a carer, which 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."⁵ Parents caring for children were excluded, unless their child had a long-term condition or disability.

For other briefing papers in this series, please visit the [IES ReAct landing page](#) or the [ReAct website](#).

⁴ Fieldwork included: 11 interviews at Prime provider organisations; 6 interviews with Restart participants with caring responsibilities; eleven representatives from eight different employer organisations who consider themselves good practice employers

⁵ Carers Trust (2025a) *About caring*.

The importance of supporting working carers

The government's Get Britain Working white paper identifies the economic impact of caring and identifies that caring responsibilities can be a barrier to employment. ReAct research was born out of an acknowledgment that due to an ageing population and a combination of other socio-demographic factors, unpaid carers are one of the fastest growing demographics within the UK working age population.⁶ In a survey of over 13,000 carers and former carers carried out in 2022 by a leading UK charity, 62% said they worried about burnout from juggling work and care, and 65% had passed up work opportunities because of caring.⁷

Without carer friendly employment support and workplace policies, working carers are likely to reduce their working hours, take jobs that are less demanding, or to leave the labour market altogether.⁸ Previous evidence suggested that carers are less likely to be in paid employment, less likely to work full-time than the rest of the population and can find it difficult to re-enter work once caring has finished, an issue which worsens the longer carers are out of the workforce.⁹

Employment outcomes for carers on Restart¹⁰

Analysis of records from 300,000+ Restart programme participants found:

- 14% of programme participants have non-childcare caring responsibilities.¹¹
- 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.¹²
- approximately 5% of carers achieved a sustained employment outcome compared to 29% for all participants on average.¹²

⁶ Pickard et al. (2015) *The effectiveness of paid services in supporting unpaid carers' employment in England*.

⁷ Carers UK (2022) *A snapshot of unpaid care in the UK*; survey respondents were 13,415 carers and former carers

⁸ Williams and Bank (2022) *Support for working carers across the globe: the development of international standardised guidelines for the workplace*.

⁹ Brimblecombe et al. (2018) *Review of the international evidence on support for unpaid carers*.

¹⁰ As of October 2024

¹¹ We found large variance among providers in the number of carers which may be reflective of how data is collected

¹² DWP (2024) *Restart Scheme statistics to October 2024*

The Get Britain Working white paper notes the gendered nature of care [Error! Bookmark not defined.](#) and the programme data analysis found the effects of gender and caring are additive. Females with caring responsibilities took longer to achieve a first job and sustained employment milestones on average when 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. While poor outcomes for carers may be a result of systemic issues, the data also suggests a role for employment support and work arrangements to support employment and retention.

The impact of caring on carers – barriers to employment

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. In particular, respondents found that unpredictability in their availability was a barrier to work which could make even traditional flexible jobs unsuitable. For example, a part-time job could be unsuitable if the lead time for determining shifts/patterns of hours was too short to arrange 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 have practical challenges related to caring such as housing, transport, and geographical location. There were individuals who could not work from home due to the size of the home where they cared, or limited work availability in an area where they relocated to perform caring duties.

How to increase the effectiveness of employment support for carers

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 commonly part of an initial diagnostic assessment.

Participants' caring status can change while on the programme, pointing to the need for ongoing conversations with participants to capture these changes.

The research identified specific examples of effective practice for carers. For instance, when advisers 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. 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.

Another example of effective practice was establishing signposting routes to external groups and resources, particularly when accompanied by good working relationships at the local level. Another practical lesson was that offering virtual and telephone appointments may work better for carers.

Unemployed participants with caring responsibilities may also benefit from peer networks and workshops to allow them to build back confidence and benefit from peer relationships and guidance.

Building relationships with employers

Disclosure can be important to avoid unexpected impacts of a carer's commitments. Early disclosure of caring responsibilities is important to employers, but carers may struggle with this. It is recommended that advisers conduct practice interviews with participants to rehearse disclosure where needed.

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 have a role in how flexible employers were willing to be.

We found that this group certainly benefit from flexible work options, availability and individual circumstances need to be considered. In many cases, carers would benefit from ad-hoc flexibility arrangements with their employers to account for unpredictability around care or any emergencies.

A list of targeted recommendations for practitioners is available [here](#).

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.¹³ 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. We found that flexible working policies are most often 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 supports carers. Carers' charities were also found to help employers with implementing a range of policies and measures to support carers in the workplace.

A list of targeted recommendations for employers is available [here](#).

There are systemic barriers to employment for carers that go beyond the Restart programme. These include a lack of access to alternative care support; financial challenges around the loss of Carer's Allowance or other benefits; and the fact that current provision of Carer's Allowance appears to restrict carer's employment choices through the working hours threshold and the level of entitlement. While this research focused on practical issues and recommendations within the Restart scheme and for employers, we note the broader contextual challenges.¹⁴

Recommendations for advisers to support carers

- Employment support interventions should be complemented by a standardised data collection approach. For caring responsibilities this needs to be updated periodically to reflect any changes while participants are on the programme.
- Prime providers should signpost to external groups and resources.
- Advisers should work with participants to identify transferable skills related to their caring to boost their employability after a career break.

¹³ Carers UK (2023) *Carers' employment rights today*.

¹⁴ Restart Scheme statistics to April 2025; Department of Work and Pension

- 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.
- Virtual and telephone appointments can work better for carers.
- Support advisers with training around the barriers carers' face and Carer's Allowance.
- Advisers should conduct practice interviews with participants to rehearse disclosure where needed.
- Advisers should explore the full range of working arrangements and both formal and informal flexibility that may enable a carer to work. Conversations on availability need to be accompanied by alternative care considerations.
- Identifying carer-friendly workplaces can be important for placing carers so advisers can use employer accreditations to focus participant's job search.

Recommendations for employers to support carers

- Employers need to collect data on carers within an organisation to identify which staff have caring responsibilities to ensure that appropriate policies are implemented and success understood.
- Employers can publicise their carer-friendly policies and practices, to increase awareness of what they already offer to make it easier for jobseekers to assess how carer-friendly an employer may be.
- Employers at the early stages of building a more carer-friendly workplace can benefit from sign-posting to specialist charities, such as Employers for Carers.

The findings underscore the support that enables carers to enter and remain in the workforce. While some tailored interventions are recommended, most strategies align with approaches, such as peer networking, that benefit a range of groups. The insights reinforce the broader vision for a more personalised, data-driven model of employment support, and highlight the critical role employers play in fostering inclusive and supportive workplaces.

Further reading

- The full report - https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Working%20Carers%20Report_3.pdf
- Top tips for employment advisers – <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Top%20tips%20for%20employers.pdf>
- Top tips for employers - <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Top%20tips%20for%20advisers.pdf>