



**FDA Carers' Survey**  
Results, recommendations  
and a practical guide



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# Executive summary

**In the 2017 People Survey, 67,000 civil servants identified themselves as carers. That equates to 23% of the civil service - a significant proportion.**

In 2020, we launched a survey of carers to understand the challenges and barriers that exist. The pandemic underlined our desire to gather the views of members and non-members who undertake caring responsibilities; we really wanted to understand the current context and identify if the enforced home-working that many of our respondents were navigating had alleviated, or contributed to, any pressure they were facing.

This work developed on the back of a personal case. We negotiated the development of a Carer's Passport that would work for an individual who needed more flexibility in their work, and an employer who needed certainty and parity in the way they divided tasks among their teams. Both sides of this negotiation were keen to find the right solution, and both had the best interests of the business and the individual at heart; but the process was frustrating and the outcome we reached, while appropriate, wasn't the ideal situation for either side.

This experience motivated us to see what the other 66,999 carers across the civil service were experiencing. Our findings show some worrying trends, but have also helped us to identify opportunities for improvement. We gained an insight in to the types of caring responsibilities our members undertake:

**90% of respondents provide emotional support;**

**89% provide practical help; and**

**75% provide help with paperwork, financial matters etc.**

We also learnt that 59% of respondents are providing care for at least 11 hours each week, with 39% providing more than 20 hours. A significant 39% of respondents told us that they felt they'd been treated less favourably at work because of their caring responsibilities.

For this report, we've taken time to consider the information that was shared with us, but also to identify recommendations for improvement, which we'll be pursuing with our colleagues across the civil service. We hope these will be a useful way of effecting tangible change in the way carers are treated at work.

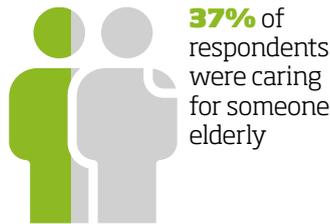
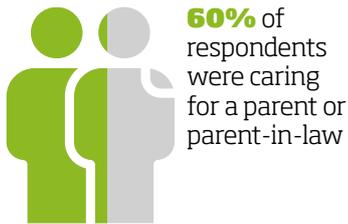
At the end of this report you'll also find a practical guide, that can be used by workplace representatives to negotiate change and improvements to policy locally, but also by members who are navigating balancing their caring responsibilities and their careers.

We hope that our experience of trying to find the right balance of flexibility, support and collaboration can help improve the working lives of carers.

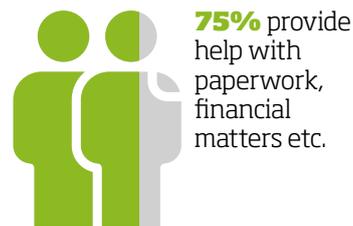
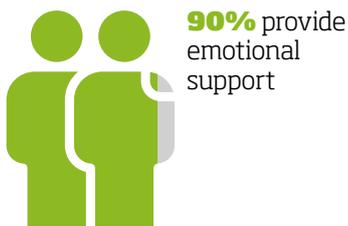
**Santosh Bhabra, FDA Representative, Legal Aid Agency**  
**Victoria Jones, FDA Equality Officer**

# The headlines

Data from Carers UK shows that there are 13.6 million carers in the UK, most of whom are balancing paid work alongside their caring duties. Our survey gave us a snapshot into the types of care civil servants are doing alongside their jobs.



The most common types of care provided were found to be:



Many respondents told us they first identified as a carer after reading about it through work, with a number referencing Carers' Awareness Week as the moment they recognised that the role they were undertaking would classify them as a carer. Others told us that they had spoken to members of their departmental carers' network, or that colleagues had suggested they seek support.

Some respondents shared that they felt becoming a carer was a gradual or iterative process - with initially picking up groceries, or booking appointments evolving into live-in care provision or speaking to medical professions on someone's behalf. Caring also came into their lives as a result of a traumatic incident or bereavement, with some identifying their role as a carer through counselling or medical support.



It was clear from the responses we've received that caring is dynamic. You can be in a settled routine and then something happens to the person you provide care for and it all changes. In those instances, the need for flexibility, understanding and open communication with your employer is key. We also found that caring isn't an unusual situation, but a well-established part of life for many people.



**62%** aren't able to take respite from their caring responsibilities



**39%** feel they've been treated less favourably at work



**1 in 3** do not feel comfortable discussing caring responsibilities with their line manager



**59%** are providing care for at least 11 hours each week



**39%** providing more than 20 hours.



# What we learned about carers in the civil service

## Caring and your career

Respondents to our survey made it clear that they felt their caring responsibilities had a direct impact on their career:

“Loss of promotion opportunities, loss of deputising opportunities, loss of money, increased stress at work juggling responsibilities.”

“I have learnt to be flexible to juggle the two - thank God my team are flexible too! - but it usually results in long days. If I've had to pause work to deal with a caring issue, I usually have to make the time up later so I skip lunch or work late after everyone's in bed to catch up.”

“I have stayed in my current post because if I apply for SCS I will lose some of the holiday I currently have as a Grade 6 civil servant.”

“A few years ago, I'd returned to work after maternity leave and my daughter's first three operations. I seemed to be the only person who didn't score highly on performance and didn't receive a bonus. I asked my line manager why, and what I could do better. They said it wasn't possible because they won't give me the sort of work that would enable me to achieve this...because it would be better for me not to take on too much until my daughter was of school age. I've also not applied for jobs where they were full time and inflexible hours.”

“Strangely enough no impact, or a positive one maybe. I went for a promotion to G7 and mentioned in the (phone) interview that I was in the hospital waiting room while my husband was in intensive care, I would need an unspecified amount of time at the hospital and may or may not be reliable. Got the job anyway and my Carer's Passport was fully accepted.”

“I've had to think about location. If I do an overseas posting, will there be adequate care and medical support, and how easily/quickly can we get back to the UK for consultancy or treatments. I've deliberately not gone for promotion or some high profile jobs because I know I would not cope with increased workload and caring responsibilities.”

“My daughter's additional needs on top of normal parenting means I've lacked time, energy and focus to develop my career. I've lost networks, missed learning opportunities, not taken on the extra-curricular roles and responsibilities. I think the flexibility I am effectively given is in lieu of challenging work that would help me progress. I find this frustrating and disappointing.”

“I have not sought promotion as I cannot guarantee I'd be able to put in the time and can't do overnight stays. Same grade for 20 years now! Lack of pay rise really bites...”



## Caring and how you feel about work

We asked carers how their caring responsibilities impacted on the way they felt about work. In general, respondents told us how they felt worn out, found it difficult to concentrate and often like they were being pulled in different directions:

“Constantly fatigued. Feeling of inability to cope. Feeling of underachieving and presenting a burden to team.”

“Sometimes it is hard to focus on a complex work task when difficult caring issues come up.”

“Sometimes I'm very tired and don't concentrate as well, or forget things (usually I have an excellent memory). I get a bit annoyed when colleagues book late or after hour social events with other teams and externals. They know I can't come to those - I have caring responsibilities!”

## Your manager's response to your caring responsibilities

We were pleased to read some positive comments about the support available from line managers. However, there were also worryingly frequent comments about managers who weren't understanding or considerate of the responsibilities respondents were balancing outside of work:

“My managers do not sometimes believe me and also feel sorry for me - they give me menial work.”

“Previous line manager was not sympathetic to me asking for time off work, due to an emergency hospital admission for my daughter, because I didn't go into detail of the reasons, due to the stressful nature of the situation.”

“As soon as I went down to four days with one day from home, my status dropped and I was left out of key decision making. I don't think my boss realised he was doing it.”

“It's not overt. More like I get excluded, particularly from attending L&D or networking events out of hours. even if they have remotely dial in options. I don't have the freedom to attend these - I have caring responsibilities. Some of my team are young and single - I don't think they get it when you talk about familial and caring responsibilities. It's more 'sucks to be you!' than 'how can we help?'”



# Carer's Passport

## What is a Carer's Passport?

The Passport provides carers, and their line managers, with information about how the individual's responsibilities impact their work. It includes any solutions agreed between the carer and their line manager, for example, compressed hours.

The Carer's Passport will ideally stay with the employee should they be transferred within their department or across the civil service. It is available to any new line manager so they are aware of the employee's caring role and any solutions agreed.

(from Charity for Civil Servants: <https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/our-services/caring/carers-passport/what-carers-passport>)

A Carer's Passport is a really positive tool for ensuring that the flexibilities required to manage caring and working are clear and agreed. While some of our respondents felt the rigidity of an agreed pattern of work or adjustments didn't suit the dynamic challenges their caring posed, we firmly believe that they can be a useful way of providing clarity and promoting open conversations.

We were really keen to understand both the experiences of respondents who had created a Carer's Passport, but also any barriers in place for those who hadn't drafted one.

A total of 45% of our respondents had a Carer's Passport. Out of those individuals, 54% told us that they had completed it independently, without input from their manager, HR, trade union or other source of support. We found that 62% of those with a Carer's Passport had identified the solutions themselves, with 31% telling us that their manager had identified the flexibilities available.

We were really keen to understand how Carer's Passports are being created and developed, because we think it's crucial that they are collaborative documents that are co-created. It's important that line managers are able to be creative in their suggestions. They need to come to the table with some workable possibilities as to how the business can flex to support someone who is undertaking a caring role outside of work, rather than the onus being on the individual with caring responsibilities to think of any adjustments that would help. While the carer might be best placed to consider what flexibilities might suit their circumstances, having solutions-focused conversations with a supportive line manager can really engender a culture of flexibility and ensure the conversation about caring is an ongoing one.

We also found that there was a huge variation in the time it took for the Carer's Passport to be agreed. Some respondents fed back that adjustments had been made the following day, while others reported they were still waiting for an agreement after eight months. It's crucial that action is taken swiftly, as the toll on an individual balancing their caring responsibilities and work can be very severe if the right support isn't provided.

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## Carer's Passport - where things have gone wrong

For many respondents, the process of adopting a Carer's Passport has worked really well, but there are pockets of feedback that underline the barriers that still exist:

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“ My manager was not aware [of the Carer's Passport] and when I told him about it he said that I should work part time as it was a waste of taxpayers money.”

“ When sent to a new manager he asked if I was really able to do my new job - it was like he thought I couldn't do the job because I was a carer so I stopped sharing it with new managers.”

“ The solution I had to opt for once my request for flexibility was refused has probably killed my career completely.”

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## Carer's Passport - not for me

A majority of 55% of respondents told us that they don't have a Carer's Passport in place:

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“ Never got round to fully completing the application as the relationship with the line manager was very good and any adjustments needed were put in place.”

“ I've drafted the passport twice, but have never discussed or submitted with my current manager... They have been flexible and sympathetic...I'm not sure how I feel about formalising this on paper and at the moment whether this is beneficial.”

This is worrying. While positive relationships with your current line manager may make the formalisation of an agreement seem unnecessary, if you move on it can be challenging to maintain the flexibilities that you had. One of the benefits of the Carer's Passport is that it can be taken with you as you move to different roles.

While our survey highlighted some issues with new line managers and their perceptions of those with caring responsibilities, we do think that a well-documented and up to date Carer's Passport can facilitate career moves and progression, which are otherwise difficult to secure.



# Moving forward



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# Recommendations

1

The Carer's Passport is an excellent tool, but line managers need to better understand how to adapt and use it. We'd like to see training available to ensure that managers are able to support members who approach them, seeking to formalise adjustments to support their caring.

2

A dedicated HR point of contact in each employer, so that members who are facing difficulty balancing their caring responsibilities have a source of independent impartial support. This HR contact should also be available for new starters who face issues having the recommendations in their passport adopted, and provide additional support to line managers.

3

Formalising caring arrangements should be the default - managers should proactively ask staff to undertake a Carer's Passport and ensure that if circumstances change, they are taken into account.

4

There should be an enforceable time limit for completing, agreeing and actioning the Carer's Passport. Employers should commit to actioning agreed changes within eight weeks.



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## Conclusion

This work has been vital in understanding the barriers that carers face at work. Balancing work alongside personal commitments can leave carers feeling like they are being pulled in different directions. It's also clear from our survey that for many, undertaking additional caring responsibilities isn't a temporary measure, but a commitment spanning many years. Carers should be supported at work to find balance, helping employers to retain knowledge and expertise, but also allowing them to embrace the behaviours and attributes carers bring to work.

The resources and support available to carers varies across employers, but respondents were clear about the positive impact local networks had in helping them consider what support they needed.

Trade unions play a crucial role in supporting members too. At the FDA we're increasingly seeing members come to us to seek support in recalibrating their working lives after a change in their personal responsibilities - particularly during the pandemic - and we are here to help.

We'll be lobbying for change at both a central and departmental level, to see our recommendations adopted and ensure that the great work that has been done to develop the Carer's Passport is continued. We believe that if we make these improvements for carers, everyone will benefit. We've also developed a checklist to help individuals navigate conversations with employers around getting more support at work.

**For more information on our broader work promotion equality, diversity and inclusion at work, visit the FDA website at [www.fda.org.uk](http://www.fda.org.uk) or contact us at [equalitymatters@fda.org.uk](mailto:equalitymatters@fda.org.uk).**



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# Caring at work - a checklist for balance

## **Talk to your FDA rep**

Whether you've got a Carer's Passport in place but it needs updating, you're thinking about creating a passport from scratch, or you've hit a bump in the road, reaching out to your local representative is your first step. We can listen, advise and support and can support you in drafting a request for additional flexibility, or a change in working pattern.

## **Speak with your line manager**

Raising potential concerns can help to head off any problems before they become more complicated or time-sensitive. If you've got a Carer's Passport, it's a living document so do use it as a tool to keep the conversation going. Your line manager or your local trade union representative will also be able to explain any departmental options for additional Carer's Leave if that's something you need.

## **Be honest, open and direct**

If you're looking to change the way you work, it's helpful to be really clear on what you think would help and the reasons why. Negotiating changes to your working pattern should be a two-way conversation. Your union rep will be able to advise, support and potentially advocate for you.

## **Think flexibly**

When thinking about adjustments that might help you manage your caring responsibilities, it helps to think creatively. Could you work compressed hours? Would less travel help? Would job-carving, or re-designing your role give you more flexibility? Would formally shifting to part-time work help, or do you need to be home-based? Your manager might have some suggestions too and you might need to flex to find an arrangement that works for you - it's all about finding a pragmatic, workable solution.



### **Acknowledge your strengths**

Being a carer means you have a lot of transferrable skills and behaviours that can be helpful at work too. Negotiation, advocacy, diplomacy - these are just some of the skills carers frequently use. Keep this in mind when considering the contribution you make to your team, or if you're thinking about moving to a new role.

### **Speak to your GP or seek professional support**

Sometimes carers need support too. While your union rep can provide support, you may need to speak with your GP if you need support with your own health and wellbeing. Your union rep can support you in navigating any processes you need to go through with your employer.

### **Use the resources available**

Alongside the support you can get from your union, departmental networks can be really helpful too. The Charity for Civil Servants also provides some excellent resources for carers, and line managers supporting carers at work.

### **Be vocal**

If you're comfortable doing so, talking to your team about the responsibilities you have and the practical implications of those on your time can be really helpful. If you have an alternative working pattern and meeting dates or times don't work, let others know. While it can be irritating to be overlooked, often these things aren't intentional. Your local rep can help if you think there are underlying issues or if there's a pattern of exclusion that you can't resolve informally.

### **When things change, talk to us**

Caring is dynamic, emotional and sometimes challenging. We know that your circumstances can change quickly and sometimes employers don't react as promptly as we would like. Your union rep can act as a sounding board and support - we are here to help.





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