

# Barriers to employment for young adult carers

Research report

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# 1. Introduction

Young adult carers are young people aged 16-24 who provide unpaid care to someone, usually a family member, on a regular basis. They may care for a parent, sibling, grandparent or other relative who has a disability, long-term illness, mental health problem or other condition which results in a need for care, support or supervision.

There are more than 314,000 young adult carers aged 16-24 in England and Wales. That's the equivalent of more than 1 in 20 young people. A caring role can have a significant impact on a young person's engagement in education, training and employment, and on their overall wellbeing. Research shows young adult carers are three times as likely to be or have been NEET (not in education, employment or training) than other young people the same age<sup>1</sup>.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. Since 2008, L&W has worked with policy makers, learning providers, employers and young adult carers themselves to improve access to education and employment for this group of young people. L&W convenes the National Policy Forum for Young Adult Carers, bringing together representatives from government departments along with young adult carers, a range of national third sector organisations and learning providers to identify how national government policy can enable young adult carers' engagement in learning and work.

## The project

In 2017, L&W undertook research on behalf of the Department for Education to gather robust evidence on young adult carers' barriers to employment. The research adopted a mixed methods approach to explore:

- The factors that affect young adult carers' aspirations and decisions about employment.
- The barriers that young adult carers face in making successful transitions to employment.
- The support that young adult carers need to overcome these barriers.
- Policy/structural factors that impact upon young adult carers' access to employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Audit Commission (2010), *Against The Odds*, Targeted Briefing: Young Carers. London: Audit Commission.

## 2. Methodology

This research adopted a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The research was conducted in three stages:

- **A literature review** to establish the existing evidence base on young adult carers' barriers to employment.
- **A quantitative survey** of current and recent young adult carers, to explore common trends in their experiences.
- **Qualitative interviews and focus groups** to provide in depth explanatory data about young adult carers' experience of employment.

### Evidence review

The evidence review consisted of desk-based research using key terms. The search for and collation of evidence was structured around four research questions:

- What factors affect young adult carers' aspirations and decisions about employment?
- What barriers do young adult carers face in making successful transitions to employment?
- What policy and structural factors impact upon young adult carers' access to employment?
- What support do young adult carers need to overcome these barriers?

While this report is focussed on young adult carers (aged 16-24), reports and research into young carers (pre-16) were also included in the evidence review. This was both due to the lack of research into young adult carers as opposed to young carers and because research into the experience of young carers provides an important backdrop to understanding the transitional experience of young adult carers. Similarly, some research focussed on adult carers and employment was included. However, in all instances the implications of being a young adult carer was considered.

The review included research dating back to 1999; however, consideration has been given to the ways in which the experiences of young adult carers and the support available to them has changed over time with developments in national policy and practice.

### Survey

The second stage of the research involved a large-scale, mostly quantitative survey of current and recent young adult carers in England. Current young adult carers aged 16-24, and those aged 25-35 who had been young adult carers when they were younger, were invited to complete the survey. The questions asked about young adult carers' experiences of employment, their aspirations and their perceived barriers to achieving these, as well as the support they would find useful in overcoming these barriers. The survey also asked about respondents' demographics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age) to see if there are any variations in the experiences of different groups of young adult carers.

In order to reach the widest possible audience, the survey was administered online via Snap Survey software. The survey was disseminated via L&W's networks, partner organisations and social media channels. A Word version was also made available for staff who work with young adult carers to administer the survey in a paper-based format.

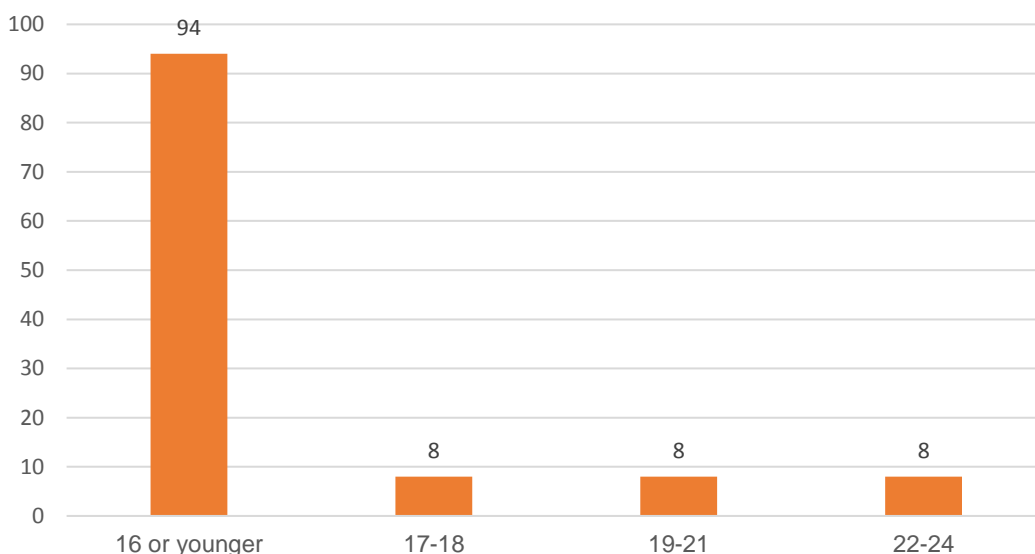
### About survey participants

A total of 118 young adult carers responded to the survey. The survey sample is not randomised and so the cohort's characteristics are not necessarily representative of the general population of young adult carers in the UK. However, in conjunction with L&W's previous work and with qualitative data for this project, we can begin to identify trends in the characteristics of young adult carers across the UK.

The majority of respondents (87%) were aged between 16-24. However, 14% of respondents were 14-16 and 12% of respondents were aged between 24 and 35. All of these older respondents had been carers under age 25, and so could reflect upon their experience as a young adult.

The majority of respondents started caring before the age of 16 (see Figure 1.1 below). These respondents were asked questions about their experience at school, as well as their experience in post-16 education and employment. Nearly all survey respondents were current carers, but 5% had previously or recently been carers.

**Figure 1.1 Age respondents started caring**



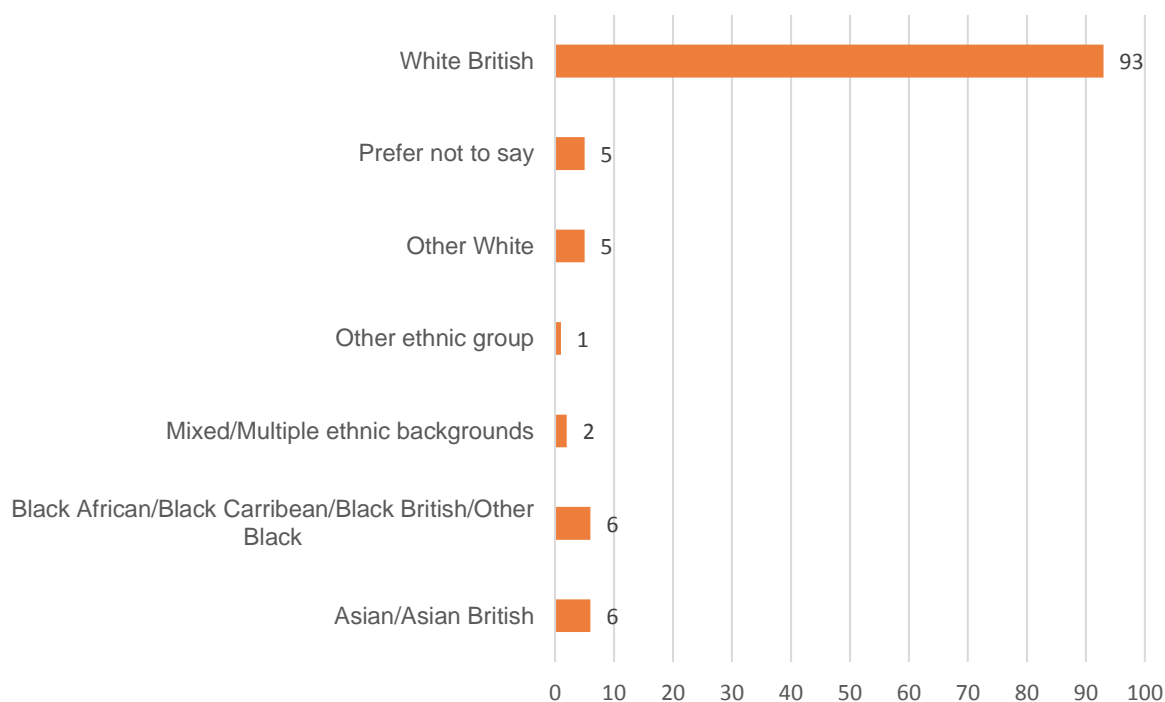
(N118)

There were 91 female and 26 male respondents, a ratio of 7:2. This could be because women are more likely to care, however, it could also be that women are more likely to identify themselves as carers, or that women are more likely to access support and therefore were easier to reach through our recruitment networks.

The majority of respondents (79%) identified as 'White British' (see Figure 1.2 below). Just under a quarter (21%) of respondents identified as having a disability, while just under half (45%) identified as having a mental health issue. The survey did not specifically explore the

link between mental health and caring, and it is difficult to speculate about causality, but this number does vary from the general population statistics which suggest between 1 in 4 and 1 in 6 people have a mental health difficulty<sup>2</sup>. Of all the respondents, 33% lived in a household where no adults were in employment, 33% lived in a household with one adult in employment and 34% had two or more adults in employment in their home.

**Figure 1.2 Ethnicity**



(N118)

## Interviews and focus groups

In order to explore the findings emerging from the survey in more depth, qualitative interviews and focus groups were conducted with a sample of young adult carers. Interviews were conducted by telephone, while focus groups were conducted face to face at three carers services across England. In total, data was collected from over 30 young adult carers.

The interview data was analysed thematically. The qualitative data was used to contextualise and describe the survey data. Where relevant, points of contention between the two data sets are explored within the report.

### About interview and focus group participants

Participants reported a range of current circumstances in relation to employment status. Many participants were working in roles that had a caring element, for example, in public services such as education, childcare or the health and social sector. Some were youth workers or young adult carer support workers. Others had positions in retail and hospitality. All of these roles are based in sectors which are typically considered to be low paid.

<sup>2</sup> The Mental Health Foundation (2016) Fundamental facts about mental health (London); McManus, Meltzer, Brugha, Bebbington and Jenkins (2009) [Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: results of a household survey](#) (The NHS Information Centre for health and social care)

The majority of respondents' roles were part-time. Some had more than one part-time position. Many had paid jobs, while others were engaged in voluntary work. Participants tended to work in the third sector. The majority of participants were current carers, meaning that they were engaged in employment alongside their caring role. Only a couple of respondents were not current carers.

Many respondents were engaged in education. Educational circumstances included studying at school (a few young adult carers were 16 years old), studying at sixth form, studying at an FE college, and studying undergraduate degrees at university. Many respondents reported choosing subject areas that were influenced by their caring role such as Childcare, Psychology, and Health and Social Care. Most of those who were in education were also in part-time employment, as well as having a caring role.



### 3. Evidence review findings

This section considers existing evidence on young adult carers' barriers to education and employment, as well as the factors that shape their career decisions and the support needed to enable them to make successful transitions into employment. This chapter collates evidence on:

- Factors affecting young adult carers' aspirations and decisions about employment.
- Barriers young adult carers face when making transitions to employment.
- Policy and structural factors impacting young adult carers' transitions to employment.
- Support that young adult carers need to overcome these barriers.

#### Factors affecting young adult carers' aspirations and decisions about employment

This section explores key research findings which suggest that:

- Young adult carers tend to seek paid work in the care sector.
- Caring comes with a host of associated practical considerations around time spent at work and its location.
- Young adult carers are more likely to be living in poverty.
- Young adult carers are more likely to have poor health and wellbeing than their peers.

#### Caring professions

Young adult carers are more likely to work in caring professions. Survey research from 2014 found that 32% of young adult carers at college or university were on a caring-related course<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, a study of 66 former young carers working in caring professions found that over half attributed their career choice to their experience as a young carer<sup>4</sup>.

There are a range of reasons why this might be the case. Due to the amount of time spent fulfilling caring duties, young adult carers may feel that they have few or no skills outside of caring. This is compounded by the fact that young adult carers have less time than their peers to participate in leisure activities and develop interests that may later become career aspirations<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, young adult carers experience significant disruptions to schooling, which may also mean missed opportunities to cultivate other interests<sup>6</sup>.

Additionally, young adult carers may have other interests but choose to enter caring professions because they believe that missed schooling and low educational attainment will

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<sup>3</sup> Sempik and Becker (2014) *Young Adult Carers at College and University* (London: Carer's Trust)

<sup>4</sup> Frank, Tatum and Tucker (1999) *On Small Shoulders: Learning from the Experience of Former Young Carers*

<sup>5</sup> Action for Young Carers (2005) *Young Carers: The Next Step Forward* (The Carers Federation Ltd, unpublished), in Constable (2012) *Report into Young Adult Carers Aged 16-24 in Surrey*.

<sup>6</sup> Sempik and Becker (2013) *Young Adult Carers at School: Experiences and Perceptions of Caring and Education* (London: Carers Trust)

prevent them from entering other sectors. In actuality, young adult carers have a host of transferable skills developed through their caring responsibilities - including financial management, time-keeping and administration - but without support, young adult carers may not know how to transfer these skills across contexts or how to apply them in the world of work.

Some young adult carers may wish to pursue a career in care because caring is a large part of their identity. However, while caring can be a meaningful activity, and entering a caring role is not necessarily a negative outcome, caring jobs tend to be low paid and lack potential for employment progression<sup>7</sup>.

### **Practical considerations**

Young adult carers face a range of practical considerations that can affect their decisions about employment. A survey of 16-17 year old carers found that young adult carers prioritised local jobs over career aspirations because of their caring responsibilities and the feeling that they need to be close to home in case of emergencies<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, young adult carers' aspirations and decisions may be tempered by the need to find flexible or part-time employment. Consequently, while their peers may pursue jobs based on interest and aspiration, young adult carers may make decisions based on practical considerations relating to their caring role.

### **Poverty**

One study found that young adult carers are more likely to be living in poverty than other young people, with only one in five coming from families with at least one person in employment<sup>9</sup>. This could be because families with low incomes are also less likely to be able to afford alternative care, which increases the likelihood of a young person taking on a caring role. Additionally, those who were not previously living in poverty may fall into poverty once ill health prevents parents from participating in paid work.

There is a strong association between parental income and occupation, and a young person's career aspirations<sup>10</sup>. Children from low-income backgrounds tend to do less well at school and enter lower-paid work. This could be because limited resources restrict these young people's participation in extra-curricular activities. In addition, parents from low-income backgrounds may lack experience of navigating the education and employment system, and in turn are unable to pass this onto their children. Either way, living in poverty is likely to compound other influences on young adult carers' career aspirations and decisions.

### **Health and wellbeing**

The emotional stress of being a young adult carer is likely to influence career aspirations and decisions. Findings indicate that the stress of being a carer may negatively impact a young person's mental health, making these young people vulnerable to pessimistic thinking<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Dearden and Becker (2000) *Growing Up Caring: Vulnerability and Transition to Adulthood – Young Carers' Experiences* (Leicester: Youth Work Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

<sup>8</sup> Becker and Becker (2008) *Young Adult Carers in the UK: Experiences, Needs and Services for Carers aged 16-24* (London: The Princess Royal Trust for Carers)

<sup>9</sup> Becker and Becker (2008)

<sup>10</sup> Gorard, See and Davies (2012) *The impact and attitudes on educational attainment and participation* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

<sup>11</sup> Abraham and Aldridge (2010) *'Who Cares About Me?' The Mental Well-Being of Young Carers in Manchester*; Newman (2003) *Children of disabled parents* (Russell House Publishing)

Moreover, research found that young adult carers tend to be 'present-orientated' in their thinking; in other words, they find it difficult to think ahead or plan for their futures<sup>12</sup>. This is likely because of the significant burden of caring responsibilities and the accompanying exhaustion. The result is that young adult carers may find it difficult to think about their future career aspirations, or to think about them positively as compared to their peers without caring responsibilities.

## **Barriers that young adult carers face in making successful transitions to employment**

Young adult carers experience significant barriers when transitioning to employment. These barriers overlap with the factors affecting decisions and aspirations around employment but are compounded by employer inflexibility and lack of awareness.

Barriers include:

- Practical limitations due to the time-consuming nature of caring responsibilities.
- Disrupted education and low academic attainment.
- The perceived or real attitude of employers to young adult carers.
- Poor health and wellbeing.

Young adult carers are also likely to experience disruption once in employment due to caring responsibilities, which may impact both progression at work and employer attitudes towards young adult carers.

### **Practical limitations**

Becker and Becker<sup>13</sup> suggest that the greatest factor affecting the employment prospects of young adult carers is their lack of spare time due to their caring responsibilities. This appears to be corroborated by data showing that the higher the number of care hours provided per week, the less likely a young person is to be in paid employment<sup>14</sup>. Young adult carers may also require flexible or part-time work in order to continue with their caring responsibilities. These requirements may narrow down the 'pool' of available jobs, making it more difficult for them to find work in their local area, or may entirely restrict their access to certain sectors.

### **Disrupted education**

Young adult carers miss an average of 5% of school days because of caring and, on average, achieve nine grades lower than their peers at GCSE level<sup>15</sup>. Young adult carers are less likely to go on to higher education than their peers, and when they do they are more likely to drop out. A survey of young adult carers at college indicates a 29% drop out rate, which is almost five times the current UK average of 6.2%<sup>16</sup>. The result is that, in comparison

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<sup>12</sup> Becker and Becker (2008)

<sup>13</sup> Becker and Becker (2008)

<sup>14</sup> Yeandle and Buckner (2007) Carers, Employment and Services: Time for a New Social Contract?, Report No 6, London: University of Leeds and Carers UK.

<sup>15</sup> Children's Society (2013) Hidden from View: The experience of young carers in England; Sempik and Becker (2014)

<sup>16</sup> Yeandle and Buckner (2007); Higher Education Statistics Agency (2016)

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/higher-education-2015-16>

to their peers, young adult carers lack the formal qualifications and skills required for paid work.

Qualification level appears to be a key determinant of whether a young adult carer finds work. As with the general population, those young adult carers with higher qualifications are less likely to become NEET<sup>17</sup>. This may be a direct result of their qualifications, or because those young adult carers who have time for Higher Education are also more likely to have time for paid work. The impact of low levels of qualification is exacerbated by the fact that caring experience tends to be under-valued. Experience of caring affords a wide range of transferable skills. These include both 'hard' skills such as financial management, administration and handling medication, and 'soft skills' such as communication skills and empathy. However, both employers and young adult carers tend to be unaware of the range of transferable skills developed through caring.

### **Poor health and wellbeing**

Young adult carers are at an increased risk of experiencing both physical and mental health problems. A survey of carers aged five to 18 demonstrated that young people who provide unpaid care were much more likely to report their health as 'not good' than their peers<sup>18</sup>. This may be because spending time looking after a dependant means that young adult carers neglect their own health, or because their caring responsibilities are physically taxing. Becker and Becker<sup>19</sup> found that young adult carers suffer from a range of ailments including colds, ulcers, backache and exhaustion. Moreover, Yeandle and Buckner found that 51% of young adult carers reported mental health problems<sup>20</sup>. High levels of sickness are likely to cause issues for young adult carers in sustaining work opportunities or could prevent some young adult carers from being able to engage in employment at all.

### **In-work disruptions**

Once in work, carers lose an average of 17 days of work and experience disruption to an average of 79 days per year as a result of their caring responsibilities<sup>21</sup>. Disruptions to work may prevent young adult carers from progressing while in work, or may cause them to drop out entirely. Moreover, awareness that caring responsibilities will disrupt their working day may prevent young adult carers from seeking work in the first place or cause employers to discriminate at the recruitment stage. A survey of young adult carers in work (n37) found that two fifths of young adult carers did not feel supported by their managers<sup>22</sup>. Lack of support can act as an additional barrier to progression or be a factor in young adult carers leaving paid work altogether.

## **Policy and structural factors impacting young adult carers' progression to employment**

Currently, young adult carers have a right to an assessment by local authorities under either the Care Act (2014) or the Child and Family Act (2014). These acts have strengthened the

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<sup>17</sup> Yeandle and Buckner (2007)

<sup>18</sup> Centre for Analyses of Social Exclusion (2010) An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK: report of the National Equality Panel (London School of Economics)

<sup>19</sup> Becker and Becker (2008)

<sup>20</sup> Yeandle and Buckner (2007)

<sup>21</sup> Sempick and Becker (2014)

<sup>22</sup> Yeandle and Buckner (2007)

rights of young adult carers in the UK. Similarly, the adoption of a 'whole family approach', where unpaid caring is understood 'in context', has made headway in improving provision for young adult carers<sup>23</sup>. Carers are also protected from discrimination in employment under the Equality Act (2010) due to association with the person they care for. However, there are a number of policy and structural factors which act as barriers to employment progression for young adult carers. These include:

- Current regulations around benefits entitlements.
- Eligibility rules around the 16-19 Bursary in Further Education.
- Access to Carer's Assessments.
- Lack of alternatives to unpaid care.

### **Current regulations around benefit entitlements**

Currently, young adult carers lose their entitlement to the Carer's Allowance of £62.50 per week once they are working or learning for over 21 hours per week, and their Carer's Allowance is subject to income tax once they are earning over the personal allowance. This leaves young adult carers in a 'catch 22' situation, as most FE and training programmes are classed as full-time (even if they do not involve 21 hours or more of supervised study per week) which can mean that young adult carers cannot learn and claim Carer's Allowance at the same time<sup>24</sup>. For example, apprenticeships are a crucial route into paid work. Although there is no minimum hours for apprenticeships, most apprenticeships tend to be over 21 hours per week. Given the fact that many young adult carers live in poverty, the potential loss of family benefits may act to deter young adult carers from seeking out paid employment and apprenticeships.

### **Access to Carer's Assessments**

In theory, a Carer's Assessment under either the Care Act or Children and Families Act (2014) should enable local authorities to determine whether a young adult carer needs further support, financial or otherwise. However, the assessment is not automatic and research suggests that young adult carers experience 'considerable confusion' over the assessment process<sup>25</sup>. This means that some young adult carers may not be receiving the support that they are entitled to and which, if received, might help them to make successful transitions to employment.

### **In-education support**

Currently, young adult carers in education are not automatically recognised as a vulnerable group with automatic entitlement to the 16-19 Bursary. Subsequently, while young adult carers can apply for the Bursary, many may not do so, either because they do not define or wish to declare themselves as a carer, or do not understand the application process. Others are unaware that the Bursary exists. Even when young adult carers are aware of the

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<sup>23</sup> Department of Health (2010) A life outside of caring: Recognised, valued and supported: the next steps for the Carers' Strategy (London)

<sup>24</sup> Aylward, N (2013) Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training. NIACE Policy Paper.

<sup>25</sup> Aldridge, Cheesbrough, Harding, Webster and Taylor (2017) The lives of young carers in England, (London)

Bursary, and FE providers prioritise young adult carers for this financial support, it is not available for young adult carers aged over 19, and so older carers may miss out on financial support. There is a separate bursary fund for learners who take out an Advanced Learner Loans, but awareness of these loans and the associated bursary appears to be low amongst learners in general, let alone among young adult carers who tend to have less contact with formal education than their peers. Internal processes within FE providers often fail to recognise young adult carers and to make adaptations such as offering flexible learning.

Although awareness of young adult carers in the FE sector has improved, colleges and other FE providers often do not provide the wider emotional and practical support needed to allow young adult carers to fully participate in education. Even when support is available, colleges often fail to implement a systematic method of identifying young adult carers. As a result, some young adult carers are likely to slip through the net.

Gaps to financial, practical and emotional support in FE may prevent young adult carers from fully participating in their studies and achieving the same level of educational qualifications as their peers. In turn, young adult carers are likely to find themselves at a disadvantage in the employment market, as they are less likely to have the formal qualifications needed for many jobs.

### **Lack of alternative to unpaid care**

In 2000, Becker and Dearden noted that ‘community care policy [in the UK] assumes that family members will provide much of the care and support required by relatives’<sup>26</sup>. This assumption means that in low-income families where private care is not an option, the responsibility for ill or disabled relatives often falls to dependent children or young adults. This burden is likely to be exacerbated by the recent cuts to health and social care, particularly to district nursing<sup>27</sup>.

### **Support that young adult carers need to overcome these barriers**

Clearly, young adult carers require additional support to help them to make informed decisions about their careers, to successfully transition into employment and to feel supported once in work. Research suggests that young adult carers would benefit from:

- Specialist support services for young adult carers including careers advice, advice around benefits entitlements, and in-education support.
- ‘Whole family’ approaches aimed at alleviating the burden of caring.
- Care-friendly employment policies and in-work support.

### **Specialist support for young adult carers**

Research suggests that the support needs of young adult carers aged 16-24 differ from both young carers and adult carers. During this transitional period, young adult carers may decrease engagement with carers services as they begin to focus on further education and

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<sup>26</sup> Dearden and Becker (2000)

<sup>27</sup> Robertson, Wenzel, Thompson and Charles (2017) Understanding NHS financial pressures: how are they affecting patient care? (London: The Kings Fund)

work. Although far more carers services now offer peer support groups for young adult carers, this specialist support must be protected and further embedded in all carers services.

Research suggests a range of support relevant to young adult carers' needs can enable them to make successful transitions into employment. In particular, young adult carers aged 16-25 benefit from information about paid employment, support with the job application process and help accessing further education or training if necessary<sup>28</sup>. In order to counter barriers to employment, support needs to be personalised and holistic. For example, as well as addressing gaps in skills and qualifications and helping with the job application process, advisers could work with a young adult carer to arrange alternative care for dependants, address potential ill-health and navigate benefit entitlements.

Additionally, FE and HE providers need to implement policies and practices specific to young adult carers. Providers can support carers by making referrals to local carers services and counselling. Alternatively, colleges and universities can provide internal support - for example, student support services can help a young adult carer to create a 'crisis plan' in case of a sudden increase in their caring responsibilities<sup>29</sup>. In the first instance, colleges and universities need to identify young adult carers through questionnaires or other appropriate screening processes and ensure that students are aware of the available support<sup>30</sup>.

### **'Whole family' approaches**

Yeandle and Buckner<sup>31</sup> found a strong link between the health of the dependent and the ability of a carer to find work. This evidences the value of a 'whole family' approach to supporting young adult carers. Increased community nursing provision could alleviate the burden on young adult carers, enabling better health and freeing them up to pursue their work and interests<sup>32</sup>. FE providers should also take a 'family-focused' approach. This means working with a family to ensure arrangements are in place for alternative care when a young adult carer is engaged in learning. It could also mean addressing the learning needs of other members of the family<sup>33</sup>.

### **Carer-friendly employment policies and support**

Carers who secure employment often risk dropping-out of work due to a lack of support. Survey data suggests that only 25% of working carers feel supported in the workplace<sup>34</sup>. Lack of in-work support may also deter some young adult carers from seeking employment in the first place. In order to support carers in the workplace, employers should consider having and promoting a carers policy<sup>35</sup>. These policies encourage declaration of caring responsibilities during the induction period so that appropriate adjustments can be made. This may include flexible working hours and location, allowing young adult carers to have access to their mobile phone, and providing information on shifts and rotas well in advance.

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<sup>28</sup> Becker and Becker (2008)

<sup>29</sup> Carers Trust and NIACE (2015) Supporting Students with Caring Responsibilities: A resource for colleges and services to help young adult carers succeed in further education, [https://professionals.carers.org/sites/default/files/supporting\\_student\\_carers\\_fe.pdf](https://professionals.carers.org/sites/default/files/supporting_student_carers_fe.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Carers Trust and NIACE (2015)

<sup>31</sup> Yeandle and Buckner (2007)

<sup>32</sup> Department of Health (2014)

<sup>33</sup> Carers Trust and NIACE (2015)

<sup>34</sup> Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (2010)

<sup>35</sup> Carers Trust (2014)

Employers should always speak to the young adult carers about their needs and tailor support accordingly. Employers may also want to make referrals to local carers services or develop in-work peer support networks for carers<sup>36</sup>.

Employers also need to be made aware of anti-discrimination laws under the Equality Act 2010. In particular, employers should understand that they have a duty not to deny a job or promotion to young adult carers because of their caring responsibilities<sup>37</sup>. Employers should make it clear during recruitment that they welcome applications from carers. To make the recruitment process accessible to young adult carers, employers should ensure that the time and date for interviews and assessments are given well in advance and be flexible in the case of last minute change due to caring responsibilities.

## Summary

This chapter has considered the available evidence relating to young adult carers and employment.

Research suggests that, to continue to provide unpaid care whilst also working, young adult carers are required to consider the number of working hours required and the location of any workplace. This limits the pool of jobs available, and often means that young adult carers accept jobs that meet practical requirements but do not align with their career aspirations or interests.

There is a general lack of awareness of young adult carers and their support needs amongst employers. As a result, employers are often unwilling to provide flexible hours and working arrangements. In some instances, employers' lack of awareness leads to discrimination, and in many cases fear of discrimination means that young adult carers would not disclose their caring responsibilities to their employers. Few employers appear to have a carers policy to encourage disclosure and to protect young adult carers from discrimination.

Young adult carers' qualification levels appear to be considerably lower than the general population. This can affect their transitions into work, as the lack of employer awareness means that young adult carers' educational records are not considered within the extenuating circumstances of caring. Additionally, poor careers advice means that young adult carers may miss out on opportunities to plug the gap in their educational record by marketing their caring skills as transferable.

Young carers are at an increased risk of experiencing both physical and mental health problems. This can make applying for and sustaining employment difficult. The stress and emotions resulting from caring can often mean that young adult carers have little space to consider future career aspirations or may experience pessimistic thinking about the future.

The significant time spent caring means that young adult carers are often drawn into caring professions. While this is not necessarily negative, limited opportunities to socialise and explore hobbies or other interests means that young adult carers may not have had the space to consider other career options. This is exaggerated by the correlation between being

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<sup>36</sup> Learning and Work Institute (2016) Supporting young adult carers in the workplace: a guide for employers

<sup>37</sup><http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/ci/fattach/get/585/1354033248/redirect/1/filename/carers.pdf>



a young adult carer and living in poverty, which may further limit their participation in extra-curricular activities.

Young adult carers tend to have little awareness of the bursaries to which they are entitled in education, and in some instances young adult carers are locked out of the labour market due to eligibility rules around benefits, particularly the Carer's Allowance. Although young adult carers are entitled to a Carer's Assessment, many miss out on this opportunity due to lack of awareness.

Young adult carers would benefit from better information about the support available to them. The support needs of young adult carers aged 16-25 differ from both young carers and adult carers. Specialist services for young adult carers can help to navigate the transition into work or further education. Such support can be provided by local carers services, colleges or employers. Research suggests that support should be holistic and address young adult carers' mental and physical wellbeing and the needs of the cared-for person, to allow young adult carers to better engage with employment.

## 4. Pre-16 education

This section presents the findings of the survey and qualitative research with young adult carers relating to their experiences of school and pre-16 education. Four-fifths (80%) of the survey respondents and most of the interviewees and focus group participants had been young carers while at school.

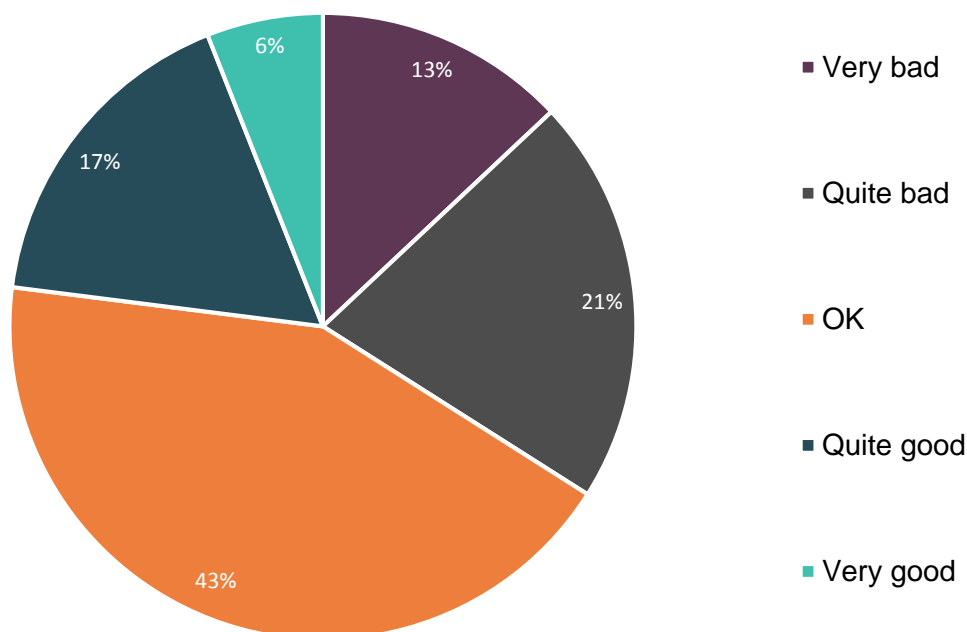
This chapter explores:

- Respondents' experiences of pre-16 education.
- Declaration during pre-16 education.
- Impact of caring on aspects of pre-16 education.
- Support accessed in pre-16 education.

### Experiences of school

Survey respondents who had caring responsibilities at school most commonly identified as having an 'OK' experience of school (43%). Over a third said they had a 'Quite bad' (21%) or 'Very bad' (13%) experience. A small proportion (6%) felt they had a 'Very good' experience and 17% felt their experience was 'Quite good'. Most of the interview and focus group participants described a negative experience of school, with many explaining that they were not identified as a carer or offered support.

**Figure 3.1 Young adult carers' experience of school**



(N94)

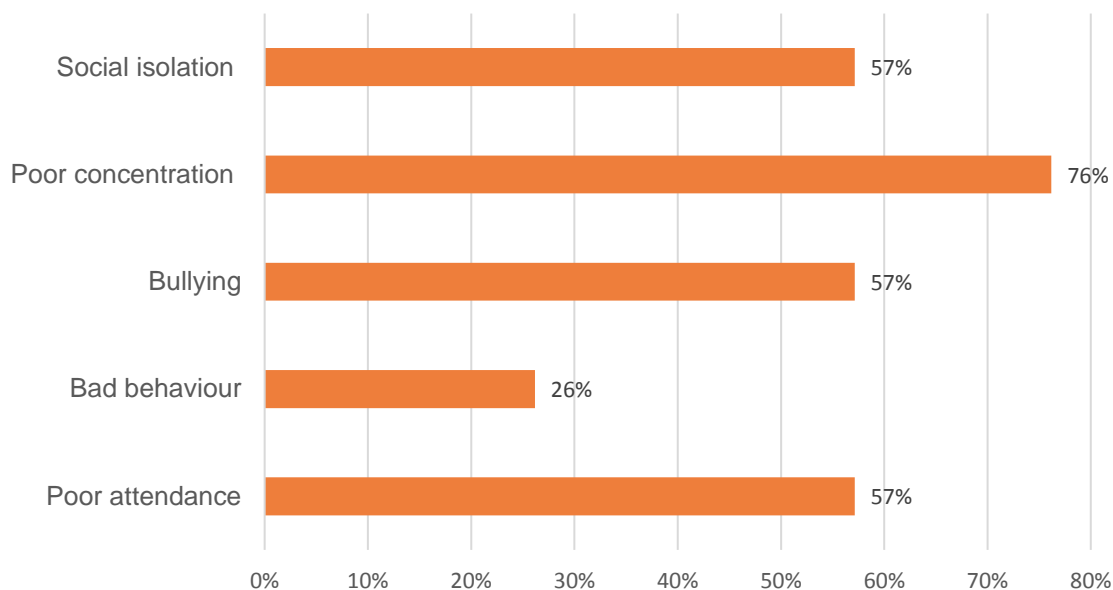
Often interviewees reported that the latter half of secondary school was particularly challenging. During this time, school workload increased, and participants felt growing

pressure to make decisions about their future. In some instances, caring responsibilities had also increased during this time, leading to them feeling overwhelmed. These circumstances negatively impacted on their relationship with their cared for family member, their own mental wellbeing and disrupted their education.

### Impact of caring on social experience at school

Many respondents found that their caring role had a significant impact on their social experience at school. Over half (57%) of participants had experienced challenges with both social isolation and bullying (see Figure 3.2 below).

**Figure 3.2 Challenges experienced by young adult carers at school**



(N94)

Some experienced bullying because of their caring role and their cared for family member's health condition.

*'[I] always got bullied for being a carer... Her coming to meet me at school, obviously when she could, people didn't understand why she looks how she looks.'* (Focus group participant)

Others felt that they had no time to engage in social activities with their friends because they had to spend their time caring or earning money to financially support their family. Those that did have time felt guilty for choosing to socialise with friends rather than spend time with their family. Many participants explained that when they did socialise with friends, they would be distracted by worry about the person they cared for. For some, this meant they stopped enjoying socialising and chose to stay at home.

Many participants reported that the adult responsibilities and priorities associated with caring made them feel distant from their peers. Some felt their classmates were unable to empathise or understand their circumstances. In some cases, this meant that young carers stayed silent about their caring responsibilities in school.

*'My friends didn't want to socialise as well, go out with me because I was always busy and there wasn't time... There was nobody else who I could talk*

*to about what was going on at home... If I mentioned something, they'd be like, 'Oh, that's boring,' or they're just not interested.'* (Interviewee)

Those who did have friends at school often still experienced practical limitations to spending time with them. Participants with a disabled parent would have to rely solely on public transport to meet with friends. This made socialising difficult, particularly when participants lived in remote locations.

Some explained that their experience of being socially isolated as a young person continued to affect their ability to communicate and socialise as an adult.

*'I never really had any friends at school, I don't really have any friends now, to be honest. I don't really interact with anybody. So, because I didn't really have time at school to be going out with friends and stuff because I felt like I had to get home and make sure everything was all right, I just never really formed friendships.'* (Interviewee)

### **Impact of caring on academic performance**

Many participants experienced poor concentration at school. As shown in Figure 3.2 above, over three quarters (76%) of survey respondents struggled with concentration. The qualitative research found that young adult carers' ability to concentrate or focus was often due to feeling distracted by worry and concern for the person they cared for. Other times, participants explained that concentration issues were due to exhaustion from caring.

Some participants reported that caring had impacted on their academic achievement at school because they were unable to concentrate and dedicate time to their studies. Others did feel able to maintain a good school record, although in some cases they felt their maximum potential may not have been reached. One respondent pointed out that maintaining good grades at school may affect the amount of support offered to young adult carers, as it can appear that their caring role is not negatively impacting their life.

*'Had I had a bit more support I would have done better, and mentally from the ages of about 13 to 17 I wasn't okay, but I was doing okay in school, so they didn't really care.'* (Interviewee)

For some respondents, their caring role and their home circumstances made them more motivated to concentrate harder, work more efficiently and strive for higher grades. Of the survey respondents who had already left school, 89% had left with a qualification. The most commonly identified qualifications were GCSEs (see Figure 3.3 below).

**Figure 3.3 Qualifications achieved by young adult carers at school**

Qualification	
GCSEs at A-C	66%
GCSEs at D and below	37%
Level 1 NVQs, SVQs or BTECs/Foundation GNVQ	1%
Level 2 NVQs, SVQs or BTECs/Intermediate GNVQ	1%
Other	7%

*(N59, respondents could select more than one answer)*

### **Impact of caring on attendance**

Over half (57%) of survey respondents reported that their caring responsibility had impacted on their attendance at school.

Some interview and focus group respondents also reported that they missed parts of school. For most, this was to fulfil responsibilities related to their caring role, such as attending medical appointments with the person they cared for. For one respondent, the lack of support from school added to them feeling unwilling to engage fully in their education.

*'I think that was a bit of how I wasn't getting enough support, so I just totally disengaged myself. I was like, "Well, if you're not bothering with me, I'm not going to bother turning up. Or I'll come and then I'll leave halfway through the day".'* (Interviewee)

## **Declaration and support at school**

### **Declaration**

Of all the survey respondents who had caring responsibilities during school years, 68% said the school knew about their caring responsibilities. The qualitative data suggests that in some cases school staff helped respondents to identify their caring status. In other instances, participants were already aware of their caring status, and had approached teachers or school support staff to ask for help. Often, participants only notified the school of their home circumstances when they reached a crisis point.

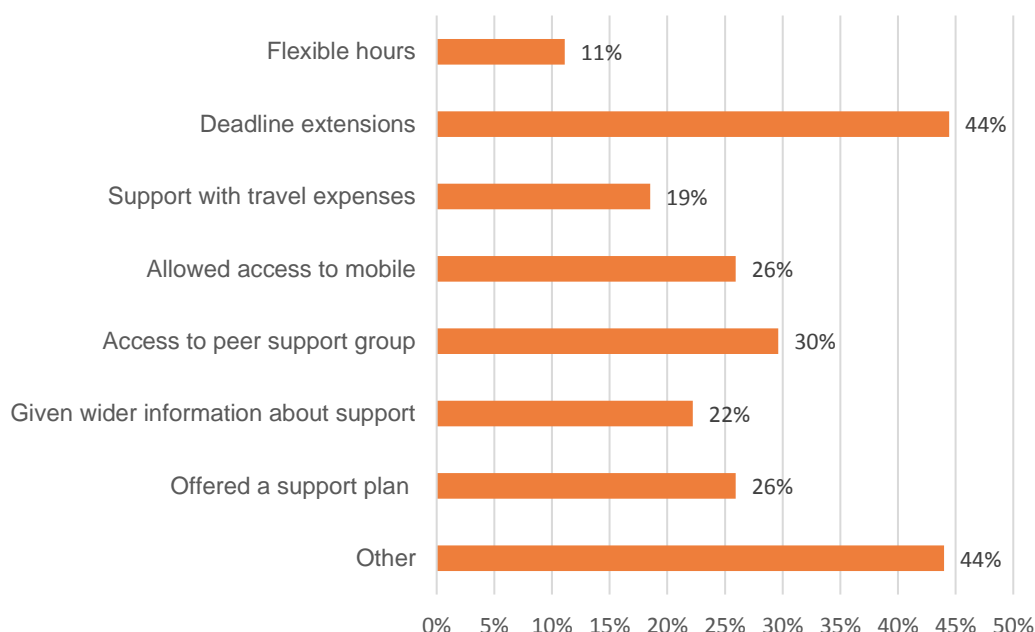
Participants who had not told the school described a number of reasons for their decision. Some had normalised their role as it had been a part of their lives for a significant amount of time. As such, they did not realise that they had anything to declare – but nor did their school identify their caring role. Others felt there was a stigma attached to talking about their role. A minority did not feel a need to declare as their caring role did not cause any disruptions to their education. Those whose caring responsibilities were not known to their school did not receive any internal support or signposting to external support.

### **Support received**

Of those survey respondents who selected that the school knew about their caring, only half were offered support. As Figure 3.4 below shows, survey respondents who received support indicated that the most common adjustment offered was deadline extensions. Just under half of those offered support (44%) selected that they received 'other' types of support, including

free school meals, being given a 'time out pass' to leave lessons when needed and one to one counselling.

**Figure 3.4 Types of support offered at school**



*(N27, respondents could tick more than one answer)*

Some respondents had stories of teachers offering emotional and practical support. For example, one was encouraged by teachers to overcome the embarrassment they felt about their caring role and was given clear information about the support available. Others described practical adjustments such as being allowed to ring home at any point during the day or being granted permission to complete coursework at home and email it to teachers. Another was signposted to external support which helped the participant and their school better understand the issues underpinning their truancy. These adjustments helped young people to balance caring with their school work.

In some cases, teachers who were particularly supportive had lived experience of unpaid caring themselves, which respondents felt made them more able to empathise with their situation. Others noted that form tutors and class teachers were more understanding than senior members of staff.

Those that received support at school, noted that benefits included reduced stress, higher confidence and improved academic achievement. The survey results suggest that receiving support has a positive impact on young adult carers experience of school. Only 4% of those who received support had a 'very bad' experience of school, compared to 19% of those who did not receive support (see Figure 3.5 below).

**Figure 3.5 Support received and experience at school**

Satisfaction	Support	No support
Very good	7%	0%
Quite good	22%	16%
Ok	48%	38%
Quite bad	19%	24%
Very bad	4%	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>37</b>

However, while the positive impact of receiving good support is clear, the qualitative data indicates that the support offered to participants was often inadequate. Some participants reported that their school did little to understand their caring role or make appropriate adjustments. One interviewee explained that despite telling the school about their caring role, there was a lack of recognition and support.

*‘School knew what I was doing and how mum was financially dependent on me, and I was the main carer for my sister... but they didn’t really acknowledge me as a carer... no real support was provided... and it was just like I was keeping everything together even though I was a child, if that makes sense, and they let me do all that with no support.’ (Interviewee)*

Another respondent explained that the lack of interest in their situation made them feel less able to discuss their role and more isolated from potential sources of support.

In other cases, focus group and interview participants reported that their school responded with punitive measures to address issues that arose because of their caring responsibilities, such as poor attendance, lateness or misbehaviour. For example, one respondent was penalised for having an unclean uniform. This indicates that teaching staff were often reacting to the visible behaviour rather than its underlying causes.

The qualitative data also emphasised the importance of the support on offer being consistent and long-term. Many interview and focus groups participants reported that there was an inconsistent and unofficial approach to supporting them. While some teachers endeavoured to understand their circumstances and support them in education, others failed to do so. In some cases, this inconsistent approach was perpetuated by a lack of formal or systematic process to document their caring role. This lack of whole-school approaches resulted in some respondents having to repeatedly explain the reasons behind their behaviour, many of whom found this lack of discretion uncomfortable. For example, one focus group participant who needed to be in regular contact with their mother reported not feeling comfortable asking for permission to leave lessons in front of peers. A survey respondent also explained that the support they were offered had been ‘half hearted’ and ‘ad hoc’.

Other participants found that their school offered little in the way of internal support once they had been referred to an external service. For example, one respondent’s school recognised that they had caring responsibilities and signposted them to their local young

carers group. However, after this intervention, the school did not provide any follow up support.

## Summary

Overall, young adult carers' experiences of pre-16 education were mixed. While approximately two-fifths had an 'OK' experience, only around a quarter had a 'Very good' or 'Quite good' experience. In comparison, just over a third had a 'Quite bad' or 'Very bad' experience. Some young adult carers felt that the latter years of pre-16 education presented significant challenges as workloads increased, and the pressure of making decisions about future pathways mounted.

The findings show that respondents' caring roles had a negative impact on their concentration, social experience, and attendance at school. Bullying, not having time to spend with friends or feeling guilty when they did, not being able to focus on their work due to worrying about their family member, being too tired to concentrate, and having to miss school to attend medical appointments were common experiences. All of these are likely to impact on young people's friendships and social relationships, development of communication and social skills, and access to social activities which can often support access to employment or further learning opportunities later in life.

While two-thirds of young adult carers declared their caring role at school, the rest did not. This was for a multiplicity of reasons including normalising their role, feeling concerned about the stigma attached to declaration, or not feeling they needed or wanted to declare. Those that did declare were often identified by the school at crisis points.

The survey findings show that only half of those who told their school about their caring responsibilities were offered support. Where support was accessed, young adult carers tended to find it inadequate or inconsistent, often depending on a small number of staff who understood the potential impact of a caring role, rather than being part of a whole-school approach. Support to help young people cope with workload and make decisions about their future pathways is beneficial for any individual. However, given the additional responsibility young adult carers have, support is particularly important at this transition stage, and many felt that the lack of support offered at this time compounded their negative experiences of school, resulting from their caring. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that when support was accessed, it had a positive impact on young people's experience at school. Young adult carers felt that support improved their performance at school, reduced stress, and raised confidence.



## 5. Post-16 education

This section explores young adult carers' experiences of post-16 education and how this compared to their experiences of school. In particular, it looks at:

- Respondents' experience of post-16 education.
- Motivations for engaging in post-16 education.
- Impact of caring role on experience of post-16 education.
- Support available in post-16 education.
- Future learning.

### Experience of post-16 education

Fifty-five survey respondents were currently in or had been in some form of post-16 education or training. Of those respondents, four identified their caring hours as equivalent to a 'full-time' job. The majority of young people interviewed had progressed into post-16 education or training. Progression pathways included sixth form or FE colleges, apprenticeships and higher education.

Respondents were studying or had studied a range of subjects. Many of these subjects related to caring professions, including Health and Social Care, Nursery Nursing and Childcare, Counselling, Coaching and Mentoring, Sociology and Psychology, and Medicine. Respondents studied across a range of levels and types (see Figure 4.1 below).

**Figure 4.1 Qualification type**

Qualification type	
GCSEs/Level 2 NVQs & SVQs/BTECs	46%
A-Levels/Level 3 NVQs & SVQs/BTECs/International Baccalaureate	37%
Functional Skills/Level 1 NVQs & SVQs/BTECs	29%
Undergraduate degree	24%
Apprenticeship	5%
Unaccredited/informal learning	3%
Postgraduate degree	3%
Other	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>

*(Respondents could select more than one answer, 3 respondents said they didn't know their qualification type)*

As Figure 4.2 below shows, participants generally had a better experience of post-16 education than they did of school. A far larger proportion said they had a good experience of post-16 education than school (52% compared to 23%) and only a small minority (4%) said

they had had a bad experience of post-16 education, compared to a third who said that school was either quite or very bad.

**Figure 4.2 Experience of post-16 education compared to experience at school**

Experience	School	Post-16 education
Very good	17%	18%
Quite good	6%	34%
Ok	43%	44%
Quite bad	21%	4%
Very bad	13%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>59</b>

Interview and focus group participants gave a number of reasons as to why their experiences of post-16 education had generally been more positive than school. Overall, respondents described post-16 education as more flexible than school, which enabled them to more easily balance their studies and caring role.

*'I think it is a little bit different, because you're quite flexible at university, you don't have to go to lectures if you don't want to and it's quite a lot of self-learning.'* (Interviewee)

Respondents also reported that the wider range of post-16 education options better enabled them to balance their caring role with their studies. For example, some chose to attend a local university as it meant they could fulfil their caring role, save money and engage in education. Another also mentioned that attending a smaller university was beneficial as the atmosphere felt friendlier and more understanding of their needs.

*'I didn't move away, So, I, sort of, found the balance of finding a uni that I could commute to and it was a very, like, college style atmosphere, it was very small... So, all the lecturers knew you on a personal level. So, if I was struggling with work or if I didn't turn up, they'd know why. I didn't have to explain myself all the time.'* (Focus group participant)

However, caring still created barriers for many participants in post-16 education, and in some instances, this was compounded by a lack of support and understanding from the education provider. This aligns with respondents' experiences of pre-16 education.

### **Motivations for engaging in post-16 education**

Interviewees and focus group participants described a range of motivations for engaging in post-16 education. Many could identify an influential and supportive school teacher or other 'role model' who had boosted their confidence and aspirations. For example, one respondent felt that the support from their tutor at college made them realise they were capable of progressing into higher education.

*'At that time, I felt really down, and it gave me such a boost. It was the time where they kicked me out of the course, and the helper, she is the one that*

*told me, you know what, you should do this... I learnt so much in seven months, and I had so much support and I am so grateful for it.'* (interviewee)

Others were inspired by friends who had gone onto further or higher education. One respondent started helping a friend with their university work which made them realise they would be able to study at a higher level.

*'I saw my friend who was at university and she would come back, and she would have coursework and I would be doing it for her and I thought, okay, if I am doing her coursework it is not that difficult, I could go to uni and that is how I started off.'* (Interviewee)

Some respondents were motivated to learn because of their own passion for a particular subject. For example, one participant was interested in history and people, and so decided to study archaeology. For some, practical limitations such as the importance of studying near to home outweighed their interests. For example, one respondent chose not to study their desired course as it was too far away from home and another reported applying to a 'less prestigious' university closer to home. A respondent who had decided to move away to study dropped out of the course when their cared for family member's health deteriorated.

Some felt that caring had positively influenced their post-16 education choices. For example, one participant chose a course in Neuroscience and Psychology to better understand their sister's health condition, and to gain a qualification that would allow them to pursue a career researching the condition.

### **Impact of caring role on education**

For many interviewees and focus group participants, their caring role caused disruptions to their studies, resulting in high absenteeism or underperformance. In some instances, young adult carers were informed that because of these issues, they could not continue with their course. These participants felt that there was a lack of awareness about what it meant to be a young adult carer on the part of their education provider.

*'I missed the whole year and I found it very unfair... because I worked so hard and then all of a sudden I was told, "Oh, you have too many absences and I am sorry, try again next year" and I missed the whole thing, I missed the whole year.'* (Interviewee)

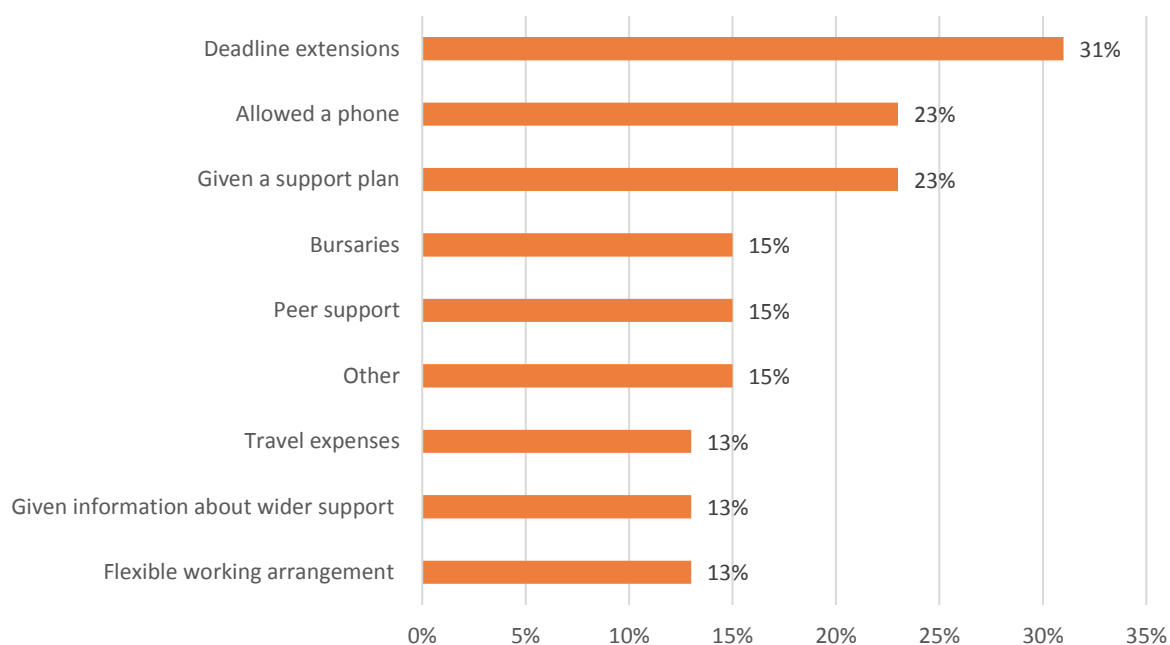
For several respondents, their caring role impacted so significantly on their studies that they dropped out of their course. Some explained that they felt this would have been avoidable if they had been offered greater flexibility and support by their provider. Caring during college was particularly difficult for those who struggled with their own mental or physical health. In one case, a respondent attributed their anxiety and depression with the challenge of trying to balance college and their caring role.

*'I was studying Psychology, Sociology, English Literature Level 3, English Language Level 3, then I was also retaking my GCSE maths plus being a carer at the same time and, in the end, it just got way too much for me and I ended up having a mental breakdown. I started suffering with anxiety and then I just stopped. I had to stop college because it just, basically, broke me down. It was just too much for my brain to handle at once.'* (Interviewee)

## Support

Despite having a more positive experience, only one in five of the survey respondents who answered questions about post-16 education were offered support by their education provider. As with school, the most commonly offered adjustment in post-16 education was deadline extensions (see Figure 4.3 below). Over 15% of survey respondents were offered a support plan or allowed access to their phone so they could be easily contacted by the person they cared for. Interviewees reported accessing a range of support during their time in post-16 education. This included academic/course-related support, mental health, employment and career related support, support linked to their caring role, and financial support. Specific examples given included flexible and understanding teaching staff, the introduction of a 'carers card' to enable discrete declaration and identification, and holistic mental health support that took into account both the pressures faced in education and their circumstances as a carer, and the relationship between these.

**Figure 4.3 Percentage of young adult carers offered support type**



*N38, (number of those in FE who were offered support). Respondents could select more than one answer.*

Similar to respondents' experiences of pre-16 education, support in further education and higher education settings often came from individual members of staff rather than a formal organisational policy. For example, one young person explained that a lecturer offered them flexibility and understanding.

*'I had just one lecturer who understood my situation and I didn't have to go into every lecture with him. So, I had one module which I didn't need to go to every lecture because he understood I was caring and had a lot of things to do.'* (Interviewee)

Another participant described how one teacher had offered them extra time and support with academic work as well as emotional support, which then encouraged them to declare their caring responsibilities to wider staff.

*'I went and did my access course to college, my teacher then was absolutely fantastic. I really struggled, I failed quite a bit. He actually came in, in the Summer, in his own time, so I could re-submit, and he could give me help with things. He was fantastic, and I think that's then when I got my confidence about things and kind of being like, "Right, I'm going to tell people about my mum".'* (Interviewee)

Some respondents had benefitted from their carers service working with local providers to improve the support available to young adult carers. Participants in one focus group described how their young adult carer group leader worked closely with a further education college in the local area to introduce a young adult carer card. This enabled students to tell staff about their role discretely and access financial support when needed.

Some respondents who experienced mental health issues accessed support such as counselling or therapy, both through their education provider and externally. While this was beneficial in terms of addressing mental health conditions, one respondent explained that the counsellor offered limited support for her caring role.

*'Then the counsellor was also helping me on the side because I was that unwell. I think she acknowledged that I was a carer, but she didn't mention a lot about getting carers support, but in terms of my mental health she was really supportive and flexible.'* (Interviewee)

Conversely, another respondent found that counselling, accessed through their college, provided them with time and space to address their mental health issues as well as support to help them in their decision-making process about their progression route.

*'[College] were the first people who gave me some counselling, which is when I started to figure out that, actually, the reason I feel this way is because I'm quite angry about being a carer, back then. So, then they supported me to have a year out to try and figure myself out, that's what needed to happen. Then, I decided to go to uni.'* (Focus group participant)

### **Lack of support and understanding**

The majority of survey respondents did not access any support in post-16 education. For some, this was because they felt they did not require additional support. However, many interviewees and focus group participants explained that they would have liked to receive support but were unable to access or engage with any support on offer. As with respondents' experiences at school, this was often due to a lack of understanding amongst staff about how caring responsibilities may impact on educational experience. Some respondents made their college and university staff aware of their caring responsibilities, but found that little was done to address their needs. In fact, sometimes teaching staff punished young adult carers for bad behaviour, absenteeism or poor results, rather than addressing the root causes, which were often related to their caring role.

*'They didn't really think about it; it was just like so you either do your college work or you don't, you know, I don't think they kind of thought about the reasons behind different stuff and so yes it was difficult and to be honest I didn't really like college but I got through it.'* (Interviewee)

One participant explained that their university emphasised that studying should take priority and did not understand that caring needed to take precedence. They explained that while individual lecturers were understanding, the university policy did not take caring into account as a reason for absence.

*'The university were very much like, and they can do this at uni level, if you cannot prioritise your degree, why are you here?... It was pretty much their approach through my entire degree so something would happen with my sister and I'd have to travel 300 miles to see her in hospital for one appointment, and subsequently I'd sleep through my lecture the next day and I'd try to explain this to them but they'd be like, "You have two options, you can take a leave of absence or you can essentially work harder."... It was difficult because a lot of my lecturers I was really close with, they all completely understood and knew what was happening but by uni policy there were only so many options they could give me.'* (Interviewee)

Some participants had opted for courses with few contact hours or part-time courses so as to better balance education with caring. However, one respondent on a part-time course reported being excluded from accessing formal support at university because of the lack of regular contact hours. Many participants emphasised that even a part-time course was difficult to balance with caring, particularly as caring hours are often unpredictable and based on the changing needs of the cared-for person.

### **Future learning**

An overwhelming majority (91%) of survey respondents who had participated in post-16 education would consider future learning. The data shows no correlation between this and whether respondents received support in post-16 education, nor between respondents' overall experience of post-16 education and their desire for future learning. This may be due to the small sample size of young adult carers who answered both questions, or it could suggest that young adult carers' desire to learn is not determined by previous experience.

Some respondents explained that future learning was required to achieve their career goals.

*'I would consider learning in the future because I need to gain further qualifications to become specialist in a particular career and to increase my income.'* (Survey respondent)

Others enjoyed learning and wanted to build upon the knowledge they had already acquired.

*'I always love to learn.'* (Survey respondent)

*'I wish to widen and strengthen my knowledge in the future, through another course work or work-related training. There is always more to learn and you are also able to improve your standard and understanding of work.'* (Survey respondent)

Some participants wanted another opportunity to learn in the future because they felt that their current caring responsibilities had prevented them from fully engaging with their studies.

*'I am currently in school working on my undergraduate degree and find that many opportunities are missed because of my caring role. I do not have time or energy to be as involved as I'd like.'* (Survey respondent)

However, respondents anticipated barriers to future learning, with many saying it would have to depend on finances, time and travel distance.

*'I am interested in a master's degree but it will depend on time and funding.'* (Survey respondent)

*'I would consider learning in the future but it would depend on money and travel.'* (Survey respondent)

## Summary

Overall, young adult carers had a more positive experience of post-16 education than pre-16 education. Key reasons for this included more flexibility and more choice of education provision within further education and higher education. These factors enabled young adult carers to better balance their caring role with their studies and limit its negative impact on their education.

However, young adult carers continued to face challenges in these educational contexts. Similar to the findings from pre-16 education, respondents said their caring role affected their attendance and performance. This often affected their progression through their course, and in some cases young adult carers dropped out of their programme, either voluntarily or because their learning provider said they could no longer continue.

Findings suggest that a 'trusted other' or supportive 'role model' can be a significant influencing factor to motivate young adult carers into post-16 education, especially for those who lack confidence in their capabilities. Many young adult carers are also motivated to pursue a subject area that relates to their caring role, and respondents tended to be studying courses in a care-related subject. Practical considerations such as distance from home are also important influencing factors for some young adult carers, which tended to limit their post-16 options.

As in pre-16 education, the findings suggest that young adult carers' experiences of support in post-16 education are inconsistent. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that their provider was aware of their caring role, but only three-fifths of these received support. For some, this was because they felt it was not needed, but others reported a lack of awareness amongst staff and a resulting lack of support on offer. Experiences of good support were often dependent on the understanding of support staff and tutors. Therefore, while there are cases of individual teaching staff providing beneficial support, this research found little evidence of formalised or systematic support within post-16 education providers.

Despite this, the overwhelming majority of young adult carers appear to be keen to learn in the future in order to achieve their career goals and make up for lost opportunities resulting from their caring. However, many anticipated that they would experience continuing barriers to engaging in learning because of their caring responsibilities.

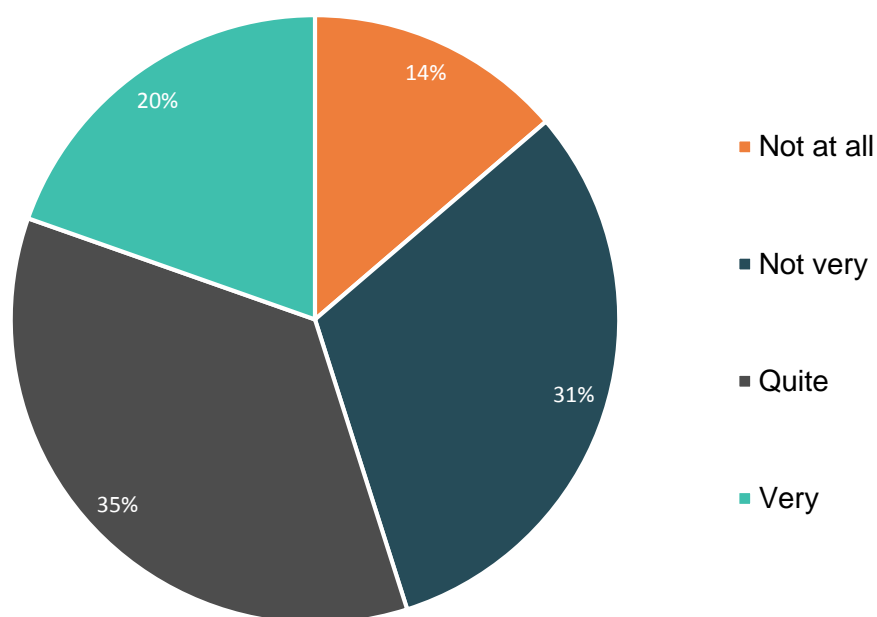
## 6. Careers Advice

Effective careers advice can play a key role before and during transition periods and when young people are thinking about progression pathways into further education, training and employment. This section draws on the survey and qualitative data to explore young adult carers' experiences of careers advice.

In total, 43% of the survey respondents had had a session with a careers adviser to discuss their plans about future education, training and employment options. The qualitative data found that a few participants had accessed careers advice through school, while others had received advice through a post-16 education provider or an external service.

Just over half of survey respondents (55%) found their careers session either 'quite' or 'very' useful (35% and 20% respectively). The rest felt that it was 'not very' or 'not at all' useful (31% and 14% respectively). This was mirrored in the qualitative data. Many participants had only had group careers advice sessions and found this too generic.

**Figure 5.1 How useful respondents found the career session**



(N51)

Of the 51 respondents who had had a careers session, just over half (52%) discussed their caring responsibilities, while just below half (48%) did not. There was no difference in how useful respondents found the session between those who had discussed caring and those who had not. Of the 27 respondents who discussed their caring responsibilities with their careers adviser, only a quarter were offered additional support.

The qualitative data suggests that, in many cases, careers advisers were not able to offer advice about how to manage caring with employment. Some interviewees felt that careers advisers did not recognise the skills and experience they had gained from their caring role as valuable to employers.

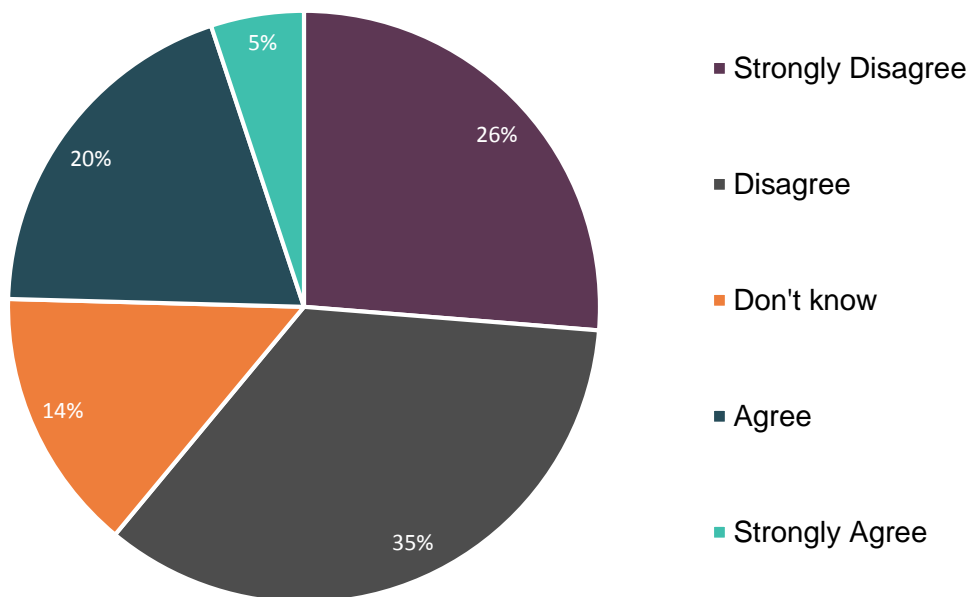


*'I don't think careers advisers, especially when I was at school, I don't think they really like went "oh well, [caring] is a really good thing, you know, that could be really useful in your sort of life"... [she] didn't really know what she could do, you know, how she could support me as a carer.'* (Interviewee)

Participants also commonly found their careers advice too prescriptive. For example, some were only informed about and supported with applications to their local sixth form, rather than being asked about their aspirations. Others felt they were pushed towards one education option, such as university, at the expense of others. Over three-fifths of all survey respondents (61%)<sup>38</sup>, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'careers advice was tailored towards my needs as a carer' (see Figure 5.2 below).

*'I saw like a careers adviser from uni but I didn't really find it that helpful... it sounds bad but I just don't think that a lot of careers advice really did tailor to young carers and young adult carers, you know, I think it's all just focused on well, you know, at school it's like "right okay you need to go into education" and once you're in uni it's like "right, time to get a job", you know, like I don't think it really thinks about the other stuff.'* (Interviewee)

**Figure 5.2 'Careers advice was tailored to my needs as a carer'**



(N118)

Based on their experience of receiving narrow and prescriptive advice, some young adult carers emphasised the importance of holistic careers advice. For example, one participant had a careers session with Jobcentre Plus. They felt their adviser was not understanding of how their mental health had impacted on their ability to secure or sustain employment. This respondent has since started accessing support from a service which provides both employment and mental health support through one to one coaching.

<sup>38</sup> Including those who had not had a specific careers advice session.

*'They provide not just support getting into employment, because I was like, 'I don't need help doing applications and stuff because I can get the interviews,' but sometimes I'm not very motivated because my mood's too low, it's more support needed when I get in work, and they can provide a year's support, kind of, coaching and contact when I'm in work and stuff like that, and advise.'* (Interviewee)

Some participants had attended careers fairs, and this had helped them to explore the range of opportunities available to them. Many had received support with transitions into post-16 education from their young adult carer support worker. These workers were better placed to offer support about how to balance caring with work; how going into work may affect their benefits; and how to recognise caring skills as transferable to a work context<sup>39</sup>.

Over half (57%) of the survey respondents had not had a careers advice session. For many, they felt that this had prevented them from viewing the skills they had accrued from caring as valuable in an employment setting. For others, this lack of careers support meant that they were unsure how to frame these existing skills in an attractive and professional manner.

## Summary

The findings show that the majority of young adult carers have not received careers advice. Less than half of participants had accessed formal careers guidance sessions with a qualified adviser, and only half of these respondents found the sessions useful. Around half of respondents who had had a careers advice session discussed their caring role with their adviser. Data on whether discussing their caring role during the session had an impact on the usefulness of the session is inconclusive. However, the survey results show that very few young people who discussed their caring role were offered additional support as a result.

Only two-fifths of survey respondents felt that their careers advice had been tailored to their needs as a carer. Qualitative data suggests that careers guidance often takes a one-size-fits-all approach that does not tend to take young people's caring roles into account, and that careers advisers lacked the skills and knowledge to provide advice on managing care and employment. Therefore, advice given can be prescriptive or generic, rather than based on individual needs. There is a suggestion that holistic, person-centred careers advice is more beneficial. Evidence suggests that young adult carer support workers are providing this to some extent. Providing opportunities to attend careers fairs is also cited as effective practice as it enables young adult carers to gain information on a range of transition options.

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<sup>39</sup> This support is discussed in the 'additional support' chapter.

## 7. Carer-specific support

Carers services offer a range of broad and holistic support to young adult carers which can support their transition into further education and employment. Local authorities, health services and other organisations can also play a role in ensuring that young adult carers are supported to achieve in learning and work.

This chapter explores:

- The types of support young adult carers received from carers services.
- Reasons for not accessing support from carers services.
- Carer's Assessments.
- Other additional support.

### Types of support accessed from carers services

Many interview and focus group participants accessed support from carers services. These respondents felt that accessing support around employment and education from a specific service for young adult carers was important as other public service professionals were less able to understand their needs, barriers and aspirations.

Many of the focus group participants and some of the interview respondents were active members of their local young adult carers group. They all explained that there was a wide range of support on offer to meet a range of needs. The types of support on offer included:

- Emotional support.
- Support with education and employment.
- Financial support.
- Advocacy activities.

### Emotional support

Many respondents accessed emotional support from their local young adult carers group or one-to-one from their support worker. For one respondent, engaging with their carers group gave them a chance to meet other carers who had achieved their aspirations. This motivated them and gave them confidence to do the same. One respondent gained motivation to sustain engagement with their college course having been able to discuss the pros and cons with their support worker.

*'If didn't have that support I would really struggle mentally and emotionally, I would have dropped out of college by now, I'd have been at home just caring and stuck looking at the four walls, and not doing much. Even going to the groups helps me with my confidence, and being encouraged to get out and do stuff.'* (Interviewee)

For many, emotional guidance and support from their carers service provided a space to address challenges as and when they come up. This support helped to mitigate against

major disruption to work and studying, by ensuring issues were addressed before they reached crisis point.

Respondents also explained that their carers group offered opportunities for social activities such as day trips and evenings out. This was particularly beneficial for those who lacked more informal sources of support such as family member or friends. These activities also allowed for respite from caring. For example, one respondent explained how participating in their local carers group gave them a chance to relax, take their mind off caring and feel 'normal'.

*'Just going out and just doing activities is really fun, I don't get a chance to do that, and quite a few other people don't either. So, it's really nice to be able to have something to look forward to, even if it is just an hour, it's an hour of feeling a bit more normal... There are other people that are going through similar stuff as well, so they understand, so that's good.'*

(Interviewee)

Affording young adult carers opportunities to engage in leisure activities and hobbies also provides an opportunity for them to explore interests which may translate into career aspirations. Additionally, this time helps to provide a much-needed break from caring and work, which helps young adult carers to cope with the emotional strain that results from caring. In turn, improved emotional wellbeing may make transitions into employment easier.

### **Support with education and employment**

All the participants who had accessed carers services reported that they were offered support in making decisions about employment or further education. Some had been given practical support with applications for employment and further or higher education. Others had been taken to college and university open days and careers fairs such as WorldSkills UK LIVE (formerly The Skills Show). Some participants explained that they had accessed CV writing support and opportunities to develop interview skills and techniques through their carers group. Often young adult carers had been shown how to present their caring skills as transferable to the workplace.

Overall, this support helped participants to make decisions about the steps they would like to take in the future. For example, one respondent worked closely with their young adult carer support worker to apply for an apprenticeship. They felt encouraged to draw on their experiences of caring in their interview to evidence the skills they had developed.

Once in work, many had continued to receive support from their carers service. One participant had been experiencing issues with an employer. They were given advice by their young adult carer support worker to help them understand their rights and entitlements in the workplace which helped them to address the challenges.

*'They have helped me when all that stuff happened with my old apprenticeship, she sat down and we went through everything I was entitled to and what they were and weren't allowed to do... If I didn't have that support I wouldn't really have known what to do next after that all happened.'*

(Interviewee)

In contrast, an interviewee who was not engaged with their local carers service felt that it was difficult to find information on employment rights for young adult carers.

*'In terms of talking to your employer about stuff like that, no, just nothing at all, like, literally nothing. It's just not available, or legal rights.'* (Interviewee)

### **Financial support**

Some respondents had received financial support from their carers service. This support covered expenses such as travel costs or college meals, allowing them to better balance studies or work with caring.

*'There have been situations like when I first got the apprenticeship, because I wasn't getting paid in any other way, I couldn't afford a bus pass. So, at the Young Carers they managed to get me a bus pass, which was nice because that then meant that I could get to work.'* (Interviewee)

Carers services were often able to provide young adult carers with information about grants and funding for further or higher education. For example, one participant received support to apply for grants to cover the cost of a master's course, while another received a grant to cover the learning materials needed for their apprenticeship.

Carers services also often provided information on how employment would impact young adult carers' benefit entitlements.

### **Advocacy activities**

Respondents from one of the focus groups reported that they were actively involved in campaigning activities to raise awareness about the experiences of young adult carers in their local area and to encourage identification. This included writing a guide for colleges and schools on how best to support young carers and young adult carers. They also participated in a live radio discussion with the county mayor. In many cases, this advocacy work had helped young adult carers to set caring in the context of local and national policy. For some, this inspired them to work in this area, with one participant aiming to go into academia and study caring from this perspective. Others found the advocacy work helped them to improve their public speaking and communication skills and broadened their social horizons through opportunities to meet more people.

Those that took part in advocacy work were also often more likely to know their rights and entitlements in terms of employment and feel empowered to hold employers and learning providers to account.

### **Reasons for not accessing support**

Some interview participants had accessed support from a carers service at some point in their lives but had since disengaged. Disengagement was for a range of reasons including age limits on access to support, not having enough time to engage, not feeling confident enough to engage, or because the individual's support needs had changed or reduced. Other interview participants had never accessed support. While some of these individuals felt they did not need support, many had been unable to access much-needed support because of a lack of information about available provision, or a lack of provision in their local area for carers of their age.

Those not engaged with a service were often aware that there was support available but experienced barriers to accessing this. Barriers included not feeling that they had sufficient information about the support available, that services had not actively 'reached out' to them, and lacking time to engage. Others were not engaged with support because they were no longer a carer.

Some faced age-related barriers. For example, one respondent found that there was no age appropriate support in their local area and that carer support groups offered activities which were aimed at older carers, such as knitting. Another, who was 30 years old, reported that they were no longer eligible to access support for young adult carers as it ended at 25, while others reported that their local carers group does not offer young adult carer-specific support to those aged over 18. These respondents were often concerned about becoming cut off from their support network; one which may be particularly beneficial during transition stages and during decision making processes. However, one respondent, whose support officially stopped at 16, found that their group was very flexible and allowed them to continue accessing the support aimed at younger carers. An older respondent had also experienced this at the age of 25, when official support stopped. They had since become a young adult carer support worker which meant they had access to informal support from colleagues who also had experiences of caring.

### Support from other services

Some participants emphasised the need for other support services to complement carers services. For example, one young person struggled with mental health problems. They felt that they were given inadequate support by the NHS, and often the responsibility was placed on their carers service to offer this support.

*'I was saying to my carer support worker the other day that, they know all the stuff going on at home and what I have to deal with and do, but the mental health system's always been like, from a young age, 'You've just got to deal with it.' They can't help, and they're not interested, leave it to carer support... I've got mental health, but then they don't realise how caring also can make it a lot worse at times. Not just that, obviously other stuff can make it worse, but it still impacts it a lot.'* (Interviewee)

Others echoed this, with many saying that although they had received good support from their carers service, they had less success with accessing other specialist support.

### Carer's Assessment

A significant majority (62%) of survey respondents had not received, or were unaware that they had received, a Carer's Assessment. Similarly, most interview respondents said that they had never had a Carer's Assessment. Reasons for not having one included that they had never been informed that they were eligible for one or were not aware that it existed. Unpublished research<sup>40</sup> that drew on support workers' views of young adult carers' experiences in Wales found that young adult carers may have had a Carer's Assessment without knowing. This is due to the word 'assessment' not necessarily being used by support

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<sup>40</sup> Aylward, N., Lees, C., Wolkind, R., and Klenk, H. (Forthcoming) 'Young adult carers in Wales'.

service professionals or the process not being clearly explained to the individual. This may be one reason why the proportion was so high in these findings.

A few respondents said that they were aware that Carer's Assessments exist but that they did not feel that they would benefit from it. Meanwhile, some who had never had one were wary about the assessment. For example, one respondent said that assessments and government-related processes make them feel anxious. Another reported that they were concerned about the impact it would have on the support they currently access. These perspectives indicate a lack of clarity about the process and potential outcomes of an assessment.

A much smaller proportion of survey respondents (38%) said that they had had a Carer's Assessment. Of these, almost three quarters found it very or quite useful, while the remainder found it not very or not at all useful. This was also reflected in the qualitative findings, with participants saying that, when they had had a Carer's Assessment, it was quite useful. For example, one respondent accessed financial and respite support as a result of their assessment. They received access to a carers support budget which enabled them to buy useful household items and gave them the option of taking a holiday.

*'In financial ways, they did help me, and they said that I can apply every year or something, and they also told me that if I need to go on a holiday that they would support me as well, they would help me with like £100 or something.'*  
(Interviewee)

Another participant was put in touch with the crisis team as a result of their Carer's Assessment. This team were able to deliver their sister's medication, relieving this respondent of that responsibility. This was helpful as they were also in full-time education, so they were able to dedicate more time to their studies.

Some interview respondents had requested a Carer's Assessment but had not yet had one due to a lack of response from social services. One respondent reported that despite contacting social services to arrange a Carer's Assessment on multiple occasions, they had not heard back.

*'I've said this loads of times and I rang social services last week, and I've rang social services for the last three years actually. I rang social services before [my step-dad] died, because I knew it was going to be inevitable. I knew it was going to be inevitable, that was going to happen, and I was kind of trying to get the support before it happened and no support whatsoever.'*  
(Interviewee)

Only one respondent who had had a Carer's Assessment said that they discussed education and employment during the assessment. This respondent spoke with their assessor about how they thought they would cope with the transition from school to university. The respondent found this quite therapeutic, but at the time of the interview they had not received a clear outcome of the assessment and or any follow-up support.

## Summary

This chapter has explored how support from carers services often better meets young adult carers' transition needs than careers advice sessions or support from other services, including local authority Carer's Assessments.

Carers services offer a range of support to young adult carers, including peer support and social activities, emotional support, practical support around education and employment, and financial support. Many also empower young adult carers through opportunities to engage in advocacy activities. This holistic and individualised support results in a range of positive outcomes for young adult carers, which in turn increases their chances of making successful transitions into education, training and employment. For example, this support enables young adult carers to better understand their rights in work and increase their confidence to challenge employers if difficulties occur. Support to access grants and advice on benefit entitlements can remove financial barriers that young adult carers can face when thinking about pursuing further education. Emotional and social support can also reduce the emotional impact of caring on education and employment, provide opportunities to explore interests outside of caring, and provide role models to increase young adult carers' motivation to engage in education, training and employment.

However, there are barriers to accessing support specific to young adult carers. Often, these relate to gaps in local support for young adult carers, or for young adult carers of a certain age. Other barriers included a lack of awareness of the support available. This suggests that support services could be more prevalent and more promotional activity may need to take place in order to reach the young adult carers in need of support. However, recent cuts to health and social care have impacted on carers services' budgets, restricting their ability to both identify young adult carers and provide the level of support they need.

Where young adult carers accessed support from other specialised services, findings indicate that they were not necessarily appropriate for their needs. This points to a need for a more joined up approach between statutory and carers services, in order to improve identification of young adult carers and provide them with holistic support.

The majority of respondents had not had a Carer's Assessment. While the reasons for this are not certain, it is likely there are communication issues between social service professionals and young adult carers. Overall, those that did have an assessment found it beneficial in terms of accessing financial support and respite, which could support transitions into education and employment. However, none of the young adult carers involved in our research appear to have been provided with specific career-related support as a result of their Carer's Assessment.



## 8. Searching and applying for work

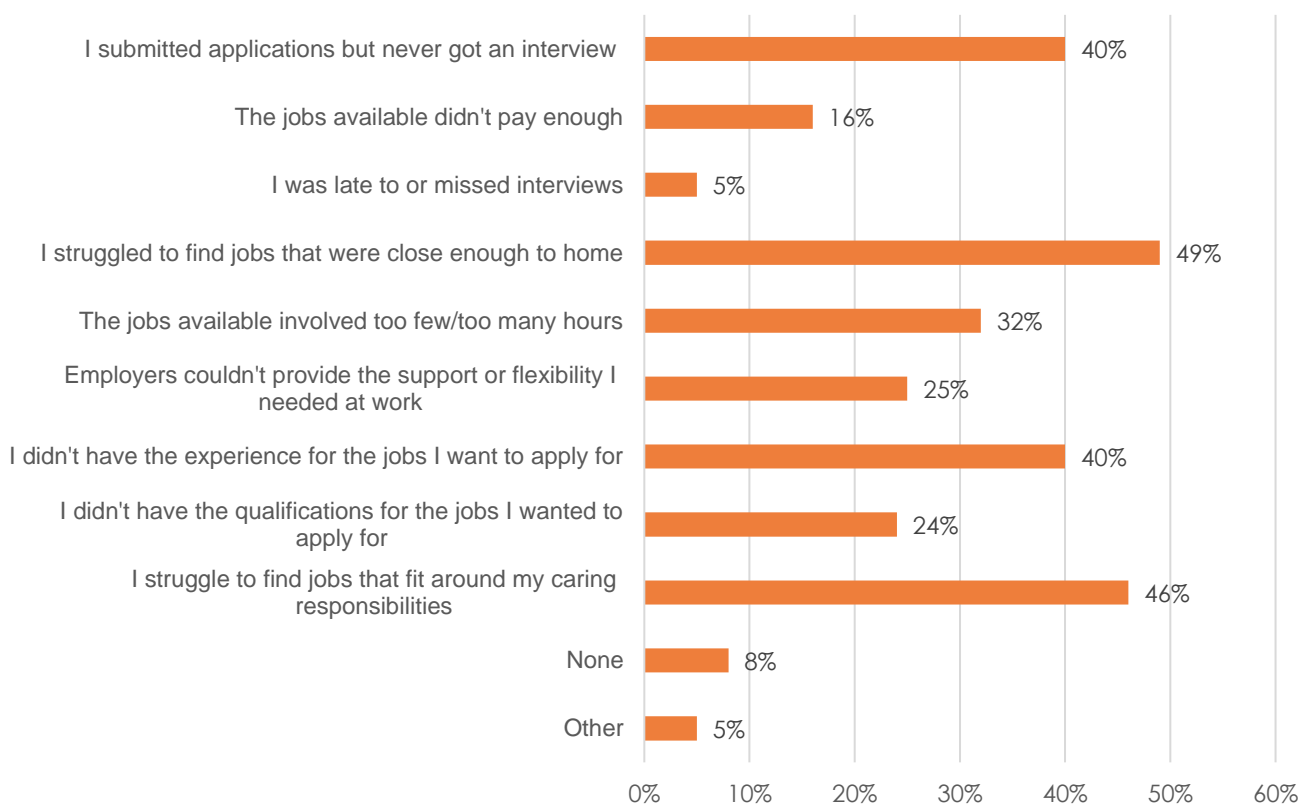
Young adult carers experience a range of challenges when looking for work, many of which are the direct result of having caring responsibilities. In total, 97 survey respondents (82%) had looked for work. This chapter explores:

- Participants' experiences of looking for work.
- Factors affecting decisions about previous and current employment.
- The influence of caring on participants' decisions about work.
- Participants' views of the transferable skills gained through caring.

### Experiences of looking for work

Those that had looked for work had experienced a range of challenges. The location of jobs is an important factor for young adult carers to consider when searching for work, as it may affect how quickly they can reach the person they care for in an emergency. This is reflected in Figure 7.4 below, which shows that almost half (49%) of young adult carers who had looked for work, experienced challenges with finding jobs close to home. A similar proportion (46%) also struggled to find jobs that they could fit around their caring responsibilities, while almost a third (32%) said that available jobs did not have a suitable number of hours for them. In addition, 40% of young adult carers who had applied for work did not have the experience for the jobs they wanted to apply for, and the same proportion had submitted applications, but were not asked for an interview.

**Figure 7.4 Challenges experienced by respondents when applying for work**



(N97, respondents could select more than one answer)

Of the 21 survey respondents who had not looked for work, eight said they would not have the time to work because of caring responsibilities, seven said the travel costs would be too much, five said they did not have the experience needed to get the job they wanted and five said that they did not have the qualifications needed to get the job they wanted.

Many of the interview and focus group participants had experienced similar difficulties in applying for work. Some had been limited by the need to find jobs that were close to home.

*'It has to be rather close so that if something does happen, then I can get home rather easily.'* (Interviewee)

Others said that regular and fixed shifts or rotas were important, as this meant that caring could be planned around work, and alternative arrangements made for the cared for person when they clashed. Some interview respondents reported feeling 'locked out' of permanent or secure roles that would enable them to be more financially comfortable and have more opportunities for progression. Because of their caring role, they felt that they could only apply for zero-hours or part-time roles which allowed them the flexibility to continue caring. This limited the range of jobs they felt able to apply for.

*'I wish I didn't have a zero-hours contract, but then more-so for prospects in life, such as mortgages and stuff. I've now got a mortgage, but I really struggle with the zero-hours, but it's better for me, because if I know that mum needs something, then actually, I'm not tied to doing any hours... if I had 37.5 hours job and it was this day, this day, this day, I don't know if they would be as flexible.'* (Interviewee)

Another respondent felt that the types of jobs they could apply for was limited by their need to stay fit and healthy in order to fulfil their caring role. They explained that any job that involved potential risk to their physical capability was out of their scope.

*'It's the type of job. If it was something that could put me in a serious harm's way, so, something that was, like, a very physical job, I can't afford to hurt myself, because I've got other things to be doing. Like, not just my job or college, like, looking after someone else. I can't put myself in, like, harm's way.'* (Interviewee)

For others, caring had disrupted their education, and this meant that often they did not have the qualifications to apply for the jobs they want. Some explained that they could not afford to address this by undertaking training in the area they wanted to work in.

Some interviewees and focus group participants reported that their caring responsibilities meant that they did not have enough time to look for work. One respondent reported that their adviser at Jobcentre Plus understood the time-consuming nature of caring and made relevant adjustments in order to avoid them being financially penalised. This enabled the respondent to balance their caring responsibilities with their job search.

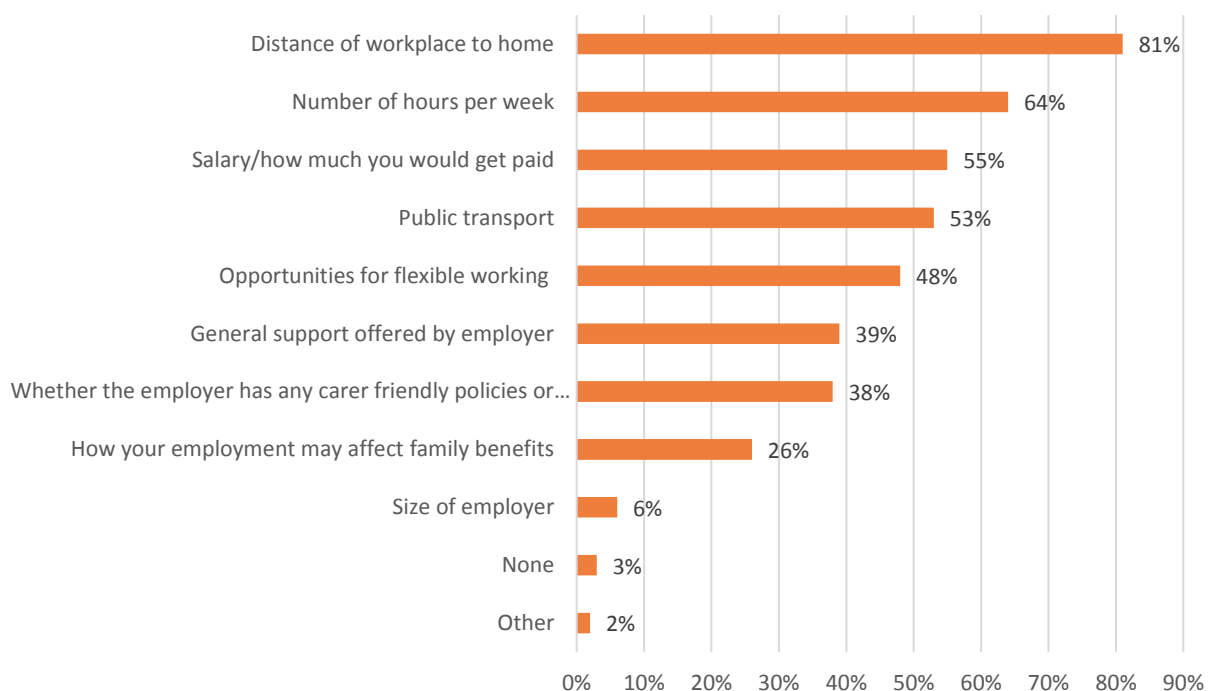
*'You have to do a certain amount of job search but because of the caring stuff they know that sometimes I can't hit the target every week but they're understanding with it.'* (Interviewee)

However, others who were not able to look for work because of caring felt that the full-time nature of caring was not well understood by Jobcentre advisers.

## Factors affecting decisions about previous and current employment

Participants in both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research reported a range of factors that had affected their decisions about employment. As Figure 7.5 below shows, the most commonly cited factors that respondents considered when looking for work included the location of the workplace, including its distance from their home (81%), the numbers of hours per week (64%), the salary of the role (55%), public transport links (53%), whether the employer offered flexible working (48%), whether their family's benefits would be affected (26%), and whether the employer had carer-friendly policies or support in place (38%).

**Figure 7.5 Factors affecting respondents' decisions about employment**



*(N97, respondents could select more than one answer)*

### Location of work

Figure 7.5 shows that the most common factor respondents would consider was the distance of their workplace to home (81%). Over half (53%) of survey respondents also cited public transport links as an influential factor in their decision-making process. Location was also commonly cited by interview and focus group participants. It was particularly important for those who relied on public transport or were unable to drive to work. Working close to home was also an important factor as it meant respondents could get home quickly and easily in emergency situations. One respondent explained that they had turned down a better paid role because the location was inconvenient.

*'I did apply for a job... that was more money than what I'm earning now at the part-time job, but because of where it is I wouldn't be able to get there. So, I think location is a big thing for me.'* (Interviewee)

This is one of many examples where practical considerations took precedent over other factors such as interests, progression and pay.

### **Number of hours**

A large proportion (64%) of survey respondents said that they considered the number of hours per week when making decisions about employment. Many interview respondents also took this into consideration.

*'I've seen jobs that I've really liked, but I haven't been able to go for them because they've been full-time. That's not good for me.'* (Interviewee)

Others described having to consider the number of hours for each possible role, and weigh up whether it would be manageable given their caring responsibilities.

*'So, if their contract is, like, twenty plus hours, I have to work out whether that is doable along with college and caring.'* (Interviewee)

### **Flexible working**

Just under half (48%) of survey respondents felt that flexible working was a factor to consider when looking for work. Interview and focus group participants also highlighted this as an important factor when considering employment.

Many wanted flexibility in a role so that they could balance caring with work. Flexibility also helped them to manage the unpredictable nature of caring. Research participants described needing to be able to 'drop' their work in case of emergency. Many found that flexible roles were more prevalent and easier to secure in certain sectors, such as retail, charity, and health and social care.

*'It was convenient for me because I could go there twice a week, or I could go in once a week and they didn't have a problem with that, I could go any time I wanted.'* (Interviewee)

Others felt that this was only possible in voluntary roles – where they could gain experience but were not paid and so felt less obliged to come in if they had to look after the person they cared for.

A challenge in securing flexible working was identified as having the confidence to ask employers to make adjustments to meet their needs. One young adult carer explained that they felt scared to ask for the flexibility they need in a job, and this made them cautious about starting work.

*'It is really scaring me that maybe if I go for a day job they won't really accept the flexibility, or they won't accept to give me the chance, you know? It is a really scary move, I want to do it, but I am very scared.'* (Interviewee)

In one instance, a participant job-shared with their sister. This worked effectively as they were both able to perform their paid role well, as well as carry out their caring duties.

*'I've always worked with my sister and I think, I probably always will, because we can make it work between us and because I think we're both quite skilled at what we do... she can be at work when I can be at - so she's at work today, I'm not at work... So, if there was anything wrong with mum, there's someone free... But, we've got to make sure that these plans are in place at all times.'* (Interviewee)

Although this participant was pleased with the job-sharing system they had worked out, it limited their employment choices to employers who were willing to hire both them and their sister.

For many, flexible roles were only available as zero-hours contracts. There were few instances where their role was both flexible and secure. Moreover, while flexibility has benefits, some participants emphasised that irregular shift patterns can act as a barrier to work.

*'When I was doing shift work, it's really hard because you can't get into a schedule. Obviously, being a carer, you need to be in a schedule. So, when they wouldn't agree to, like, a regular rota, that was really difficult because then I wouldn't know, like, on Sunday, what I was doing the following week. Then, that's hard to actually be a good carer and actually be able to go to work as well.'* (Focus group participant)

Many participants said they needed regular fixed shifts with advanced rotas so that they could manage their daily caring activities around work, but at the same time they needed to be able to spontaneously take time off for hospital appointments or emergencies. These kinds of roles were hard to come by and often depended on individual managers understanding their caring responsibilities.

### **Financial considerations**

Just over half (55%) of survey respondents said that salary was a consideration when applying for jobs in the past. Many interview and focus group participants agreed, stating that their main reasons for securing employment was to earn more money, to financially support their family, to be more financially independent or to save money for the future.

*'Just to have some more freedom, was one of the main [motivations] and to be able to do something that is just for me and to have money without having to rely on my family, and then sort of that would help me in the future with going to uni with budgeting and things like that.'* (Interviewee)

Most of those respondents who felt money was an important consideration were working in 'stop gap' jobs rather than in jobs they aspired to pursue as a career.

Just over a quarter (26%) of survey respondents cited the potential impact of employment on their welfare benefits as a consideration. The majority of interview participants were not in receipt of welfare support and therefore their entitlement was not a factor to consider when moving into employment. However, those who were receiving financial support such as Carer's Allowance often considered how it would be affected by securing employment. Some explained how moving into work in the past had affected their benefit entitlement.

Many explained that as a young adult carer, they were responsible for financially supporting other family members. One respondent experienced delays in payments when their employment status changed, which pushed their family into a financially precarious situation. When they did engage in full-time work, they found that their wage did not cover their living costs and found that it was not a financially viable option.

*'Even if I get a full-time job, I don't get much money because I'm paying for a full family house, and who are quite financially dependent on me as well.'*  
(Interviewee)

For another, entering an apprenticeship affected their mother's child tax credit contribution. Given the low wage apprentices earn, they found this very challenging.

*'I got an apprenticeship and they stopped all my mum's money for me, so that made her lose a lot of money and now with the new benefits system obviously it's left us in a mess. We hardly have any money... she still gets money for my brother because he's at school, but the money she got for me they stopped because apparently if I get an apprenticeship, I'm basically a working adult [but on an apprentice's] wage, you're not really a working adult, I don't think.'* (Interviewee)

Several respondents were employed on zero-hours contracts which meant their income fluctuated monthly – as did their entitlement to welfare support. One respondent reported having to send their pay slips to their local authority each month to prove that they earned below the threshold for welfare support. This was a complicated process and one which they often forgot to do, given the time-consuming nature of their caring responsibilities. This meant that some respondents were potentially missing out on some of the financial support they were entitled to.

Other respondents had found that entering full-time employment meant their Carer's Allowance was curtailed. For some this was not an important consideration, for others this resulted in financial hardship.

## **The influence of caring on previous and current employment**

Many respondents reported that motivation to pursue their current role stemmed from their experience of caring. They felt that it had opened up opportunities to certain roles, namely those in the caring sector. For many respondents, this meant they secured roles that matched their own lived experience and interests. Positions also often aligned with their educational background, as many had chosen subjects that complemented their caring role. For example, one young adult carer explained that their subject choices throughout education and their previous and current job roles have focussed on mental health, something they have lived experience of.

*'I did mentoring from thirteen, and then I got into youth work stuff, so I've always wanted to do something with children and young people, and then I did psychology at A Level and university, and then most of my roles from then have been with children and young people or within education, and I've got personal experience in mental health, and I also just enjoy the mental health part of psychology.'* (Interviewee)

Another explained that they felt happy working in roles in the caring sector as they felt confident in their ability to perform well.

*'My roles are very much based around caring, or mental health... because I feel comfortable and I know that I can do it well. The thought of doing anything else is just a bit of a minefield; I'm quite happy where I am.'*

(Interviewee)

Others had chosen to work in the health and social care sector, as they expected employers to be understanding of their caring role and offer the support they may need.

*'I feel like because I'm in a caring environment working, you expect them to care a little bit about what's going on in my life outside of work as well. I think that's maybe also a reason. You don't really think about it, but I think that's probably the reason why I've done it.'* (Interviewee)

Some felt that their caring had given them skills and experiences that they were able to transfer into their current role. For example, one participant worked as an executive assistant. Although this role is not typically considered as a 'caring' role, they felt this job allowed them to use skills transferred from caring.

*'My whole job's about looking after someone else; making sure their needs are met and I always have to think about what my boss needs before she even realises she needs it. Which I've always, sort of, grown up doing.'*

(Interviewee)

Conversely, other respondents explained how their caring role had limited the types of employment they had felt able to engage in. These participants felt that their caring role had 'locked them out' of certain sectors. For example, one respondent felt that their caring role impacted on their ability to develop good social or communication skills. As a result, they did not feel confident enough to apply for any customer-facing roles, which 'forced' them into a role that required little communication.

*'I didn't have any social life at all until I got into late year 11/year 12 because I was going home every day after school and didn't see my friends, straight home to look after my mum, and I sort of lost that going out with your mates and gaining your confidence and finding your feet in the world... It took me a long time to catch up with everyone else in terms of being able to actually speak to people... which forced me into the building trade because it's something that you don't have to have a lot of confidence for. You can just go there, get on with the job, keep your head down and go home.'* (Focus group participant)

Some respondents cited the main reason for securing work as providing an opportunity to have a physical and emotional break from their caring role.

*'It was basically just to have a routine of having a break from looking after someone. So, obviously it's not a lot of hours, but it's just a different atmosphere and different environment to be around. So, it's just a break from doing what I normally do.'* (Interviewee)

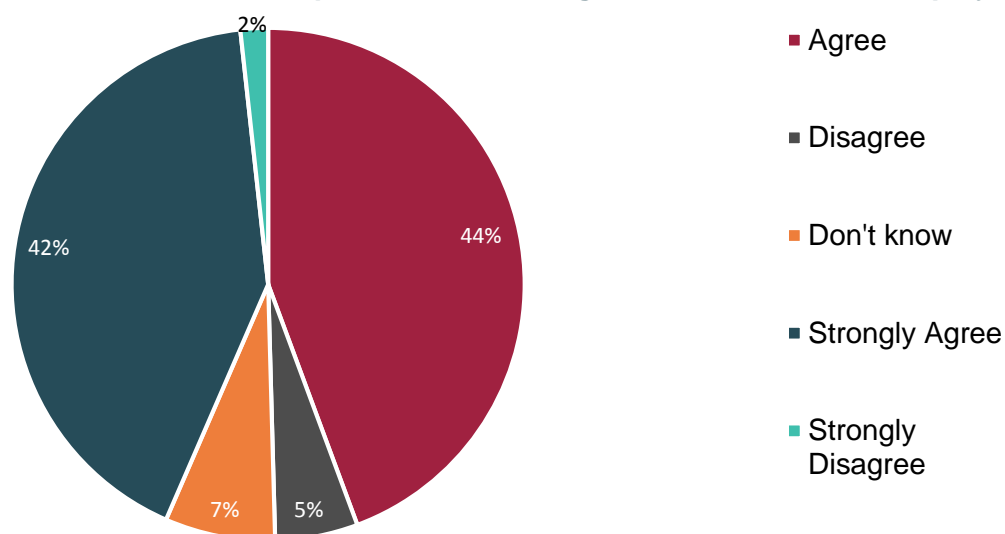
## Participants' perceptions of skills gained from caring role

Young adult carers listed a range of skills they felt they had gained from their caring role. Commonly, these included: patience, empathy, being decisive, being proactive, taking initiative, independence, listening skills, life skills, money management, managing competing priorities and multi-tasking, problem solving, teamwork, and dealing with stressful situations with a cool head. Some felt that these skills pushed them into caring work.

*'I found from a very early age I had to learn how to be quite compassionate, understanding, especially with my mum's condition. I've got to be quite patient and I think all that comes into making a good work person, but also I spent much more of my life caring for my family than I have doing anything else, so all I've known from my earliest memories I was looking after my mum, so that's just naturally been engrained into who I am and I think that always sort of pushed me on that path towards caring.'* (Focus group participant)

Of all the survey respondents, the majority (86%) agreed or strongly agreed that their caring skills were useful to employers (see figure 7.6 below). However, the qualitative data suggests most young adult carers felt that these skills were not acknowledged or valued by employers. Many took a nuanced perspective and felt that certain skills were valued by employers in certain sectors but not by employers more broadly. For example, many said that their caring skills would be valued in a caring role but not across other sectors.

**Figure 7.6 Extent to which respondents felt caring skills were useful to employers**



(N118)

For some young adult carers, the tasks associated with caring were so normalised that they did not recognise their value and they had never considered putting them on a CV. A minority of interviewees and focus group participants could see how these skills could be transferable to roles outside of the care sector. For these participants, it had usually taken a trusted support worker or tutor who had helped them to see how their caring skills could be valuable in employment. One respondent explained how a course tutor had helped them to identify and define their skill sets by listening to the daily caring tasks they carried out.



*'Like preparing someone's meal. It all has certain skills in it but, until you discuss it and disclose it with someone, that's when you actually realise about what you're actually doing because they'll replay it back to you like, 'Oh, it sounds like you've gained organisational skills,' or it sounds like you've gained something else. You actually realise that all these everyday things that you've been doing, you've actually been learning in the process or gaining other skills.'* (Interviewee)

This demonstrates the importance of having one-to-one tailored career support that focusses on caring as well as qualifications and work experience.

Another participant said their perception of their skills gained from their caring role had been shaped by praise from their employer.

*'I definitely feel like I can multi-task really well and I get good feedback from my boss for always thinking about things in advance of her, which is what she really needs to support her. I think that definitely comes from just, like, having it and growing up doing that.'* (Interviewee)

These types of conversations could often challenge respondents' perception of their skills set and how their caring role had contributed to building it. However, many interviewees and focus group participants had not considered how caring skills could be transferable or attractive to employers. Respondents often needed prompting when asked about skills developed through their caring role. These perspectives also had a significant bearing on whether to include them on their CV and thus disclose their caring role.

## Summary

These findings suggest that young adult carers experience a range of challenges when looking for work, many of which are the direct result of having caring responsibilities. For example, almost half of respondents had struggled to find work which was close to home or that they could fit around their caring role. Other challenges could be the result of outcomes of caring, for example, a lack of qualifications or relevant experience.

When looking for jobs, young adult carers tend to consider practical factors such as location and public transport links, and will often choose to apply for roles with working hours which accommodate their caring responsibilities. Another key consideration is the level of pay compared to the income their families receive through benefits. These considerations often take precedence over other factors such as interests, aspirations and skillsets.

A caring role also influences young people's decisions about which jobs to apply for. Many participants were inspired to work in the care sector because of their lived experience of providing care. Some participants felt that they could directly apply their skills and experience in this sector, while others felt that the restrictions that their caring had placed on them meant that they were 'locked out' of certain sectors.

Very few participants had thought about the transferable skills they had gained through caring. However, the majority of survey respondents agreed that these would be useful to employers and a small number of interviewees had received support to include these on their CVs or application forms. However, many young adult carers were concerned that their caring experience and skills would not be valued by employers.

## 9. Experiences of employment

Almost two-thirds (64%) of survey respondents were in employment, and many of the interviewees and focus group participants had experience of paid work. This chapter explores:

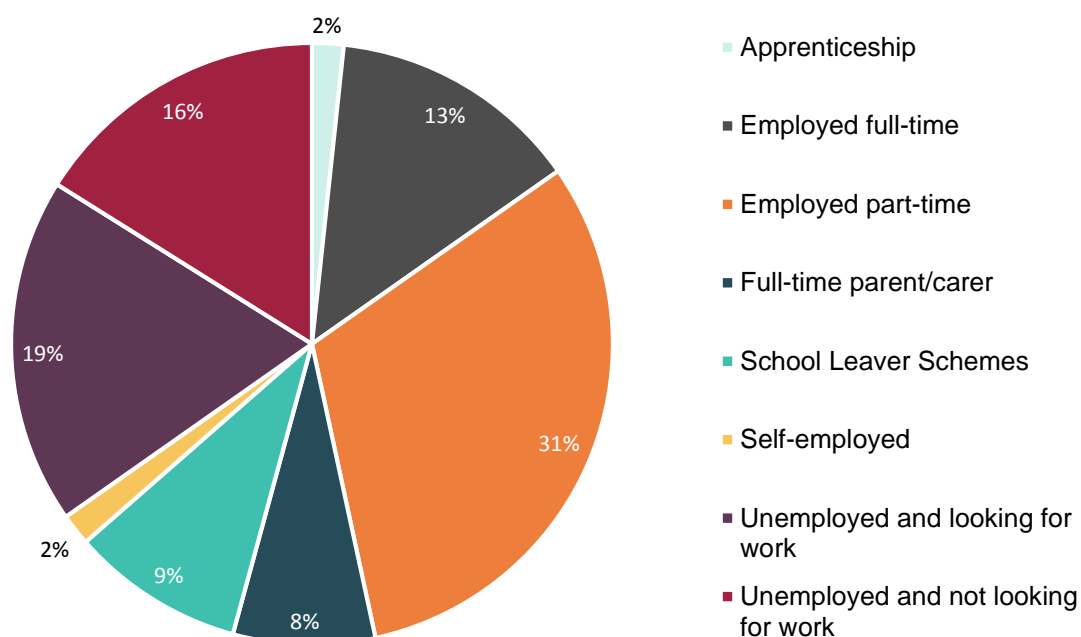
- The employment characteristics of research participants.
- Declaring caring responsibilities in employment.
- Experiences of employer support.
- Suggestions for improved support.

### Employment characteristics

Figure 7.1 below shows that survey respondents were most likely to be in part-time employment (31%), with only 13% of respondents working full-time. Of those who were in some form of employment (N76), 62% were on flexible, zero-hours contracts or in part-time work. Almost a fifth of respondents (19%) identified as being unemployed and looking for work and 8% of the cohort (nine respondents) identified their employment status as a 'full-time parent or carer'. However, seven of these respondents were also in education or training. In total, 16% of survey respondents identified as being unemployed and not looking for work – although this includes those who were not looking for work because they were in education. Only 9% of survey respondents were neither in education, nor looking for work.

These results are reflected in the qualitative data. Many interviewees and focus group participants were either in part-time work or out of work. Very few of interview respondents were employed full-time.

**Figure 7.1 Respondents' current employment status**

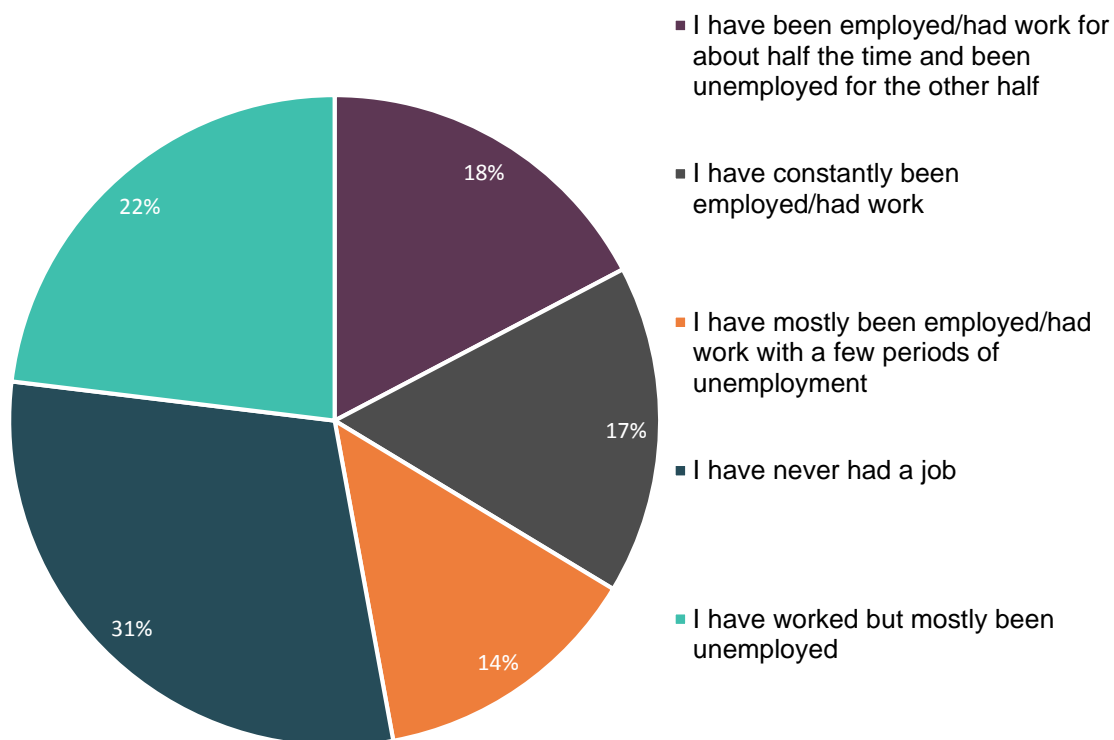


(N118)

As shown in Figure 7.2, of the 102 respondents over the age of 16, 31% said they had never had a job, while 22% said they had worked but mostly been unemployed. Around a third (31%) had either constantly been in employment or had mainly been employed with a few periods of unemployment (17% and 14% respectively). When those who were in post-16 education and those aged 14-16 were excluded, only 3% of respondents had not been in education since school and had never had a job.

Similarly, interview and focus group respondents reported a range of employment statuses over their adult lives. Most respondents had some experience of employment, but their employment history was often patchy, with many having had temporary roles or zero-hours contracts. Some participant had never been in employment.

**Figure 7.2 Respondents' employment history**



(N76)

As Figure 7.3 below shows, survey respondents worked across a range of sectors, with the most common being retail, charity and voluntary work, and hospitality and events. This matched with the qualitative results. Often, participants went into voluntary work because they felt that it afforded them more flexibility and less responsibility, which allowed them to continue prioritising caring. Although few respondents had long term ambitions in the hospitality or retail, many had taken on these jobs because they offered part-time or zero-hours contract work which could fit around caring.

**Figure 7.3 Respondents' jobs by sector**

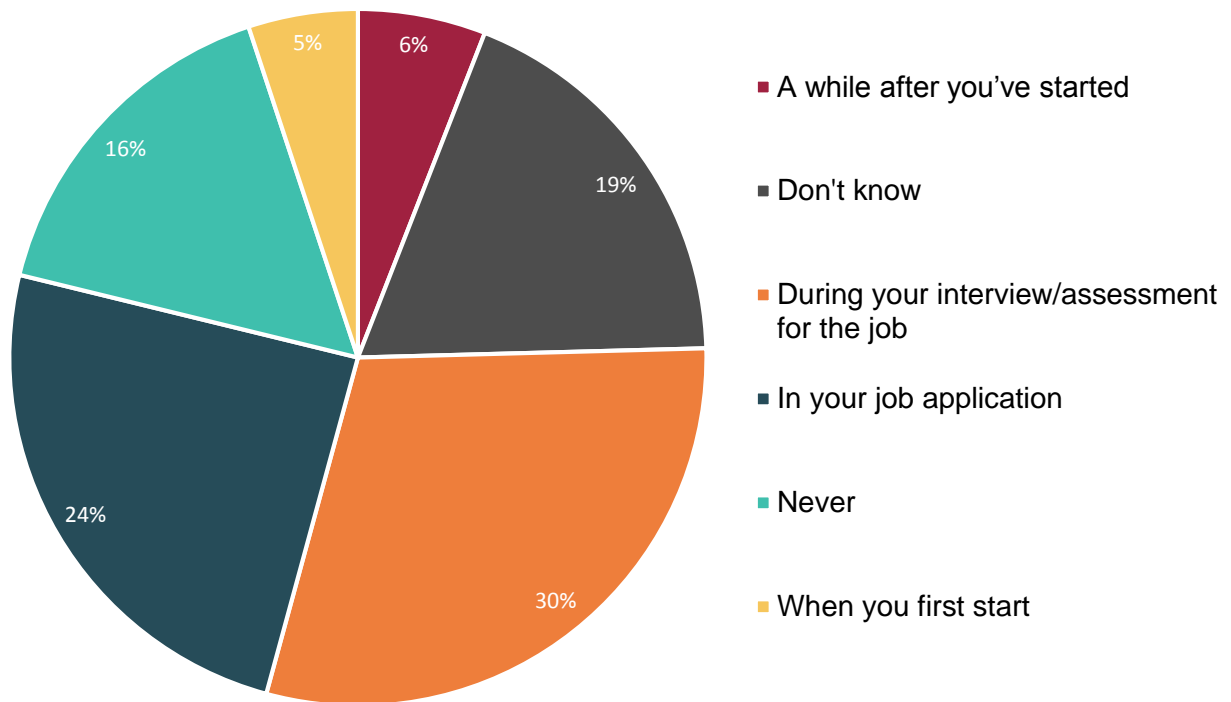
<b>Sector</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Retail	21%
Charity and voluntary work	13%
Hospitality and events	13%
Health and social care	7%
Teaching and education	7%
Accountancy, banking and finance	4%
Administration	4%
Business, consulting and management	4%
Marketing, advertising and PR	3%
Property and construction	3%
Engineering and manufacturing	1%
HR	1%
Information technology	1%
Leisure, sport and tourism	1%
Other	16%
<b>Total number</b>	<b>76</b>

## **Declaration**

Of the 76 survey respondents in employment, over half (58%) told their employer about their caring role, while 42% chose not to tell their employer. This aligns with the interview and focus group data. The majority of those with experience of employment said they had told their employer about the caring role, while a smaller proportion reported that they had not.

Survey data captured the stage at which respondents felt they would disclose their caring responsibilities to employers. This data includes all 118 participants as it is a hypothetical question, whereas qualitative data in this section draws on experiences of those young adult carers who have been in work. Figure 7.7 below shows that the majority of respondents (54%) would choose to declare their caring role in their job application or during an interview (24% and 30% respectively). Just under a fifth (19%) said they were unsure whether they would discuss their caring role, while 16% said they would never discuss it with an employer.

**Figure 7.7 Time when respondents would disclose caring responsibilities**



(N118)

### Reasons for declaring

Many respondents felt that their decision to share information about their caring role with their employer depended on contextual factors. These included the type of job applied for, the sector, the extent to which skills developed as a carer aligned with the job description, the nature of the application form, the atmosphere in the interview, and external factors such as the health of their cared-for family member. The factors also had some bearing on how and when the information was shared, which helps to add deeper insight into the quantitative data above. One respondent added that each situation is different, so they felt that there is no standard 'right time' or 'right way' to declare caring responsibilities.

### Relevance of caring role

Many discussed their caring role with their employer when they felt their experiences and skills gained from caring were relevant to the role. In these instances, it was common for respondents to share information about their caring role in their CVs and application forms or at interview stage as they felt it would help them secure the role.

*'I brought it up myself because it was related to the job. It was for the caring job, so I was like, I have experience caring with my mum and with this and with that.'* (Interviewee)

However, those participants who could recognise their skills as transferable would sometimes disclose their caring responsibilities regardless of the sector or type of role. One respondent reported that they always include information about their caring role on their CV, regardless of the role. They draw on their experiences of being a carer to exemplify relevant and valuable skills gained.

*'I have it in my CV so anything I apply for, they automatically know because I use it in my CV to build on the positives of being a carer.'* (Focus group participant)

### Sector and role type

Many participants decision to disclose their caring was based on how they anticipated it would be received by their employer. Often participants felt that disclosure of their caring responsibilities would be better received in particular sectors. Many felt comfortable talking about their caring role in the charity sector as opposed to, for example, retail sector employers. Some respondents working in the third sector said they had felt more comfortable because they thought their employer would show more empathy.

*'Working in [a charity] it was really easy to be, like, I can't come in today and because it's a mental health-based charity they sort of got it.'* (Interviewee)

For others, it depended on the role type. For example, one respondent only told their employer because their position was voluntary.

*'I told them at interview and when I told them they were very understanding, and they encouraged me as well. So, if was a two-sided thing, it helped me out as well. I think it was because of the volunteer work, I wasn't getting paid for it so that is why they didn't pressure me a lot.'* (Interviewee)

Others based their decision to declare caring responsibilities on whether they felt caring would be likely to impact their role. For example, a respondent told their full-time employer as they felt caring may disrupt working hours. In contrast, they did not tell their part-time employer as there was less chance of their caring role affecting their ability to work.

*'I told the apprenticeship because I was going to be there every day from half eight to five, so that would have had a bigger impact on me, being at home, whereas the waitressing job I do nights, so... if anything did happen there are other people I could swap the shifts with.'* (Interviewee)

### Feeling 'invited'

Others declared their caring role because they felt 'invited' to do so by an employer. Many were influenced by the wording on a job description or the atmosphere in an interview. For example, one respondent felt comfortable discussing their caring role because they were put at ease during the interview based on the way the interviewer framed the questions.

*'I could tell that from the moment I went to the interview, just because they asked the right questions. When they asked about, because I'd put it in, 'Anything else we should know,' in the application, they asked in a nice way, they didn't ask in a judgemental way that made me think, 'If I'm honest, they're not going to hire me.' They asked in a way that they wanted to know how they could support me in the workplace, rather than, 'If we take you on, are you going to be a problem?' It was, 'How can we make sure you can do your job to the best ability but also have the support you need from us?'* (Focus group participant)

Another respondent reported that there was a tick box on their apprenticeship application form which encouraged them to apply. However, they recently completed a second apprenticeship application form without a tick box which indicates inconsistencies across sectors and employers. Another respondent shared information about their caring role because they were asked in the interview if there was anything that could affect their work.

### To ensure that they would receive support

Some participants felt it was important to declare their caring responsibilities early on in the recruitment process, in order to ensure that they could commit to a role. A number of focus group participants commented that they would not want to take up a position in which they could not access appropriate support for their caring, and so would rather not be successful than not declare their responsibilities. One respondent felt that discussing their role openly from the outset maximised opportunities for employers to intervene with necessary support and adjustments.

As well as ensuring that the job was a right fit for them, these participants felt it was important to be honest and open about their caring role and how it could impact on their work with their employer from the outset. In this way, they could both make informed decisions about whether they were suitable for a role.

One respondent highlighted how being open played an important role in increasing employers' awareness and understanding of unpaid caring. For them, this was the main reason for discussing their role.

*'Because actually, it's quite a big part of my life you know, like, having a learning disability or something, you would tell them and actually, it's fine if some people don't want to, but for me, I want them to know that actually, if I've come in looking tired, or I look like I've been out last night on the razz, when really I haven't, I've been up with my mum who's got bi-polar all night, I want people to be understanding of that. So, yes, I do tell people.'*

(Interviewee)

### At 'crisis point'

Some respondents only told their employers about their caring when unforeseen circumstances arose which compromised their ability to go to work. In some cases, this was connected to an issue with the cared for person's health. For example, one participant only declared their role at 'crisis point' when a deterioration in the health of their cared for person meant that their caring role began to significantly affect their ability to attend work.

*'I worked... when was 19-ish maybe, and like one day I had my little brother phone me up and my mum had gone missing, you know, and I was at work, and so obviously then I did have those discussions with them, but I think it was more a case of until it was a disaster.'* (Interviewee)

For others, having to balance caring and work without support had led to a crisis with their own mental health. In one case, a 'crisis point' resulting from difficulties balancing caring and work facilitated an individual identifying themselves as a carer for the first time. This respondent recounted that their employer had begun to take disciplinary action due to poor attendance and lateness, and this prompted them to identify themselves as a carer and share this with their employer:

*'When I started work when I was about eighteen in the hotel industry, it wasn't so good, but I'd not actually identified what was going on at home until I was in a disciplinary action for being late so often. I broke down and then actually it came out and then, they were quite supportive.'* (Interviewee)

Some participants had not told their employers because their caring had not yet caused disruption to their work, but anticipated that they would do so if a crisis were to arise.

### **Reasons for not declaring**

Some participants chose not to share information about their caring with employers for fear of experiencing discrimination. This was often the case when participants had had negative experiences of disclosing their caring responsibilities in the past. For example, one respondent reported that they had told a former potential employer about their caring role at interview which had cost them the job. This meant they now only felt comfortable discussing their caring role post-interview, once a job has been secured.

*'I didn't mention it at the time when having the interview, because I have experience where I have mentioned it and it has been the reason why I never got the job in the past.'* (Interviewee)

One respondent explained that they would be wary about using the word 'carer' in an interview as employers would associate it with unreliability, and therefore discriminate against them.

*'I think I would be a little bit more hesitant to say it at interview stage. I don't know if employers shy away from it or I think myself I would definitely be more nervous to say, "Oh, I'm a carer," because I think it might put employers off if they think that you might be unreliable.'* (Interviewee)

Another said they would not include it on their CV, for the same reasons.

*'I don't think I would actually mention it on my CV, to be honest, just because I feel like they would be put off.'* (Interviewee)

Other respondents said that they would not include their caring role on their CV as they were concerned that this would go against them in decisions about which candidates to interview. Instead, they would discuss it at interview where they could put their caring in context, explain the skills they had gained as a result and alleviate any worries employers may have about their reliability as an employee.

In sectors or roles where respondents felt unable to discuss their caring role with their employer, it was often because they felt their employer would not understand or be flexible to their needs. For example, often respondents said that they pretended that they, not their cared for family member, had a medical appointment. They said that they felt they would more easily get time off if they used a reason which the employer understood. One young adult carer who worked for their students' union blamed student life pressures, such as essay deadlines, for any absences, as they felt their employer would show more understanding. One respondent who did tell their employer that they needed time off to take their mother to an appointment was informed that they would not get paid leave as the appointment was not for them personally.



*‘So I could only take the morning off, but I didn’t even get paid for it or anything because they went, “Yes, but we won’t pay you for it because it’s not for you, it’s for your mum”.’ (Interviewee)*

Others said that their family member’s health condition was a factor in their decisions about discussing their role. It was felt that some health conditions and the impact of them on the respondents’ lives were more easily explained and understood than others. For example, one respondent whose mother had mental health problems said they avoided telling employers about their caring role as they felt mental health issues were poorly understood.

## Employer support

Of the 44 survey respondents who had told employers about their caring role, the majority were offered support while around a third were not. The support offered to respondents varied significantly across sectors. For example, of the 10 respondents working in the charity sector, seven were offered support once they declared their caring responsibilities to their employers. In comparison, of the 16 working in the retail – the most common sector from our cohort - only two were offered support. This links to interview and focus group participants citing sector type as an important influencing factor in their decision to declare their caring role. As discussed earlier, participants working in the charity sector felt more comfortable sharing this information with their employer than in other sectors, such as retail, and this was largely due to the perception that these employers were more likely to be supportive. The survey data appears to support this assumption.

## Types of support received

Survey data shows that participants were offered a range of support. As Figure 7.8 below shows, respondents were most likely to be offered flexible working arrangements, flexible start and finish times, and to be allowed access to a mobile phone during work hours.

Interview and focus group respondents reported that they experienced a range of reactions, levels of understanding and support from employers in relation to their caring role. This section explores these experiences by type of support.

**Figure 7.8 Type of support offered**

Support type	Percentage
Flexible working arrangements	33%
Allowed access to mobile phone	27%
Flexible start/finish times	20%
Carer’s leave	6%
Support with travel or parking expenses	5%
Access to peer support group	3%
Given information about wider support	3%
Other	3%

*(N64, respondents could tick more than one answer)*

## Flexible working arrangements

A third of survey respondents who received support from employers were offered flexible working arrangements. A fifth were offered flexible working times. Some interview and focus group respondents also reported flexible working arrangements and times in past and current positions. This included working from home, getting rotas well in advance, reducing hours if necessary, allowing them to choose their shift patterns and having flexibility in start or finish times.

*'They gave me a lot of freedom, so any time I had to leave, or I would be late, or I had to take him to the hospital they would understand. I would just give them a phone call, even if it was last minute I would tell them I was going to be late and they would just say, "It's okay, come tomorrow" or something.'* (Interviewee)

Others said that in emergencies, their employers had shown flexibility, allowing them to leave work to deal with unforeseen issues with their cared for family member.

*'Once, something did happen, and I don't drive but one of my co-workers, they actually took me home. They still got paid for it and the employer was like, 'We'll still pay for it. Just take her home so that she can do what she needs to do and then come back.' So, they've got a really good understanding of what needs to happen and what I need to do.'* (Focus group participant)

One respondent had been granted an extended period of time off work in order to attend their counselling. Although their employer had been unsure at first, once the respondent had explained their circumstances, they flexed to their needs.

*'I had to take Tuesdays off work, for, like twelve weeks because I had to go into, actually, like, twelve-week counselling to make sure that I was okay and to look after my wellbeing because they'd noticed that I wasn't looking after myself. My employer, at first, was a bit, like, it was an inconvenience to them, but once we'd sat down and spoken about it, it was fine.'* (Interviewee)

One respondent felt that their employer was particularly flexible and understanding of their needs because of the sector they worked in.

*'Because it's a mental health company, and they recruit young people with good experience, so they're really flexible with it, they've even let me do a project around young carers' mental health as well at the moment, which is nearly finished, so they're really supportive and everything of it.'* (Interviewee)

Overall, this flexibility enabled respondents to better balance their caring roles with their employment.

## Access to mobile phones

Just over a quarter (27%) of survey respondents were allowed access to their phone at work. Interview and focus group participants also said they were allowed to have their mobile phone with them at work or to use the work phone at any point throughout their working day.

*'I'm expecting a phone call from social services or whatever, mum's appointment, they're more than happy for me to just walk out and answer the phone. They don't even ask where I'm going, they just know that it's probably something to do with my mum.'* (Interviewee)

In contrast, one respondent who worked in a fast food chain explained that their uniform trousers had their pockets sewn shut and having a mobile phone to hand on shift was a sackable offence.

### **Understanding their caring role**

Some interview and focus group respondents reported that their employer had actively endeavoured to understand their caring role and how it may impact on their work. This was greatly appreciated by one respondent who felt it had resulted in a highly positive experience of work.

*'From the get-go, really, my employers have taken the attitude of, 'Just tell us what you need and we'll do the best to do that'... the first thing they do is make sure I'm okay and that I'm in the right sort of headspace to be at work. They've asked, 'Can you tell us more about your mum's condition so that we can understand a bit more about what you have to do?' I appreciate that because they're trying, whereas other places don't care, don't want to know. I think that's why I'm having a good experience still, it's because they do actually care.'* (Focus group respondent)

One respondent reported that their employer was also very understanding of their needs as a carer and supported them to pursue a role within a different department within their organisation by paying for their retraining.

### **Support gaps**

Of the 44 survey respondents who were in employment and had told their employer about their caring responsibilities, just over a third were not offered support. The qualitative data suggests that often employers can be inflexible or lack understanding about what it means to be a carer.

### **Lack of flexibility**

Many participants reported employers being inflexible and unable to make adjustments when their caring role was prioritised over their work. This occurred at different stages of the employment process, and in many cases resulted in respondents not securing or losing their position.

Some respondents, having declared their role on their application form, were told at interview that they would not be offered the job due to their perceived unreliability.

*'I was turned down a job because I was a young carer. I went to the interview... and he said, "I have some problems regarding that you're a carer. You might not turn up to work on time, and you might have to leave early, and you might have to just go" and it's just not fair.'* (Focus group participant)

Others felt that at point of declaration, their employer had shown some understanding. However, when their caring role started affecting their work more, their lack of supportive action contradicted their original stance.

*'I worked in a restaurant, so shift work. They tried to be supportive but then when something actually would happen, they'd go back on everything they'd say. So, they'd say all the right things and say, 'We understand if you can't make it in, we understand if you've got to leave shift. We'll figure it out when it happens.' Then, when it did happen, they were the total opposite and... would say, 'If this keeps happening and it's a regular thing, then we're going to have to think about your employment and whether you're suitable to work for us.' So, it was a bit of a strange one because they said all the right things, just didn't act the right way.'* (Focus group participant)

In one case, it resulted in a respondent losing their job. Others found that they were forced to make the choice between their employment and their caring role.

*'They didn't really mind, I thought they were quite understanding [when I told them], I guess, but then obviously when it came down to it they weren't understanding, they obviously sacked me... The people I worked with, they weren't very supportive at all... They said that I was unreliable.'* (Interviewee)

### **Lack of understanding of their caring role**

Most interview and focus group respondents reported an overall lack of understanding from employers about what being a young adult carer entails and how much it can impact on their lives.

*'We don't go home and sit in front of the telly, we go home and we do a caring job, just like anybody who works in a care home, we go home and do that. Employers don't seem to understand that.'* (Focus group participant)

Others also explained that there is a lack of understanding around how caring might affect their ability to perform their role at work.

*'None of them seem to take much notice and even if they do take notice, they don't take into consideration how that might affect [you] when you're working, so they might acknowledge the fact that I'm a carer but at the same time they won't really understand what that entails.'* (Focus group participant)

Others faced judgements based on their employers' narrow understanding of what a carer is and does, especially those whose experiences did not meet a stereotypical definition of caring. For example, some said that employers did not understand that a person so young could have such responsibilities, while others found there was a significant lack of understanding because their family member's health condition was hidden.

*'...when like my mum came to pick me up and they're like, "Oh, I thought you were a young carer, why isn't she in a wheelchair?" and it's like, "My mum can walk perfectly fine," because I care for my brother and my mum she has like reoccurring skin cancer so it's not like obvious.'* (Focus group participant)

Participants who cared for family members with mental health problems felt that this particularly affected them.

*'...everyone has this idea of caring is that you have to be at home at a certain time and you help people into the shower... my situation was never that kind of thing... in my case I just don't fit what people think caring is about.'*

(Interviewee)

Others said that their employer had not recorded the information in an official capacity at point of declaration. They said that they had later faced issues when their caring role had affected their work, as their employers claimed that they were unaware of their wider responsibilities. For example, one respondent was told their shift had been extended despite having explained to their employer beforehand that this was not possible.

*'They wanted me to stay back 50 minutes extra when I said I couldn't. Because within that time that I work, one of my siblings would look after my mum, but I would have to get home at a certain time... they would basically say I have to do it. So, they're not really reasonable in that sense.'*

(Interviewee)

Some respondents who had issues with their mental health while in work also experienced a lack of understanding from their employer.

*'I started working for like a cinema and basically like I was sort of in the training stage and we were basically in a building site and I ended up like having panic attacks, and rather than just letting me deal with it, you know, like in my own way, they literally just made me stand in a dusty corridor while they basically pretty much had a go at me for having a panic attack... that is just a really good example of like caring is not in their remit.'* (Interviewee)

As with experiences of declaration, some respondents felt that employer understanding varied according to sector. Most notably, some respondents felt that third sector employers showed more understanding of their caring role, and staff needs in general, than those in retail or other private sectors.

*'The jobs I work for now there is... a bit more understanding, you know. Like the supermarket are just like "come in, we need you to do this, we need you to get us money", you know, even if you could go in and you could be really ill and they'd still make you stay, but they really don't care about their staff particularly.'* (Interviewee)

## **Suggestions for better in-work support**

Many respondents gave suggestions as to how in-work support for young adult carers could be improved.

### **Greater flexibility**

Participants suggested that there should be greater flexibility to enable them to better meet their caring needs. For example, being flexible when time off is needed, allowing young adult carers to have a mobile to hand and having the option of working remotely. One respondent

suggested that a 'buddying up' or job share system would enable those with extra responsibilities to fulfil both paid and unpaid roles.

### **Better employer understanding and awareness of young adult carers**

Many respondents felt that employers needed better understanding of the impact a caring role has on young people's circumstances. In particular, these participants felt that there was a need to challenge narrow and pre-conceived perceptions of caring, in order to foster greater willingness amongst employers to introduce practical adjustments and provide support. This was felt particularly strongly by those whose mental health had been affected by their caring role.

*'Employers should be there more because caring is stressful, you do get ill more than the average person but you only have the set amount of days off that everyone has and if you're taking 15 of those days off because the person you care for is ill and not you, you only have 10 days left.'*

(Interviewee)

Some respondents suggested that training should be provided for employers to build their knowledge on young adult carers' lived experiences, and how they should support young adult carers in work. Some focus group participants thought that creating more opportunities for people to be exposed to and learn about young adult carers' experiences would reduce the stigma attached to unpaid caring roles.

*'It's a bit of a taboo subject. I find the moment I'm with people that aren't carers and I bring up caring, and caring from any age, they always seem a bit more on edge, a bit uneasy. It's not very comfortable for people to talk about, which is a shame because it is something that needs to be talked about more... I do think proper education and proper awareness would remove the taboo and remove the negatives.'* (Focus group participant)

### **Careers advice tailored to carers**

Young adult carers felt they would benefit from careers advisers who had specialist knowledge about the impact that being a carer has on employment. Those who had benefited from a support worker showing them how to market their caring skills as transferable felt that this should be more widespread.

Respondents also often felt they would benefit from greater knowledge about their rights and entitlements as an unpaid carer in work. For example, guidance on how to deal with employer discrimination, how to request flexible working arrangements, and how benefits such as the Carer's Allowance may be affected when moving into work.

*'If there was more information gained when you – say, if you were to apply for Carer's Allowance or something. If they were actually then handed some information on what you could do or what's available to you, because being a carer affects your life in a big way, what you can access to help you yourself. That would be quite good.'* (Interviewee)

### **More formalised policies for carers in employment**

Many respondents pointed out that it is common to have a tick box for job applicants and employees to identify whether they have a disability. No interviewees or focus participants

were aware that caring can be classed a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. Many felt that there should also be a tick box for applicants and employees to declare a caring status.

*'I prefer kind of having it on the application form because then you don't have to almost say it, at least they kind of know and then maybe they could ask, because otherwise it almost could put them off, but if it's just kind of the application and they know already for the interview.'* (Focus group participant)

However, some respondents expressed concern that a tick box at application stage could lead to discrimination as employers may choose a candidate with no responsibilities over one with a caring role. They therefore felt that an opportunity to declare once employment had been secured, such as on a new starter form which would be officially documented, may be a more suitable option.

## Summary

Research participants had a range of experiences of employment. Around two-thirds of survey respondents were in employment, most likely in part-time, flexible work or on zero-hours contracts. Over a third of respondents were unemployed (although this includes those who were in full-time education) and over half had never had a job or had mostly been unemployed. Only around a third had constantly or mostly been employed throughout their working life.

Participants were most likely to be working in retail, likely due to the high proportion of part-time and flexible job roles in this sector. Other common sectors included the charity and voluntary sector and hospitality.

In general, young adult carers were relatively open to declaring their caring responsibilities to employers. Over half of survey respondents had told their employer about their caring role, and participants were most likely to say that they would do this at application or interview stage. However, this tended to depend on a number of factors, including whether their caring was relevant to the job they were applying for, the sector they were applying to, and whether they felt 'invited' to do so by the employer. Some research participants stated that they would always declare at one of these stages, in order to ensure that they could get the support needed in work and that they could balance the job with their caring responsibilities. However, other participants had experienced, and often feared, employer discrimination. As a result, they were reluctant to disclose their caring responsibilities at application stage, and in some instances participants never explained their caring to employers. Often this meant missed opportunities for in-work support from their employer, although not all of those who disclosed their caring to employers had been offered support. In many instances, participants only disclosed their caring responsibilities once they started to cause significant in-work disruptions, or once they became overwhelmed with balancing work and caring. This meant that support was reactionary rather than preventative.

Participants appreciated employer understanding and flexibility, and some had stories of particularly understanding individual managers and employers. However, there were many examples of when employers had been inflexible and lacked understanding about the impact of caring on work. This suggests that, at present, employer support is patchy and there is a

clear need to ensure that the approach to supporting young adult carers is consistent across sectors and types of employer. Overall, participants felt more could be done to inform employers about what it means to be a carer and how this may affect young people's work. They suggested that both employers and young adult carers should have greater awareness of carers' rights and entitlements in the workplace. Young adult carers also felt that more could be done to provide tailored careers advice which enables young people to identify transferable skills from caring.



## 10. Career aspirations

Many of the interviewees described their current job as a 'stop gap' or a means to 'pay the bills', rather than a role in alignment with their long-term career goals.

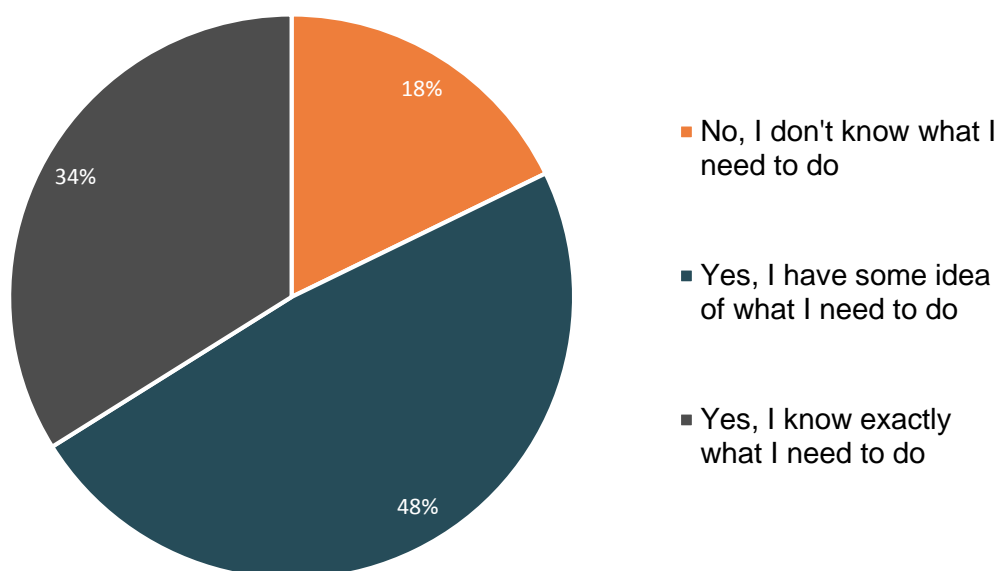
*'At the moment, I'm just working for practicality as in the hours and the location of where I am. It's not something that I would actually want to do and pursue for the future.'* (Interviewee)

For others, their current role was a part-time job to fit around studying. Consequently, career aspirations often differed from participants' current job roles. While the survey found that the sector respondents had most commonly worked in was retail<sup>41</sup>, none of the qualitative survey responses, interviewees or focus group participants indicated ambitions to work in retail in the future.

In line with previous research, the qualitative data showed that a significant proportion of respondents wanted to move into caring professions. However, there was diversity in terms of desired roles, which included nursing, childcare, youth work, medicine, psychology and teaching. Additionally, a significant number of participants had career aspirations outside of caring, including acting, stage production, fashion, business and academia.

Generally, both survey respondents and interviewees had a clear idea of the steps needed to progress in their career. At 18%, just under a fifth of survey respondents said they did not know what they needed to do to achieve their career goals, while a large majority (82%) felt they knew 'exactly' or had 'some idea' of what they needed to do (see Figure 8.1 below).

**Figure 8.1 Extent to which respondents know what they need to do in order to achieve their career goals**



(N118)

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<sup>41</sup> (21%)

However, in spite of this, both the qualitative and quantitative data suggests that young adult carers see significant barriers to achieving their long-term career goals.

This chapter explores:

- The influence of caring on career aspirations.
- Limitations to achieving career goals created by caring.
- Sectors which young adult carers want to avoid, and ones they are attracted to.
- Other influences on career aspirations.

### **The influence of caring on career aspirations**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggests that caring influences career goals. Of the 59 survey respondents who had been in work and were over 19, half felt that caring had affected their past decisions about work and employment. Of the full survey cohort, 66% felt that caring influenced their thoughts about future careers. This proportion stayed relatively consistent regardless of when the respondent started caring.

#### **A desire to ‘help’ or ‘give back’**

In line with previous research<sup>42</sup>, many respondents aspired to work in a sector connected to caring. Some participants felt that caring had given them a desire to ‘help’ or ‘give back’. For example, one respondent’s experience of caring meant that she saw herself as a ‘helpful’ person and wanted to work within a sector where she could use this.

*‘I think I’ve always felt that what I wanted to do was going to revolve around people because I’m a helpful person.’ (Interviewee)*

For this participant the experience of caring seemed deeply embedded into their sense of self. Other participants emphasised that they find caring rewarding. They felt that caring had helped to direct them towards a meaningful career path. One survey respondent working in health and social care explained how caring had influenced their career aspirations.

*‘It helped [me] realise what I want in life and the path I’d like to follow... it has made me realise I like supporting people and this can be very rewarding.’ (Survey respondent)*

In line with this, an interviewee explained that, regardless of their particular role, it was important that their career focussed on giving. They suggested they could work as a counsellor, occupational therapist, midwife, police officer, social worker, nursery worker, teacher or firefighter.

*‘I think it’s just the idea of giving something back that actually appeals to me so much. I’ve already given so much, but I don’t want to stop doing that.’ (Interviewee)*

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<sup>42</sup> Sempik and Becker (2014 and 2013); Action for Carers (2005)

Some participants were inspired by the support services they accessed. Often interviewees saw some of their support workers as role models. Others felt a duty to 'pay forward' the help they had received.

*'Seeing how like social workers or whatever have helped me, I'll then return the favour and help someone else.'* (Interviewee)

### **Skills, knowledge and experience suited to caring professions**

As explored earlier, some respondents valued the skills they had gained through caring and felt this would be the sector they would be able to best progress within. In line with this, some carers felt encouraged to go into a caring role because they believed their skills would be more likely to be valued than in another sector.

Many felt that being a young adult carer had honed a skillset ideally suited to becoming a caring professional which had influenced their future aspirations.

*'It makes you more caring so you want to take like a caring job type of thing. That's my experience, like I want to become like a social worker or something.'* (Focus group participant)

*'All I've known from my earliest memories I was looking after my mum, so that's just naturally been engrained into who I am and I think that always sort of pushed me on that path towards caring.'* (Focus group participant)

Not all caring is the same, and some interviewees described how particular skills they had developed through their caring responsibilities had shaped their career goals. For example, one young adult carer wanted to study English literature and write books. They felt that this came from their experience of reading to her blind parent from a young age. Other young people felt that the skills and interests developed through caring could be incorporated with their other interests or hobbies. One interviewee with a passion for drama wanted to work as an acting teacher for people with learning disabilities.

One interviewee explained how being a young adult carer had given her in depth knowledge of the support available including referral and access routes. They had worked in youth services and took on the role of signposting young adult carers to appropriate services. She had also recognised a training need within the youth service.

*'A lot of the time people don't know what there is out there for them, and actually if I signpost them to that, that I think to some extent they need to be thinking about it as part of their training.'* (Interviewee)

Another echoed this. They felt that securing a role in a sector other than Health and Social Care would be a waste of the in-depth knowledge and first-hand experience they had gained of mental health and social care services.

*'It feels like a waste to go and do something completely different because I have all this experience and I have all this abundance of knowledge about the NHS and mental health services and the crisis in NHS and social care it seems I feel like I'd be wasting what my sister's given me if I did something else.'* (Interviewee)

## Aspiring to address gaps in support

Other participants were motivated to fill gaps in support after having a negative experience as a young or young adult carer. Some explained that they wanted to change the support provision for future carers and cared for people. For example, one young person saw a lack of provision for young adult carers and had worked to secure funding for a carers group in her local area. Another experienced a lack of mental health support as a young adult carer struggling with depression and anxiety and so aimed to work in mental health provision for vulnerable young people.

One young adult carer felt that the paid care sector was poorly managed and that often managerial staff had no 'on the ground' experience of caring. They aimed to work their way up to managerial level within this sector so as to transform service provision.

*'I think I could be a good template for good care and good services.'*  
(Interviewee)

They felt that they were skilled in this area because of their own experience of caring. They also felt motivated to go into this because of their experience of using poorly managed care as a young adult carer and seeing the negative impact this can have.

Another interviewee wanted to study care at university level and become an academic lecturer. They felt motivated to transform the way that care is socially understood, as well as to inspire and support young people through lecturing.

## Sectors to avoid

Many respondents said that there were certain sectors that they would avoid entering in the future. Some explained this was because they did not perceive certain sectors as compatible with their caring role. Others had had a negative experience in a sector which had informed their future plans.

Sectors considered incompatible with caring were education, travel and tourism, fashion, retail, hospitality or catering. This was often due to perceptions of inflexibility, inconvenient locations, being too demanding on time and energy, and weekend or overtime working. One respondent said they would avoid shift work in retail or hospitality in the future as the working environment was not person-centred which made them feel unsupported.

*'I think we need places that genuinely care about you and want to nurture you and support you in the best way that they can. I think if you work for chains or anything like that, I don't think you get that. I think you need a more person-centred place.'* (Interviewee)

Other respondents explained that they would not apply for any job outside of the caring sector, given other employers' lack of empathy and understanding toward carers.

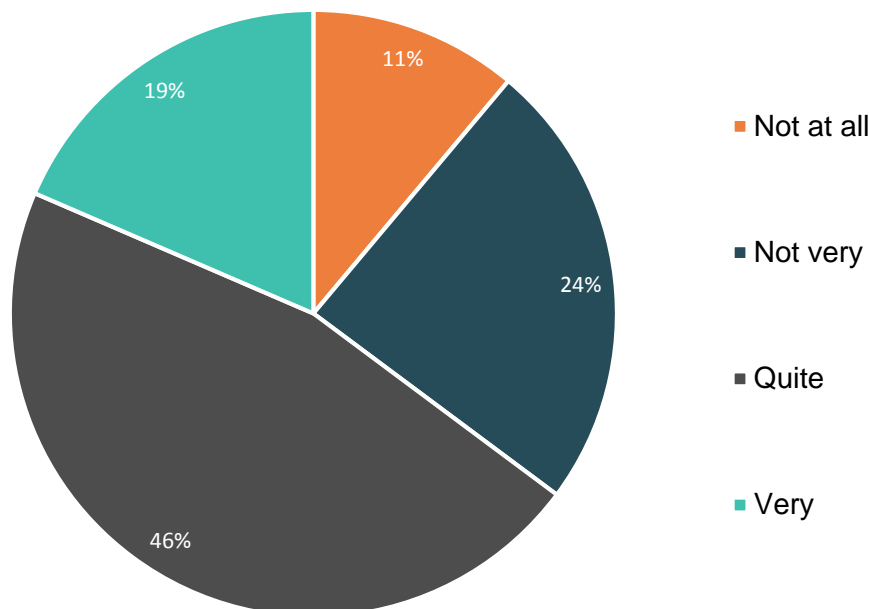
*'If you were working in a shop, they maybe wouldn't be as understanding as being a carer, because your manager's actually dealing with all these different issues and have some understanding of it. Any kind of job that you're doing, you could be an air hostess, or whatever, but there's certain jobs that maybe wouldn't be so accepting of that.'* (Interviewee)

In addition, while many participants expressed a desire to work in caring professions, a few of the interviewees explained that their experience of caring meant they would want to avoid caring as a paid job. One interviewee explained that as their caring involved an intense relationship with their mother, they would like to avoid any work that involved similarly intense relationships with people. Another young person cared for their young brother who had experienced bullying at school. They wanted to avoid teaching or working with young people as a career because they felt they could not cope with witnessing bullying amongst children.

### Barriers to achieving career aspirations

While many young adult carers had a clear idea of their career goals, some felt that there were significant barriers to achieving these goals. Of the 56 survey respondents who had been in work and were over 19, only 19% were 'very' satisfied with their career progress, while the respondents most commonly said they were 'quite' satisfied and 24% said they were 'not very' satisfied<sup>43</sup> (see Figure 8.3 below).

**Figure 8.3 Respondents' career satisfaction**



(N56)

Of the 49 respondents who had been in work and were over 19, only 10% said they had progressed upwards within one or across multiple employers. The rest had worked a variety of roles across employers or within the same employer.

On the whole, the perceived barriers to achieving career aspirations were very similar to the barriers young adult carers had experienced in securing and sustaining employment. These included the practical limitations of caring; support from employers; being 'present-orientated'; lacking qualifications, skills and experience; a lack of time to develop interests and aspirations; emotional barriers; and policy and structural barriers.

<sup>43</sup> With no comparative group from the same age cohort, it is difficult to say whether this is influenced by caring.

## Practical limitations of caring

As discussed above, the nature of caring means that young people often prioritise practical considerations, such as distance from home, transport links and number of working hours, above their own interests and career aspirations when searching for work. This often leads them to work in roles which are part-time or have zero-hour contracts, which then limits their opportunities to progress.

*'My dream job is to be a vet nurse. I don't know how that's going to work out because that is shift work and you have to be there on time. If you're not there on time, something bad will happen. So, I'm just not sure how that's going to turn out.'* (Focus group participant)

Many respondents reported that working abroad or far away from their local area was a key consideration when planning their progression pathways. One survey respondent explained that the choices for university were limited because of the need to stay near home. In this case, caring meant choosing to go to a less highly ranked university and potentially limiting career progress.

*'I didn't go to a highly ranked university because it was too far away and ended up going to one which was much nearer but no way near as good in the league table. I would also not move away from my hometown for my career as I need to be near my family.'* (Survey Respondent)

Another respondent who had considered joining the military services because their grandfather had had a career in the navy, felt unable to pursue a career that would require them to work abroad for long periods of time. They explained that not only would their family not cope, but also that they would not feel comfortable, evidencing the emotional barriers at play.

A few young adult carers felt that a way of overcoming the practical barriers they faced in relation to career progression was to become self-employed.

*'[Caring has] made me want to be my own boss so that I have the flexibility to take time whenever I need it and it allows me to be able to put my mum first.'* (Interviewee)

However, one respondent whose step father was self-employed witnessed that this type of employment does not necessarily mean flexibility or autonomy.

## Support from employers

Most of the research participants said that they valued support and understanding from their employer. As such, they were often cautious about moving jobs if they did find a supportive and flexible employer, which in turn may impede their career progression. While staying in the same job is not necessarily negative, narrowing down the pool of employers to those that offer support and flexibility could potentially limit career progression based on interest. In addition, moving between employers is the surest way of securing pay progression<sup>44</sup>, and so

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<sup>44</sup> Resolution Foundation (2018) A New Generational Contract: The final report of the Intergenerational Commission. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/advanced/a-new-generational-contract/>

young adult carers may experience depressed pay and limited opportunities to increase their salaries.

*'When I moved out of my family home I began looking for work elsewhere. In the end I decided to stay with my current employer due to the fact that they know about my caring responsibilities; I knew that I could work flexibly with them and support me when I needed to support my family.'* (Interviewee)

One participant explained that it should be possible for a young adult carer to balance caring with work and progress up the career ladder, but at the moment that is being impeded by a lack of flexibility and support offered by employers.

*'I feel like it's all down to time management, like, you can be a carer and, I guess, do what you want to do, but it all depends on the person, and basically your role, if they're supporting or flexible around your situation. I know from what I see, there are people out there that, when you're on your job, they will actually help you with your situation. It's just sad that the majority of the companies that you want to work for, they won't help you.'* (Interviewee)

For others, the need to have flexible working arrangements limited them to working in zero-hours contracts or temporary work roles which often have little room for upwards progression. Some young adult carers also only felt comfortable doing voluntary roles because they were afforded more flexibility and given less responsibility.

### **Being 'present-orientated'**<sup>45</sup>

Although most of the research participants had aspirations for their futures, for some the burden of caring limited their ability to think about long-term career goals. Many had dreams but were hesitant to make plans because of the precarious nature of caring. For example, one participant looked after a parent with a mental health problem. They felt that every time they had moved forward in their career in the past, their parent's mental health deteriorated. As a result, they were cautious about planning for the future. Others who cared for a parent or grandparent worried their health would deteriorate as they got older. For these participants, career plans felt tenuous as they anticipated an increase in their caring responsibilities in the future.

Participants who were full-time carers sometimes did not have time or space to consider their future options. Others explained that they had more pressing present concerns. For example, one young person had wanted to go to university to gain qualifications, however they felt it was currently more important to work to gain money for themselves and their family. As a result, their studies were on hold and they currently worked in a fast-food chain.

### **Lack of qualifications, skills or experience**

For many research participants, caring had limited their ability to gain qualifications and work experience, and this had created a significant barrier to achieving their career aspirations. For example, one respondent wanted to be a children's physiotherapist because of their own experience being treated as a child. However, they had not got the grades necessary to

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<sup>45</sup> Becker and Becker, (2008)

pursue this as a result of missed schooling and stress from caring. Other participants explained that they could not afford the fees for the courses they would like to undertake, and so were unable to gain the qualifications and skills needed for their desired career. This was particularly the case for young adult carers who cared for a parent who was unable to work.

Others explained how they couldn't participate in part-time work at school or college because they needed to be caring. This meant they missed out on opportunities to try out different types of job roles and gain work experience which could help them secure employment in different sectors in the future.

*'I didn't have time for a part-time job when I could've done with the money, like you know a lot of people get a part-time job at sixteen.'* (Interviewee)

### **Lack of time to develop interests and aspirations**

Caring can be time-consuming and emotionally overwhelming. As a result, young adult carers may have had less opportunity to explore interests and aspirations outside of caring. Many young adult carers who cared during school years explained that they felt isolated from their peers and missed opportunities to participate in social activities and hobbies. As such, these participants had limited opportunities to explore potential career interests outside of caring.

*'A lot of friends who are not carers they don't really understand. And you don't have much time to go out. I'd rather stay at home and look after my mum. When they say do you want to go out and you say you can't, they get right funny about it and don't bother asking you again. I worry constantly when I'm out, about my mum.'* (Interviewee)

### **Emotional barriers and mental health**

Young adulthood is usually a stage where young people begin to establish themselves as independent from their family of origin. Many of the participants described internal conflict between wanting to move into adulthood and establish themselves in a career, and feelings of guilt or fear about 'leaving behind' the person they cared for. This often meant that participants felt they were limited to a career that allowed them to continue providing the same level of care for the cared for person. Even when the option of bringing in paid care was possible, participants often had mixed feelings about this. One participant described how their emotional conflict left feeling 'stuck' between caring and work.

*'I feel that I have to do this caring because my grandfather, he doesn't trust anybody, and he will feel, if I let anybody else care for him, that he is not wanted, and I don't want that. I don't want him in his last days to think he is not wanted by his granddaughter and he has nobody, you know? So, I feel a lot of pressure, I really want to work but I am stuck between my grandfather, it is more of an emotional attachment if you know what I mean?'* (Interviewee)

Another participant echoed this. They worked as a youth worker and had the opportunity to progress to managerial level and gain greater responsibility. They explained that they would worry about the cared for person's wellbeing if they were to make this progression. This



participant felt that they would have to take time to 'train' their mum to be more independent before they could take on more responsibility at work.

*'Obviously with my mum, I think she finds it difficult when I do stuff, if that makes sense, you know. So it's just trying to work it in a way that I would be able to manage but also like there wouldn't be a major like drama for her to deal with.'* (Interviewee)

Another explained that, given their own mental health problems (which had been affected by their mother's health condition and their caring responsibility), they were reticent about taking on more responsibility in a career, despite feeling intellectually capable. They reasoned that the cost of pursuing their dream career on their mental health outweighed the benefit of earning potential.

*'I feel like my mental wellbeing is more important than having a job that pays better... It is a shame, because I am more than capable of having a job with a contract and things, but at the moment, my mental health is being impacted on my mum's mental health and work and I just feel overwhelmed with it all at the moment. So, it's been a hard decision to have to make, that, but that's what I've had to do.'* (Interviewee)

### **Policy and structural barriers**

Barriers to future aspirations within employment may be exacerbated by a lack of relevant support available. For example, one respondent currently in a 'stop gap' job for financial reasons, reported that a lack of careers advice available to them presented a barrier to progression in their desired field.

*'Current employment status is self-employed technically, labouring on building sites. It's not really what I want to do, it's just a job and money at the moment. I'm trying to find ways to get where I want to go, but I can't really seem to find the right support out there.'* (Focus group participant)

Some focus group respondents felt that current policy regarding Carer's Allowance entitlements acted as a barrier to any employment, not to mention employment relevant to their aspirations. There was a clear perception amongst participants that it is not possible to work and claim Carer's Allowance. As such, they felt that the policy made them choose between caring and working.

*'If you work at all, you can't get the Carer's Allowance that we need which really gets on my nerves. I feel like that's saying to us that you either give up your life to care and that's it, or you have to not do your caring role, which means a lot to all of us, and then you can go to work and get the money that you need to have your own life... for lots of us, without that financial support, we can't even try to be something other than just a carer. So, yes, it's restrictive.'* (Focus group participant)

While this perception may not be an accurate reflection of the eligibility criteria for Carer's Allowance, it was a common view amongst participants and in itself created a barrier to their search for employment. This suggests that more needs to be done to ensure that young

adult carers have access to accurate and up-to-date information on their benefit entitlements, particularly in relation to Carer's Allowance.

For some respondents, these restrictions had pushed them into financially precarious situations. Therefore, their decisions in terms of employment were often limited to finding work to meet a financial need, rather than taking steps towards their desired career.

*'I can't claim it because I'm in full-time education along with a lot of other things. So, like, at the moment, I'm financially ruined because I've got no income whatsoever. So, that's why I'm looking for a part-time job... because if I don't get that job, I've got no income.'* (Focus group participant)

## Other influences

Some participants were quick to emphasise that being a carer did not define them. In line with this, participants could describe other career influences outside of caring, including wanting to make money, interests and strengths and career role models.

## Personal interests and strengths

Some young adult carers felt they wanted to work in a role because it matched their interests or strengths. For example, one young adult carer felt that she connected well with children.

*'I just work well with kids because I have a lot of energy and they respond well to me and everything. I just connect well with them.'* (Interviewee)

Others had gone through a process of exploring different jobs. For example, one participant had wanted to work in science but after studying the sciences they realised they preferred to work in a more practical role.

## Family role models

Many of the participants were inspired by their parents' or grandparents' careers. For example, one respondent's dad was a drama teacher and their mum worked in television. This inspired them to become an actor, and they were currently at drama school. Another wanted to work in care because her nan had worked as a nurse:

*'I kind of want to follow family. My nan was a kind of sister/nurse and she's always kind of... brought me up thinking like it would carry on and I've always loved like medicine and children as well, and in a way it's kind of giving back and knowing that I could kind of help life in the world.'* (Interviewee)

Another said that their grandfather had studied history at Oxford and took them to historic places as a child. This stimulated an interest in archaeology and they now aimed to work in documentary-making in this area.

## Careers support

While the majority of survey respondents either had no formal careers advice session, or found it unhelpful, a minority had been inspired or influenced by a careers adviser. More commonly, they had been influenced by a support worker who offered careers advice. For example, one participant explained that a support worker had encouraged them to try to persevere with applying for apprenticeships even when they experienced a number of rejections.

*'I think having someone there saying, "No, you're doing well, carry on," I think it did help a lot. It made me think, "Yes, I will carry on trying to apply for all these jobs even though they're all saying no".'* (Interviewee)

Another young person had been helped by the manager of their young carers group. The support worker had known the young carer since they were eight years old and had been a source of encouragement for pursuing work. They had suggested and helped to organise work experience at a travel company and had eventually helped them to secure permanent employment with the same organisation.

## Summary

These findings demonstrate that often young adult carers' current employment circumstances do not match their career aspirations. Instead, their current roles tend to be viewed as 'stop gaps' in their career progression or a way of financing their learning.

Qualitative findings show that young adult carers' caring responsibilities have a significant influence on their career aspirations, namely that they would often like to pursue a career with a caring element. Many felt that their caring role had given them skills, experience and expertise in certain areas that made them ideally suited to certain careers. Others felt that they would find a caring career rewarding and were keen to 'give back' or help people through their work. There was also a perception that employers in the care or charity sectors would be more understanding of participants' home situations and therefore provide the in-work support they required. In contrast, some participants were keen to avoid caring roles, so as not to replicate their home situation in the workplace. Others felt that they were 'locked in' to roles which offered the flexibility they needed, such as zero hour contracts or voluntary positions.

As discussed in the Employment chapter, 'role models' or 'trusted others' were also cited as influencing factors in young adult carers' decisions about their future career aspirations. This included family members and support workers. Where participants had received good careers support, this was viewed as having a positive influence on their aspirations and subsequent progression pathways.

However, despite the majority of respondents feeling confident about the steps needed to be taken to pursue their desired career, they also cited numerous barriers to achieving this. As noted in the Employment chapter, important factors for young adult carers to consider when thinking about future employment were location and working hours. However, flexibility appears to be the most influencing factor. These factors clearly place limitations on the pool of jobs available to young adult carers and therefore their opportunities to progress in their career.

The lack of employer support or concern around the perceived lack of support available also acts as a barrier to career progression for young adult carers. Some reported that they would avoid certain sectors where they felt that employers would be less supportive, or where the work was viewed as incompatible with a caring role due to working patterns or perceptions of inflexibility.

Other key barriers include being 'present-orientated'; lacking qualifications, skills and experience; a lack of time to develop interests and aspirations; emotional barriers such as feeling guilty about relinquishing their caring role in pursuit of their aspirations; and policy

and structural barriers, most notably the restrictive nature of the rules around Carer's Allowance.

Some participants discussed other influences on their careers which were outside of their caring role. These included personal interests, family role models and careers advisers, suggesting that when young adult carers receive high quality and tailored careers advice, this can have a positive impact on their aspirations and motivation.

## 11. Conclusions

This research has considered young adult carers' experiences in education and employment, their career aspirations, and their suggestions for improved policy and practice. Through exploring these themes in combination with previous research, several conclusions can be drawn.

This chapter considers the four initial research questions:

- What barriers do young adult carers face in making successful transitions to employment?
- What factors affect young adult carers' aspirations and decisions about employment?
- What policy and structural factors impact upon young adult carers' access to employment?
- What support do young adult carers need to overcome these barriers?

### Barriers young adult carers face when making transitions to employment

Young adult carers face a range of practical, emotional and psychological barriers when transitioning to employment.

For many young adult carers, the pool of available jobs is limited by practical factors such as location and number of hours. Young adult carers may also limit themselves to sectors which they anticipate will be more understanding and accommodating of caring responsibilities. They often also feel limited to applying for roles which are part-time rather than full-time, so they can fit these around their caring responsibilities. This not only excludes them from employment but also vocational training opportunities such as apprenticeships, which are typically delivered on a full-time basis. Some young adult carers experience rejection or lack of understanding from employers who are unwilling to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate their caring responsibilities. Others may not apply for jobs for fear of rejection; and yet others may secure employment but not disclose their caring responsibilities for the same reason.

Lack of employer awareness and understanding means that in many cases young adult carers are not offered the support needed to balance caring with work. This can lead to a 'crisis', where young adult carers become overwhelmed with the responsibilities of both caring and working. Often this adversely affects their ability to work. This can be heightened given that young adult carers are more likely to experience mental and physical ill-health.

Young adult carers may decide not to enter employment because it financially disadvantages them or their family members by changing their benefit entitlements. This challenge also applies to education and training, particularly apprenticeships, where the national minimum wage for an apprentice is significantly lower than the national minimum and living wage that other employees are entitled to. In addition, apprenticeships are classified as employment by benefit decision makers. This can result in young adult carers sacrificing the pursuit of their interests and aspirations to ensure that their family has enough income on which to live.

Young adult carers may lack qualifications and work experience in comparison to their peers. A lack of employer awareness and inadequate careers advice means that young adult carers are rarely told that their caring responsibilities could qualify as extenuating circumstances when applying for jobs or post-16 education courses that usually require a higher level of qualification. Inadequate careers advice also means that in many cases young adult carers miss opportunities to present their caring responsibilities as valuable and transferable skills. In all, this means that young adult carers' CVs may appear less attractive than their peers, preventing them from accessing the jobs they want.

Young adult carers can experience conflicting emotions when considering further education and employment options. Young adulthood is a time when individuals move towards greater independence. For young adult carers, a desire to forge an independent path may create feelings of guilt associated with 'leaving behind' the person they care for. In other instances, young people may feel frustrated or 'held back' by their caring responsibilities. Young adult carers may also fear leaving the cared-for person to engage in work, even when there is an opportunity to access paid care.

### **Factors affecting young adult carers' aspirations and decisions around employment**

A caring role can impact young people's decisions about employment in two ways.

Firstly, caring means that there are a host of practical considerations that take precedence over young adult carers' interests and aspirations when looking for work. Caring responsibilities place practical limitations on the ways in which young adult carers can work. As such, young adult carers consider the location of jobs and the hours worked as highly important. In some cases, this may mean rejecting or not applying for jobs that are better paid or more in line with the individual's interests and aspirations. These limitations are replicated in education, with some young adult carers choosing courses and providers which are close to home over those which are more relevant to their career interests or better ranked in league tables. Young adult carers also make decisions about work based on which sectors or levels they anticipate will be more accommodating to and understanding of their caring responsibilities. Again, this is sometimes prioritised over interests and career goals. In some cases, this prevents in-work progression to a role with greater responsibility. Some respondents felt 'locked into' zero-hour contracts or voluntary roles and unable to progress.

Secondly, the experience of caring often has a formative impact on young adult carers' thoughts about future career aspirations. In some cases, participants were keen to avoid caring roles, so as not to replicate their home situation in the workplace. More commonly, and in line with previous research<sup>46</sup>, young adult carers wanted to study or work in a caring profession. This should not necessarily be regarded negatively. In many cases, despite its challenges, caring is a meaningful and rewarding part of young adult carers' lives. Many feel it has had a positive impact on their identity and want to carry this into their paid work. Some feel passionate about aspiring to transform the care sector or young carers services. However, young adult carers may also lack the time and space to explore career options outside of care. Echoing previous research<sup>47</sup>, our findings suggest that young adult carers have limited opportunities to socialise and participate in extra-curricular activities throughout

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<sup>46</sup> Sempik and Becker (2014)

<sup>47</sup> Action for Young Carers (2005)

school and college. As a result, they may not have had the opportunity to develop interests and aspirations outside of caring and thus follow a caring career, as they feel they have few alternative options. These young people may also lack confidence in social situations which can also affect the roles and sectors in which they apply for work. Moreover, caring jobs are often low paid and based on zero-hour contracts, again trapping young adult carers in jobs with little space for upward progression.

The tendency to go into care work is compounded by a lack of careers advice, or careers advice that is insufficiently tailored to young adult carers' needs. Less than half of young adult carers had accessed a formal careers advice session, and only a quarter had discussed their caring role with a careers adviser. Very few of these young people were offered additional support as a result of their careers advice session. However, the qualitative data suggests that, when young adult carers did receive specialist careers advice, they were better able to see how their caring skills could be transferable and valuable to employers across different sectors. In turn, this was viewed as having a positive influence on their aspirations and subsequent progression pathways. Other influences on young adult carers' career aspirations included 'role models' or 'trusted others', including family members, tutors and support workers.

### **Policy and structural factors impacting on young adult carers' progression to employment**

Young adult carers face a range of policy and structural barriers which impact on their progression opportunities.

Despite being legally entitled to a Carer's Assessment by their local authority, findings suggest that young adult carers experience challenges in accessing this, evidenced by a significant majority of survey respondents reporting that they had never had a Carer's Assessment. Building on recent research<sup>48</sup>, it is clear that lack of communication and clear information hampers young adult carers' access to a Carer's Assessment. Many are not aware of its existence, while others lack clarity around what the assessment entails and its potential outcomes (i.e. follow up support), so much so that it is possible that some participants in this research had had an assessment but did not realise it. There are also instances of requests for assessments not being responded to in a timely manner or at all.

Where Carer's Assessments did occur, there is evidence that they can lead to financial support and respite which could help young adult carers to progress into education, training and employment. However, none of the research participants had been offered careers advice as a result of a Carer's Assessment.

Our findings also support previous research<sup>49</sup> that suggests regulations around the Carer's Allowance can act to deter young adult carers from seeking out paid employment or accessing education, thus restricting their progression opportunities. For some young adult carers, the impact of employment and/or learning on their welfare entitlement was a key consideration in their decisions about education, employment and training. This was particularly significant for those whose families relied on them financially. Financial pressures mean that young adult carers often feel torn between continuing their caring role

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<sup>48</sup> Aylward, N., Lees, C., Wolkind, R., and Klenk, H. (Forthcoming) 'Young adult carers in Wales'.

<sup>49</sup> Aylward, N (2014)

or moving into paid employment or education. Those that chose to move into further education or low paid employment such as apprenticeships and retail were often pushed into financially precarious circumstances. For others, this barrier prevented them from progressing into their desired career or sector, as the need to earn money was more pressing than achieving their long-term career aspirations.

Despite being protected from discrimination in employment under the Equality Act (2010), our research found multiple examples of young adult carers experiencing both direct and indirect discrimination based on their caring role. Some had been rejected for jobs after declaring their caring role on their application form, CV or at interview stage. Others had been dismissed from a position due to lateness or missing work – circumstances that arose because of fulfilling their caring role. Fear of discrimination in employment appears to be prevalent among this cohort and often prevented young adult carers from declaring their caring responsibilities to employers, resulting in a lack of in-work support. Findings suggest that issues of discrimination may be perpetuated by a lack of consistent employer approaches. In addition, a lack of awareness about carers' rights and entitlements in employment on behalf of both carers and employers may exacerbate this barrier.

### **What support do young adult carers need to overcome these barriers?**

It is clear that young adult carers require additional support to guide their decision-making process around education, training and employment, to ensure their transition is successful, and to help them sustain and progress in meaningful careers.

#### **Specialist support**

Our findings suggest that support specific to young adult carers can effectively meet the transition needs of this cohort. Their needs are distinct from young carers or adult carers, suggesting the need for more widespread support of this nature. Carers services offer a broad range of support that can help to overcome the barriers that young adult carers commonly face in accessing and progressing in learning and work. However, recent cuts to health and social care budgets have impacted on the support that some carers services are able to provide, and many young adult carers struggle to access local support which is suitable for their age group, either due to a lack of awareness or availability. Our findings indicate that proactive outreach works well in raising awareness of services and engaging young adult carers in support.

Improved partnership working between different services, learning providers and employers would also provide more holistic support to young adult carers. For example, our findings suggest that mental health support that takes into account both the pressures faced in education, and their circumstances as a carer, and the relationship between them, is most effective. However, our findings show that this is seldom done in practice. A more joined up approach between colleges, training providers, universities, employers, carers services and other support agencies would not only improve support but could also aid identification of young adult carers and referral through to specialist support.

#### **Support in education**

Support in both pre-16 and post-16 education should be consistent to increase accessibility and understanding around entitlement. This can be facilitated by a whole-organisation



approach to supporting young adult carers, including a formal recording process upon declaration and teacher/staff training. Currently, our data shows that these practices are not in place across the board, resulting in few young adult carers accessing adequate support in these stages of their lives and creating issues around declaration. Schools and further and higher education can play a key role in signposting young adult carers to specialist services such as carers services or mental health support. They can also provide in-house support. Findings suggest that adjustments such as deadline extensions, allowing them to have a mobile phone to hand and flexible hours can have a positive impact on young adult carers' experience at school, which could improve their chances of making successful transitions into further learning and employment. Other effective practice highlighted included introducing a carer's ID card to enable discrete declaration and identification, and one-to-one coaching or mentoring from a 'trusted other'. Additionally, it is argued that effective support should be long-term and consistent.

### **Tailored and holistic careers advice**

Our findings suggest that careers advice which is tailored to young adult carers' needs, and takes their caring roles into account, can support successful transitions and progression in education, training and employment. Less than half of the young adult carers involved in the research had had a session with a qualified careers adviser, and only two-fifths felt that advice was tailored to their needs as a carer. However, when a young person had received advice related to their career aspirations and home situation – often from their support worker at the local carers service – this had inspired and motivated them to pursue education and training. Increased awareness of young adult carers' support needs for careers advisers may help to broaden young people's access to tailored careers support and enable them to consider the transferable skills they have gained from caring and how these could be applied in the world of work. Access to other career-related activities, such as careers fairs, may also enable more young adult carers to gain information on a range of transition options and consider a broader range of career routes.

### **Carer friendly employment policies and support**

Currently, employer support is patchy both in availability and quality. While pockets of effective support exist, there is a clear need to ensure that employer approaches and behaviour are consistent across sectors and types of employer.

The research found that flexibility and employer understanding are key to providing effective in-work support for young adult carers. Allowing flexible working practices enables young adult carers to better balance their caring role with their work. Job shares, working from home, advanced rotas, access to mobile phones and flexible working hours are all good examples of this. Genuine understanding of their caring role was greatly appreciated by young adult carers. When an employer was understanding, it was more likely that practical adjustments and support were provided, increasing the likelihood that young adult carers sustain employment.

Employers should also encourage declaration of caring responsibilities at application and induction so that support and adjustments can be put in place as soon as possible, to avoid crisis situations occurring. An official space where young adult carers can declare their caring responsibility during the recruitment process is an effective way of achieving this. There is also evidence that an understanding atmosphere at interview can encourage

declaration, particularly amongst those who are concerned about discrimination at application stage.

Raising both employer and young adult carers' awareness of carers rights and entitlements in the workplace is key to fostering effective practice. Supporting young adult carers to increase their understanding of their entitlements and rights in work can also empower them to hold employers to account and reduce discrimination.

## 12. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the findings of this research and build on L&W's existing work to suggest changes that would result in improved support for young adult carers to engage and succeed in learning and work. They include recommendations for policy and decision makers, education providers, careers advisers, employers and carers services.

### For policy and decision makers:

- **Department for Education should formally identify young adult carers as a 'vulnerable group' giving them full access to the 16-19 Bursary.** Currently young adult carers are not identified as one of the three 'vulnerable groups' who are automatically entitled to the 16-19 Bursary. While they may be able to access the Bursary on a discretionary basis, a lack of awareness amongst both learning providers and young adult carers means they often do not have access to this support. Automatic entitlement would remove some financial barriers to young adult carers' engagement in post-16 education.
- **Department for Education should promote flexible and part-time apprenticeships for young adult carers.** These young people often find it difficult to commit to full-time work, alongside their caring responsibilities. Whilst Education and Skills Funding Agency guidance states that apprenticeships should be at least 30 hours work per week, except in exceptional circumstances (which are not defined), part time and flexible apprenticeships are not promoted by government or employers.
- **Department for Education should introduce a new requirement for FE providers to report on the numbers of young adult carers they have enrolled and the outcomes they achieve.** This will encourage all FE providers to formally identify and monitor the progress of young adult carers. Introducing a standard tick box on FE application forms (similar to the tick box which has recently been added to the UCAS form) at a national level would also support this.
- **Department for Education should introduce a bursary payment for young adult carers starting an apprenticeship. This should be the equivalent of the difference between the National Minimum Wage and the National Living Wage, to ensure that apprenticeships are a viable financial option for all young adult carers.** Many young adult carers live in low-income families and have dependents who rely on their income or on benefits, both of which are affected if they start an apprenticeship.
- **Department for Education should ensure that young adult carers receive access to independent careers information, advice and guidance which takes account of their caring responsibilities and the impact that these responsibilities can have upon their decision and the opportunities available to them.** Any national reforms or initiatives aimed at improving the quality of information, advice and guidance for young people should take account of the specific needs of young adult carers in relation to careers advice.
- **Department for Work and Pensions should exempt young adult carers from the 21-hour study rule in Carer's Allowance.** This can create barriers to young adult carers engaging in education, training and employment, and prevent them from pursuing their

career aspirations. Exemption from the 21 hour rule will prevent young adult carers having to make the choice between caring and education or employment, which can result them dropping out of learning.

- **Department of Health and Social Care should commission work to identify effective approaches to conducting Carer's Assessments with young adult carers, particularly the new Transition Assessments.** Professionals conducting assessments should also be provided with examples and models of good practice, to ensure that they cover young adult carers' aspirations in terms education, employment and training, and have strong referral routes to independent careers advice in place.
- **Local authorities should provide clear and visible information about young adult carers' right to a Carer's Assessment and how to access it,** as well as the potential benefits of receiving an assessment. Young adult carers also need to be made aware when they are having a Carer's Assessment, so they can fully engage with the process and request the support they need.
- **All local authorities should develop and publish local carers action plans, which should set out the support they will provide for young adult carers. They should also prioritise funding for carers services to provide targeted support to young adult carers.** Carers services are often the main source of support for young adult carers, but budget cuts and reduced contract values mean that support workers' time and resources are increasingly limited. In addition, inconsistencies in contracts between local authorities mean that young adult carers can experience a 'postcode lottery' in terms of the level and type of support they can receive and up to what age they can access this.

### For education providers:

- **Education providers should adopt 'whole organisation' approaches to identifying and supporting young adult carers,** to reduce their reliance on one or a small number of supportive and understanding members of staff. Introducing a carers policy, staff training and securing senior management and governor buy-in can all contribute to young adult carers receiving consistent support throughout their time in education. Information and guidance about this is included in [this guide for colleges](#), produced by Carers Trust and NIACE (now L&W).
- **Education providers should work in partnership with carers services, local authorities, other education providers (including schools) and employers to support young adult carers' transitions** into and out of their provision. These partnerships can enable providers to identify young adult carers before they enrol, offer appropriate and holistic support at every stage of the learning journey.
- **Education staff (in schools, FE providers and HE providers) require further support and training to improve their understanding and awareness of young adult carers and their support needs in education.** Providers should engage with their local carers services and explore opportunities for awareness raising and training sessions to be run with their staff on a regular basis, possibly as part of inset or training days. In turn, this should improve the identification of and support for young and young adult carers, reducing the impact of caring on their experiences of education.

- **Education providers should introduce and promote practical support and adjustments for young adult carers.** Our findings show that practical support such as deadline extensions, allowance for mobile phones and flexibility with absence quotas can have a positive impact on young adult carers' experience in learning and allow them to continue engaging in further education or work. Establishing this support and ensuring that young adult carers are aware of it can enable these young people to better balance caring with studying or work, and to pursue their career aspirations.
- **Further and Higher Education providers should consider working towards the Carers Federation's [Quality Standard in Carers Support](#).** This Standard provides a comprehensive good practice framework and assessment and accreditation process for providers to review and improve the support they offer to young adult carers. L&W recently worked with six FE colleges to achieve the QSCS award and found that this resulted in considerable improvements in their identification and holistic support for young adult carers. By working towards this, providers would ensure that young adult carers receive consistent support across FE and HE, thereby improving their engagement and progression in post-16 education.

### For careers advisers and career development staff:

- **Careers advisers should receive training to increase their understanding of young adult carers and their support needs in relation to education, employment and training.** This should include training in how to help young adult carers recognise the skills they have developed through caring and how these can be transferred to the world of work; young adult carers' rights and entitlements at work and to wider support such as bursaries; and local organisations and services which can provide specialist support. Again, this could be delivered by local carers services or on a national level by an appropriate advocacy organisation.
- **Careers advisers should use existing tailored resources and materials to provide holistic and individualised careers support to young adult carers.** An example of this includes L&W's [Learning, Work and Wellbeing Toolkit](#), which includes a range of resources for advisers to use with young adult carers and enable them to consider the education, training and employment options in the context of their caring roles.
- **Careers advisers should run activities which introduce young adult carers to the wide range of career pathways available to them.** This might include careers fairs, 'speed dating' with professionals or industry talks. These activities can enable young adult carers to make more informed decisions about their career pathways, instead of defaulting to a career in caring, based on their personal experiences.

### For employers:

- **Employers need training and awareness raising sessions to increase their understanding of young adult carers, their transferable skills and their support needs in relation to employment.** This should include HR, line management and senior staff, and cover information about young adult carers, the types of challenges they may face and the transferable skills they may develop through caring; their rights and entitlements at work; and the support or adjustments that can enable young people to balance caring and employment. This could be delivered by local carers services or on a national level by an appropriate advocacy organisation.

- **Employers should adopt ‘whole organisation’ approaches to identifying and supporting young adult carers at work.** Introducing a carers policy, staff training and providing formal and ongoing opportunities to declare a caring role can all contribute to young adult carers receiving comprehensive and consistent support in work. Including a positive statement about recruiting young adult carers (or carers of any age) on job descriptions and adverts can encourage these young people to apply for roles that they may not otherwise consider and identify their caring responsibilities on application.
- **Employers should introduce practical support and adjustments for young adult carers.** Examples and advice on this can be found in L&W’s [guide for employers](#) on supporting young adult carers in the workplace. This support can enable young adult carers to better balance caring with work, become effective and valuable employees, and pursue their career aspirations.
- **Employers should also consider working towards the Carers Federation’s [Quality Standard in Carers Support](#).** This Standard provides a comprehensive good practice framework and assessment and accreditation process for employers to review and improve the support they offer to carers. By working towards this, employers would ensure that young adult carers – and carers of all ages – receive consistent and tailored in-work support, thereby improving their access to and progression in employment.

### For carers services:

- **Carers services need support and resources to provide young adult carers with tailored and holistic advice in relation to education, training and employment,** in order to support successful transitions into these opportunities. While carer support workers are often the first people that young adult carers turn to for help, these staff may not have the information or resources to provide comprehensive or detailed advice on the range of options available to young people. Carers services could use L&W’s [Learning, Work and Wellbeing Toolkit](#) to support young adult carers in making informed decisions about education, training and employment options, and to refer them to specialist careers support when this is required.
- **Carers services should provide advice and awareness raising sessions to improve young adult carers’ understanding of their rights and entitlements at work.** This would allow young adult carers to hold employers to account and request in-work support. Carers services are ideally placed to carry out this awareness raising, as they have the specialist information and knowledge required and are trusted by the young people they support.
- **Carers services should identify and work with other local organisations that can support young adult carers to access and progress in education and work.** These may include education providers, careers advice services, employers and employer representative organisations, health services and Jobcentre Plus. These partnerships would support effective referrals and enable young adult carers to access specialist advice. Activities to support this can be found in the [Learning, Work and Wellbeing Toolkit](#).