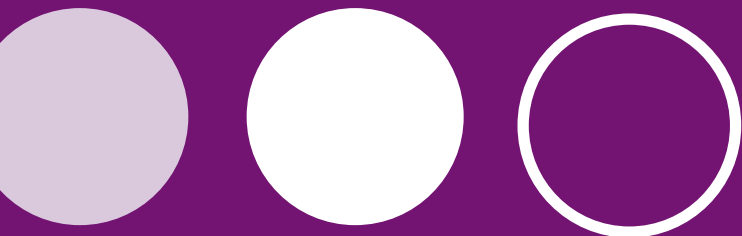


# Changing perceptions

Helping carers in the civil service reach their potential



**“Carers have a multitude of skills the civil service needs”**

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# Executive Summary

Census 2021 recorded 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK, around 1 in 9 adults. In the civil service around 1 in 5 civil servants also have caring responsibilities alongside their jobs, according to the 2021 People Survey. The higher proportion of carers in the workforce means that it is so important that the civil service gets support for carers' right as an employer.

This new report builds on what we heard from carers in the civil service in 2025 and considers what has changed since our last survey five years earlier.

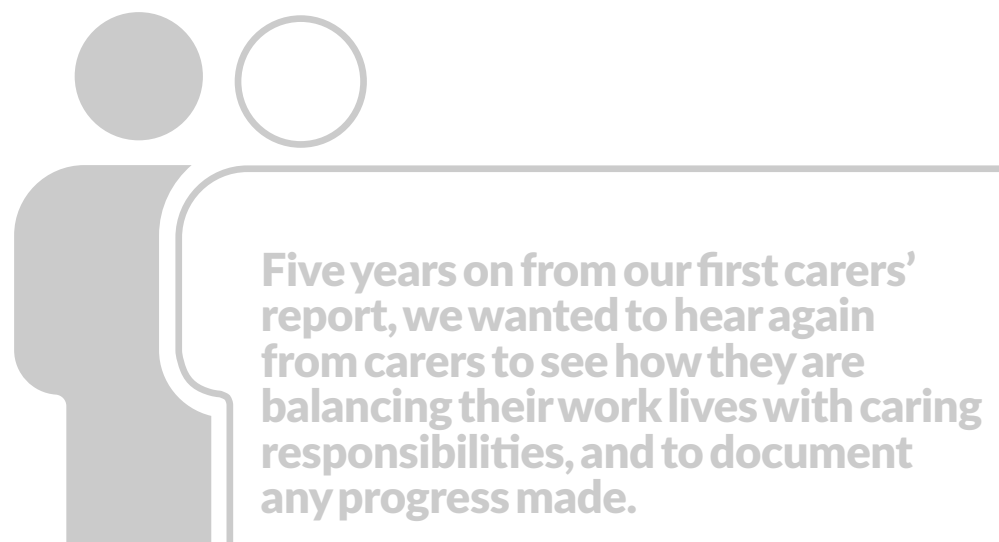
In 2020, the FDA surveyed carers in the civil service to try and understand the working lives of our members and their colleagues with caring responsibilities and highlight the barriers they face. Using these insights, we published a report in 2021, which made a series of recommendations for government employers and provided a practical guide for members aimed at improving carers' experience at work.

Five years on from our first carers' report, we wanted to hear again from carers to see how they are balancing their work lives with caring responsibilities, and to document any progress made.

We have had a great response from civil servants with caring responsibilities, including detailed accounts of their lived experience. Carers make a huge contribution to the civil service - as well as to their families and friends - and we want to thank them for sharing their experiences and helping to highlight issues where we can campaign for improvement.

Since 2021, work has been ongoing to support carers following the FDA's recommendations. We are encouraged to see that there is greater awareness and uptake of the carer's passport following our recommendations and the hard work of our reps, members and National Officers to highlight this essential workplace tool.

Our follow-up survey included questions about recent changes to working practices which may have affected carers. Many more civil servants are now able to work between home and the office with widely accepted technology to support this. However, in the last couple of



years many departments have introduced mandatory office attendance requirements which have been applied across all groups. We are concerned about the impact this may have had on carers.

We also wanted to see how the Carer's Leave Act (2023) and the Carer's Leave Regulations 2024 have affected carers in the civil service. New Cabinet Office model guidance on carers' leave reflecting these changes has been sent to all departments, but many employers are yet to act on this. We have noted some good examples where employers have gone beyond the statutory five days' unpaid leave, such as Scottish Government's policy of offering 10 days' (pro rata) paid leave for carers, and some employers like House of Commons, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Crown Prosecution Service, Welsh Government, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Competitions and Markets Authority all offering five days' (pro rata) paid leave - in some cases more at a manager's discretion. In Northern Ireland, where separate legislation applies, carers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service can also access five days' (pro rata) paid leave. Where employers have not acted to update their policies, we will be working locally to make changes and push for greater support for carers.

In our 2025 survey, 86% of respondents knew about the Carer's Passport, up from 71% who had heard of it in 2020, which shows the effect of the hard work union workplace representatives, carers networks, and employers have done to promote its use.

While our new findings show some clear improvements, especially in awareness around the Carer's Passport, they also demonstrate there is more work to be done to support carers to achieve their full potential in their working lives while fulfilling their caring role.

In this report, we consider the information that was shared with us, track the progress made since our previous report and identify new recommendations for improvement, which we'll be pursuing with our colleagues across the civil service.

Again we have provided a practical guide to support the pursuit of our recommendations, which can be used by carers navigating balancing their caring responsibilities and their careers, and workplace representatives can also use these resources to negotiate change and make improvements to policy locally.



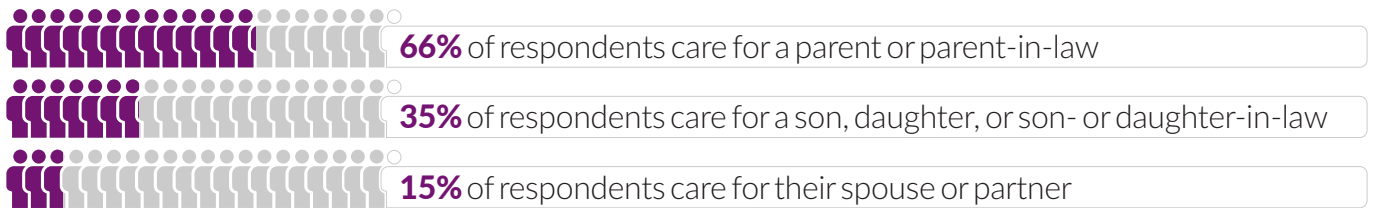
**In our 2025 survey, 86% of respondents knew about the Carer's Passport, up from 71% who had heard of it in 2020**



# 2025 Headlines

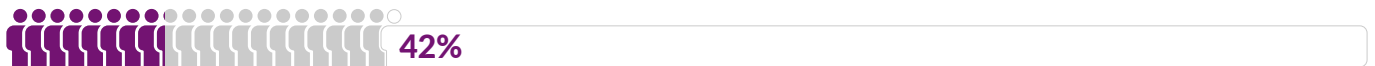


One of the main pillars of our survey was trying to understand the support carers are required to give alongside their day job. Our results show that civil service carers care for a wide range of family members or friends, and sometimes care for more than one person.



The most common types of care respondents provide are for:

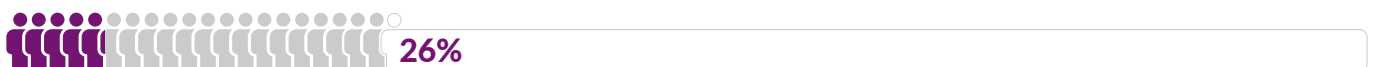
## A physical disability



## Needs that arise from being older (like support with mobility)



## Dementia



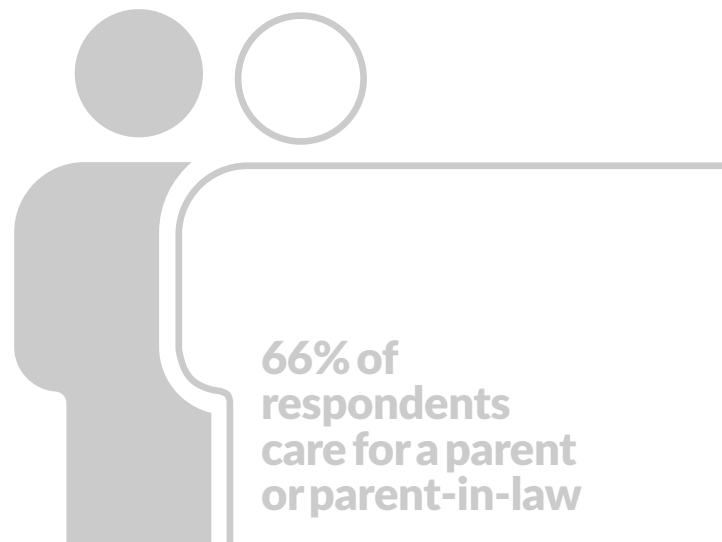
## An autism spectrum disorder



## A mental health condition

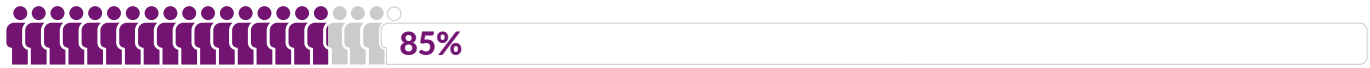


## A combination of conditions or disabilities

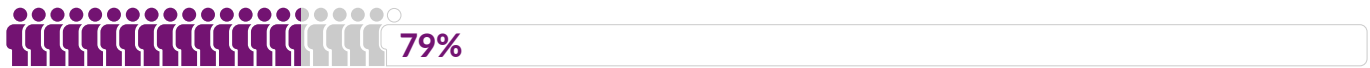


Civil service carers most commonly provide:

**Practical help (e.g. preparing meals, shopping, laundry, housework, household repairs, taking to doctor/hospital)**



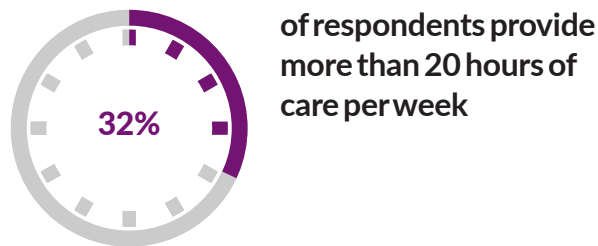
**Arranging/coordinating care and support, medical appointments and other help**



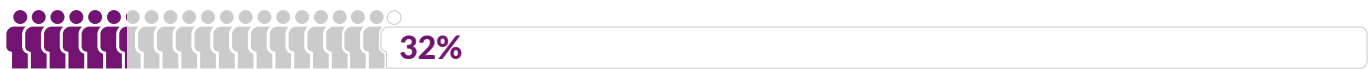
**Helping with paperwork/financial matters (e.g. writing letters, filling in forms, dealing with bills, banking)**



**Providing emotional support, motivation or keeping an eye on someone either in person, or by phone or online**



of respondents are unable to take respite from their caring responsibilities



of respondents don't feel comfortable discussing their caring responsibilities with their line manager



of respondents feel they have been treated less favourably at work because of their caring responsibilities



of respondents think that their caring role has an impact on how they feel day-to-day at work



We also asked respondents about how and when they came to think of themselves as carers. Their response highlights the importance of raising awareness of caring in the workplace and beyond, particularly when circumstances change.



**“When my GP offered me the flu vaccination as I was a carer for my parents. I hadn’t thought about it like that - I was simply a daughter.”**

**“A conversation with a work colleague who is also a carer.”**

**“I had been speaking to colleagues who advised that level of support was not necessary for their children.”**

**“Awareness of what a carer is through work advertisements.”**

**“It’s been a gradual process that’s happen over several years. I’ve found myself slowly taking on more responsibilities without even realising how much until I look back.”**

**“FDA event... Suddenly I realised I have been a carer for a long time.”**



**“I’ve found myself slowly taking on more responsibilities without even how much until I look back.”**

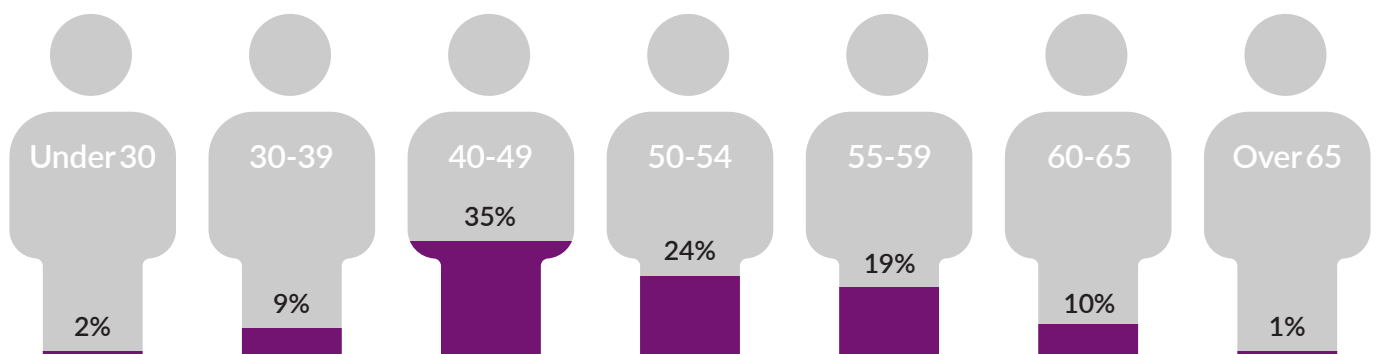
# Carers in the civil service in 2025



According to the 2021 Census, there are around 3.5 million female carers and 2.4 million male carers in the UK as a whole. To put this another way, 59% of carers across the UK are female. Looking at the civil service, 55% of employees are female (civil service statistics 2025). Strikingly, 72% of respondents to our survey were female.

One barrier raised by respondents was overcoming preconceptions about carers. Some male respondents to our survey commented that they had struggled to get flexibilities agreed as it was not expected that they would be carers, and they found it difficult to convince their employer of their responsibilities.

Younger carers also reported encountering disbelief that they have caring responsibilities. While the majority of our respondents were in the 40-59 age group, more than 10% of respondents were in their 20s and 30s.



One respondent remarked that they would like to see “acknowledgement at work that you can be...[a young] carer... for multiple years, and still someone who is worth recognising as a valuable contributor to the work environment.”

Carers in the civil service still feel that their caring responsibilities have an impact on their careers, with fears that by gaining promotions or moving roles they will be met with less understanding about what being a carer entails.

Some respondents report deliberately taking civil service roles or part-time working as some of the roles are more flexible than the private sector or full-time working:

**“I have given up senior roles in the private sector to care for my daughter. My salary in the civil service is 50% below my private sector remuneration”**

**“I’ve moved to working part-time so can’t take other opportunities”**

A staggering 62% of our respondents felt that they have experienced a negative impact on their career due to the responsibilities they hold as a carer.

**“I currently have a fantastic manager and I am scared that a change of role will mean I get someone who will not allow me to be as flexible. I hear so many horror stories from others in my position about managers who will not allow them to have the flexibility they need.”**

**“I am scared to move roles in case there is a lack of understanding about all that I have to manage.”**

**“I worry that it makes me appear less reliable. And it’s also had an impact on my team who have had to step in for me with little notice when I’ve had a caring emergency.”**

**“Senior jobs are in London. Travel to London requires a lot of carer back up. Many of the roles advertised could be hybrid, national but in some teams there is a preference for London only.”**

**“Working part time is a barrier to promotions because very few teams will take part time staff.”**

**“I am at a way lower grade than I should be, because this is the only way I can continue to stay in work (my department makes us move job every two to three years), to persuade them to accept my flexible terms because I am way better an officer than others at that grade. But I am unable to compete for promotion as nobody wants a carer with unusual flexible working requirements.”**

**“Progression/role options have been limited as I have to consider flexibility first rather than a role that will help me progress.”**



**“I am unable to compete for promotion as nobody wants a carer with unusual flexible working requirements.”**

# Making progress: Changes between 2020 and 2025



## The Carer's Passport

In 2025 86.32% of respondents knew about the Carer's Passport, up from 71% who had heard of it in 2020.

In our 2020/21 report we recommended that there be wider publicity for and take up of the Carer's Passport. This document allows carers and their managers to record the adjustments or flexibilities needed for a carer to balance their work with their caring responsibilities. You can find out more about the Carer's Passport through the [→ Charity for Civil Servants](#).

In the five years since our last survey there has been wider recognition and uptake of the Carer's Passport amongst respondents, including a greater willingness to talk to line managers about how to fill out the passport. There has also been an increase in the number of respondents having all their flexibilities agreed as part of the passport process - 80% in 2025 compared to 59% in 2020.

All of this is hugely encouraging and reflects the work of FDA National Officers and local reps, alongside the significant work Carers' Networks in departments and the Charity for Civil Servants have done to raise awareness of the Passport. It is also great to hear that some carers have managers who understand their caring responsibilities and support the flexibilities needed. The FDA wants to see this approach to carers as a model for managers across the civil service.

However, there is still work to do to raise awareness of the Carer's Passport and to support carers and their managers in getting flexibilities identified and agreed. The Passport is also designed to support carers when they move jobs and some of our respondents have found that this has not happened. There also remain some carers who feel unable to apply for a Carer's Passport due to fears around their jobs and careers – an unacceptable situation for any civil servant to be in. Our survey results emphasise how this can be tackled, highlighting the huge importance of training and support for line managers to support carers in their teams.

**“I have not felt able to apply for a Carer's Passport. I am currently on secondment within the civil service in a role I really enjoy. There are limited opportunities to apply for a permanent role and I feel that being seen as a carer would potentially negatively influence the management team against offering me a permanent role”**

**“Despite request for carers passport, line manager has not actioned although permits flexibility to attend appointments. I have requested consideration in mandated 40% office attendance as I find this difficult to manage at times, this has not been permitted”**



**“My current line manager has never discussed my passport with me.”**

**“My line manager was understanding and when I had a need to change hours of work, he understood. Also working from home was a great help.”**

**“I currently have a fantastic manager and I am scared that a change of role will mean I get someone who will not allow me to be as flexible. I hear so many horror stories from others in my position about managers who will not allow them to have the flexibility they need.”**

### Hybrid and flexible working

Since our last survey in 2020, the world of work has changed significantly. Hybrid, flexible, and remote or home working options are now much more possible and supported through widely adopted technology.

The FDA has been at the forefront of examining the future of office working in the civil service through surveys and reports in 2022 and 2025 on hybrid and office working. However, when the Cabinet Office implemented a blanket 60% office attendance mandate in late 2023, requiring civil servants in UK government departments to spend most of their working time in the office or on official business – with a higher expectation for senior civil servants. Since then, the FDA has been calling for an evidence-led approach to office work in the civil service rather than a one-size-fits all approach to half a million staff across hundreds of different employers.

The November 2025 report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Home-Based Working, including evidence from the FDA, stated that the government should lead by example with good hybrid working practices within the civil service. The report noted that government should ‘allow employers the flexibility to decide, with their employees, on the working arrangements that work best for them.’

Our new carers’ survey demonstrates that many civil servants with caring responsibilities are being held back from their full potential as they turn down or do not apply for roles which require higher office attendance or travel. Our carers’ survey underlines two of our main recommendations from the FDA’s ‘The future of office work in the civil service’ report:

- Comprehensive review of the 60% mandate: This review should be carried out with a view to creating a more flexible approach which takes into account whether a piece of work can be best completed in person or remotely, rather than a blanket mandate.
- Equality Impact Assessment for under-represented civil servants: It is imperative that all civil servants can fulfil their potential and this requires a flexible approach, not a top-down mandate.

Respondents to our carers’ survey describe how more flexibility in when and where they work would support them to progress and realise their full potential in the civil service. The FDA’s report demonstrates that top-down blanket mandates do not deliver on the government’s own objectives to boost productivity, improve collaboration, and help younger workers. Our members want effective hybrid working arrangements where the focus is on what they do,

not where they do it, and our members with caring responsibilities show that the civil service is missing out on the potential of talented and experienced individuals.

Some of our respondents also noted the difficulties they have as carers with expectations of mobility in their roles. This applies to roles where there is an expectation of changing work location, with placements or roles with significant UK or overseas travel.



**“I have been successful in securing a promotion but turned it down due to office attendance being mandated for managers.”**

**“I have turned down jobs and promotions as I am unable to commit to 60% office attendance or to travel.”**

**“[I would like to see] the ability to work flexibly to support [the person cared for]. Carers have a multitude of skills the civil service needs (empathy, resilience etc).”**

**“I can only go away overnight with a lot of planning.”**

**“Limited chance to travel as training is mainly London or Manchester.”**

**“Because I am restrained in terms of my mobility. I cannot be away from home for long periods of time. I cannot take a job abroad.”**

### Carers' leave

New carer's leave regulations were introduced following The Carer's Leave Act (2023). These changes came into effect on 6 April 2024. New Cabinet Office model guidance on carers' leave has been sent to departments. The Carer's Leave Act covers employees in England, Wales and Scotland and introduced:

- Entitlement to one week's unpaid leave per year if providing or arranging care for someone with a long-term care need.
- The option to take leave flexibly (in half or full days) for planned caring commitments.
- Entitlement available from the first day of employment.
- The same employment protections for employees as other forms of family-related leave, including protection from dismissal.

In Northern Ireland, carers were already covered under the Employment Rights (NI) Order 1996, with the statutory right to unpaid time off during working hours to deal with an emergency involving a dependant.

In our survey we were keen to see whether there has been any effect on the working lives of carers in the civil service from the Carer’s Leave Regulations 2024. However, most of our respondents had not heard about any changes.



**Are you aware of your department bringing in new guidance or policies for carers?**



Our respondents have reported differences in provision for carers’ leave across different departments. Some departments offer paid leave while others offer unpaid leave. In some cases, carers are being given special leave rather than specifically carers’ leave, which can leave carers confused over what they are entitled to. As part of the FDA’s research, we reviewed departmental policies and observed that there are differences in how carers are informed of their rights and what is available to them. Some policies even fail to refer to carers’ statutory rights and not been updated since the introduction of new legislation. We will be contacting departments where updates are needed as clear information on carers’ rights is vital for both carers and their managers.

The majority of respondents felt that having access to paid carers’ leave would benefit them. Some employers in the civil service already offer paid leave as part of policies to support carers. Our respondents report that this support improves their experiences in their workplaces and the FDA wants to see all civil service employers offer paid carers’ leave. For civil servants where paid carers’ leave is not available, we found that the majority of respondents felt that paid carers’ leave to at least the equivalent of the statutory unpaid leave (five days) would help them navigate their responsibilities.

**Would the introduction of paid carers’ leave in your department benefit you?**



# Recommendations

We asked our respondents what they wanted to see for a future generation of carers in the civil service, and they replied:

**“Genuine greater flexibility in the week for carers across all aspects of the civil service to organise a proper life work balance.”**

**“Equality in all ways at work, we are working so hard already and so want support to progress our careers.”**

**“My experience at work has been positive and I’d like to see that sustained.”**

**“Recognition of the impact of caring on carers’ well-being - a right to time off with no caring responsibilities. It is often forgotten that these don’t end even when taking annual leave.”**

**“Wider understanding from line managers of the carer’s role. Significant improvement in the hoops carers have to jump through in order to secure remote working/carers passport.”**

**“Managers taking a more active role in promoting the Carer’s Passport.”**

## In 2021 the FDA recommended:

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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.

From our research undertaken for this report, we believe that there have been improvements in awareness about and uptake of the Carer’s Passport, but that work still needs to be done in promoting and maintaining passports throughout a carer’s career in the civil service.



**In 2026 we recommend:**

- Employers should continue to promote the Carer's Passport and have training and support for line managers to implement policies consistently. Support and advice for line managers on managing carers should be part of any management training and guides.
- All employers should have clear policies and procedures for Carer's Leave, either as a separate policy or a separate section of another policy, such as leave or special leave. The policy should set out a carer's statutory rights. Employers should aim to provide at least five days of paid carer's leave (pro rata), where that does not already apply, in addition to the statutory requirement of five days of unpaid leave for carers.
- All employers should review the 60% office attendance mandate. Reviews should be carried out with a view to creating a more flexible approach which considers whether a piece of work can be best completed in person or remotely, rather than a blanket mandate.
- All employers should routinely assess whether higher graded jobs and promotion opportunities can be advertised as job shares, or for remote or hybrid working to support carers and other employees with need for flexibility.
- Employers where staff or trainees work on placements and/or have significant UK travel as part of their roles, such as the Fast Stream, should make sure that carers are considered in reviews of placements to make sure there are meaningful roles available in the same or similar locations.
- Employers where staff are required to travel overseas, such as FCDO, should take carers into account in Equality Impact Assessments, and support carers whose circumstances change by providing support such as supported permanent or temporary transition from diplomatic service to home career civil service. Where short visits abroad are required, employers should offer sufficient advance notice to allow planning for caring cover.



**Support and advice for line managers on managing carers should be part of any management training and guides.**

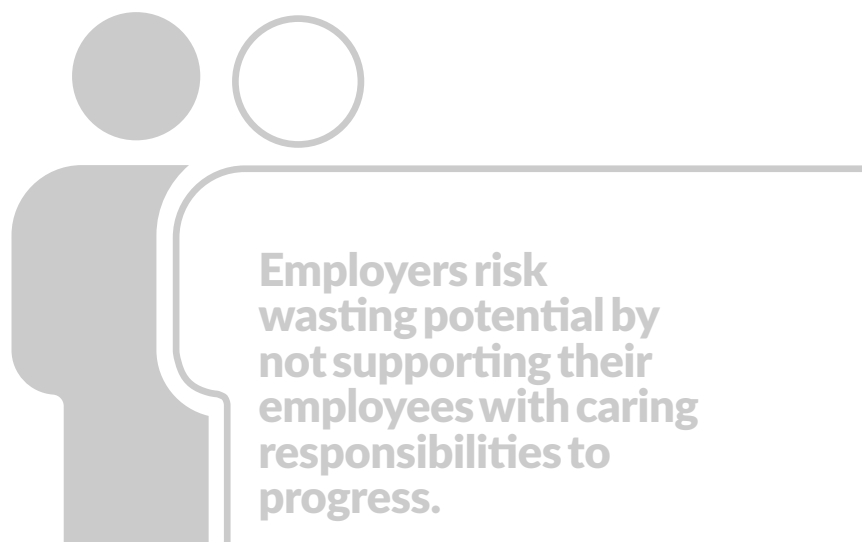
# Conclusion

Overall, the FDA wants to see a shift in workplace perceptions around who is a carer and the true potential and capabilities of carers. There are some examples from our survey of excellent management practices and opportunities offered to carers. However, many of our respondents feel held back in their careers as they have had to reject career progression because they feel unsupported to work full-time, or worry about applying for new opportunities as the support available to them is not clear.

Carers are valuable members of staff with a multitude of skills, which are useful both in their caring responsibilities and in the workplace. With support from employers, experienced and dedicated staff can unlock their talents to the benefit of all. Employers risk wasting potential by not supporting their employees with caring responsibilities to progress.

The FDA is hugely grateful to carers who have shared their stories with us. The impact and value of caring is clear, and we will continue to strive to improve the working lives of carers through campaigning for workplace change and providing training, advice, and support.

One of our respondents called simply for “acceptance, openness and support” for all carers. The FDA echoes this call, and we will take our recommendations forward to campaign for change with employers.



# Caring at work: help and advice



## Talk to your FDA rep

You can find details of your local rep in the FDA members' portal. You can talk to your rep about setting up or updating your Carer's Passport, or any problems you may be having implementing flexibilities. We can listen, advise and support you in drafting a request for additional flexibility, or a change in working pattern.

## Speak with your line manager

Setting up a Carer's Passport with your line manager is helpful. It is a living document, and you can use it as a tool to keep the conversation going in catch ups and with future managers. Your line manager or your local union rep will be able to explain any departmental options for Carer's Leave or additional support if that's something you need. Raising potential concerns early can help to head off any problems before they become more complicated or time sensitive.

Be honest, open and direct: if you're looking to change the way you work, try 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

What are some ideas which would improve your situation?

- Could you work compressed hours?
- Would changing start and finish times help?
- Would less travel help?
- Would 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 work together to find an arrangement that works for you and your team – it's all about finding a pragmatic, workable solution.

## Acknowledge your strengths

Think about the skills you have because you are a carer. It is likely you have a lot of transferrable skills and behaviours that can be helpful at work too. Skills carers frequently use include negotiation, advocacy, diplomacy, planning, and time management. 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.

The NHS Social care and support guide offers useful information for a wide range of situations, including medication and post-hospital stay care.

You can also find practical information and support from UK charities including:

- [➔ Carers UK](#) where you can choose specific content for Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England
- [➔ Age UK](#) where you can find specific advice for carers as well as more general advice for supporting older friends and relatives
- [➔ National Autistic Society](#) offers advice and support, including a Parent to Parent Emotional Support Service
- [➔ Kids](#) offers support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families
- [➔ Mind](#) has resources on helping someone else with mental health problems. They have pages on specific problems or diagnoses

### Use the resources available

Check the FDA guidance for members and reps on carers, carer's passports, and carer's leave in the [➔ FDA members' portal](#).

As well as support from your union, check locally to see if there is a departmental carers network. The Charity for Civil Servants also provides some excellent resources for carers, and line managers supporting carers at work.

You can find resources on carers' legal rights through [➔ ACAS](#) (for England, Wales, and Scotland) and [➔ LRA](#) (for Northern Ireland).

Following requests from our respondents, the FDA is introducing new FDA Learn sessions to support carers and their managers and we encourage all members to engage with our Learning sessions whether they have caring responsibilities or manage people who do. Many FDA Learn sessions are recorded so if you cannot make it to the live session you have registered for, you can catch up later in your own time and play back sections of most relevance to you. Look out for sessions in the all-member email and look at FDA Learn resources in the members' area for recorded sessions.

### 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.

You could consider contributing to your departmental carers network to help other carers understand how to manage work-life balance and navigating issues at work.

Your local union 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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