

Flexible working for carers – background information

What defines a carer?

A carer is someone, who, without payment, provides help and support to a partner, child, relative, friend or neighbour, who could not manage without their help. This could be due to age, physical or mental illness, addiction or disability. There are six million carers in the UK.

Flexible working for carers - the law explained

- A total of around 2.65 million carers are entitled to request flexible working¹
- The Work and Families Act 2006 gave carers the right to request flexible working and the act came into force in April 2007. The law provides employees with the right to request a flexible working pattern if they:
 - care, or expect to be caring, for an adult who is a spouse, partner, civil partner or relative; or who although not related to them, lives at the same address
- The right to request flexible working was introduced in 2003 for parents of children aged six and under, and parents of disabled children aged up to 18. The right to request flexible working was extended to parents of children aged 16 and under in April 2009
- Under the law employers must seriously consider all applications made, and only reject it if there is a good business reasons for doing so
- This does not give employees the *right* to work flexibly – just the *right to ask*
- Flexible working is any working pattern that is adapted for the benefit of the individual and that also suits their employer. Examples include: part-time, flexi-time, compressed hours, staggered hours, job sharing, and working from home

A step by step guide on how to request flexible working:

- Write a letter or fill in an application form. Your employer may provide you with one or you can get one from **www.direct.gov.uk**
- Your employer should arrange a meeting with you within 28 days to discuss your application
- Within 14 days you should receive your employer's decision in writing
- If your request is accepted you will need to meet with your employer to agree your new working pattern
- If your request is rejected you may appeal in writing

Carers and employment

- Carers make up over 12% of the total UK workforce, 1 in every 8 employees²
- Every year, over 2 million people become carers, some overnight, some more gradually – so there is a new population of carers in the workforce every day³
- 1.5 million carers work full-time, and of those, 140,000 care for 50+ hours per week on top of their job⁴
- 90% of working carers are aged 30+ – in their prime employment years⁴
- Working carers pay a heavy penalty in terms of their own health. Those with heavy caring responsibilities are two to three times more likely than workers without caring responsibilities to be in poor health⁴
- Young Bangladeshi and Pakistani men and women are three times more likely than other younger people to combine paid work and caring⁴
- Men and women who care for 20+ hours a week are much less likely to be in higher level jobs⁴

¹ The Third Work-Life Balance Survey of Employees, BERR Employment Relations Research Series No.58, March 2007

² Census 2001, ONS

³ In the know: the importance of information for carers, Carers UK, 2006

⁴ Who Cares Wins: Statistical Analysis on Working Carers : Evidence from the 2001 Census, Carers UK, 2006