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## **MILLIONS UNAWARE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING RIGHTS FOR CARERS**

The Government has stepped up its action to raise awareness of flexible working rights for carers. New figures indicate that millions of people are unaware that caring for a spouse or relative gives them the right to ask their employer to work flexibly. The figures also show that the majority of adults (82 per cent) aren't aware that all those with caring responsibilities are legally entitled to ask for flexible working.

Harriet Harman, Minister for Women and Equality, said: "This Government recognises the importance of this family care, and those who go out to work as well as care for older relatives. That is why we brought in the right to request flexible working for those who care for older and disabled relatives."

"We do not want people to have to choose between their work or providing important family care, so the question of their ability to work and employers' ability to respond flexibly is a huge one for the future."

Anyone who cares for a spouse, relative, or someone who lives with them, whatever level of support they provide, has the right to ask for flexible working. More than a third of people surveyed had caring responsibilities which could make them eligible to ask.

Imelda Redmond, Chief Executive of Carers UK said: "Millions of families are facing a care crunch, juggling the need to provide care for an older or disabled relative or friend, but at the same time remain in work for longer. Businesses need people to make the most of their skills and experience in the workplace, yet millions of people are at risk of having to leave their jobs because of caring responsibilities and a lack of support. Our work with Employers for Carers has shown that flexible working can help businesses with productivity, recruitment and retention. Flexible working can be a win:win solution for carers and employers, and in most cases is very easy to arrange and manage."

Employers have already demonstrated their acceptance of flexible working, with over 91 per cent of requests from parents and carers being accepted. More information about making a flexible working request can be found by visiting [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) and clicking on the 'Caring for someone' section.

## **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 working<sup>1</sup>
- 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](http://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 employees<sup>2</sup>
- 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 day<sup>3</sup>
- 1.5 million carers work full-time, and of those, 140,000 care for 50+ hours per week on top of their job<sup>4</sup>
- 90% of working carers are aged 30+ – in their prime employment years<sup>4</sup>
- 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 health<sup>4</sup>
- Young Bangladeshi and Pakistani men and women are three times more likely than other younger people to combine paid work and caring<sup>4</sup>
- Men and women who care for 20+ hours a week are much less likely to be in higher level jobs<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> Census 2001, ONS

<sup>3</sup> In the know: the importance of information for carers, Carers UK, 2006

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