



CARER POSITIVE
www.carerpositive.org

Employers and Coronavirus

Survey Report

June 2020



Introduction

Carer Positive is a Scottish Government initiative which is operated across Scotland by Carers Scotland. It aims to raise awareness of the growing number of people who are balancing work alongside caring responsibilities and awards recognition to employers with good practice in supporting working carers.

Carer Positive employers were asked in May 2020 to respond to a survey about how they have supported employees who are carers during the coronavirus pandemic.

We understand that employers have had to respond to quickly changing circumstances, with competing priorities and logistical challenges and are therefore very grateful to those who managed to find the time to share some of their experiences.

We also appreciate that many other employers who are not accredited as Carer Positive will have risen to this current challenge in finding new and imaginative ways of working and supporting their staff teams. This report does not suggest that its findings are representative of all Scottish employers, but it helps highlight some good examples of how organisations have adapted and recognised the particular needs of their employees who are carers.

Respondents

50 employers responded to the survey, between them employing a total of 89,500 employees across Scotland. 46% of employers were public sector, 46% in the not for profit sector, and 8% private sector. They cover a range of small, medium and large workplaces, ranging from Further and Higher Education institutions, local and central government and other public bodies, voluntary organisations and private sector employers in IT, financial and energy sectors.

Key Messages

- Carer Positive employers who responded to the survey have generally adapted quickly and effectively to the challenges placed on them by the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic and ongoing working requirements
- Within this, and whilst wanting to address the needs of all staff, employers have recognised the particular circumstances faced by carers and have sought to support their health and wellbeing in a variety of ways

- As many staff have moved to homeworking, a key element of support has been the development of communication channels to ensure carers have felt well connected and able to discuss particular challenges. A major focus within this has been access to counselling and mental health support, as well as signposting to relevant sources of helpful information
- Similarly, online platforms have been used effectively to facilitate peer support through virtual employee network meetings and drop-in sessions
- Enabling a greater degree of flexibility in working hours and patterns was highlighted by many employers as a feature which is helping carers balance work and caring requirements, although there was also recognition that particular caring situations made working from home much more challenging
- There are understandably greater difficulties for employers managing key staff in front-line roles, however carers circumstances were generally well accommodated within this, with health and safety a key consideration for staff, and the people they care for
- Some employers have already adapted and enhanced Carer and Special Leave policies (including additional paid leave) to reflect the impact faced by carers. And as employers begin to think of returning to work, new pandemic, health & safety and remote working policies continue to develop in response to the need to embrace a new way of working for all staff, and within this ensure that the needs of carers are fully considered

“There is no expectation through the pandemic to work and care on the same basis as pre-pandemic. No conversation/request is off the table”

Survey Findings

The vast majority of employers were able to offer homeworking for staff who were carers and for those delivering essential services, measures were in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all staff, with additional focus on those who might be caring for someone.

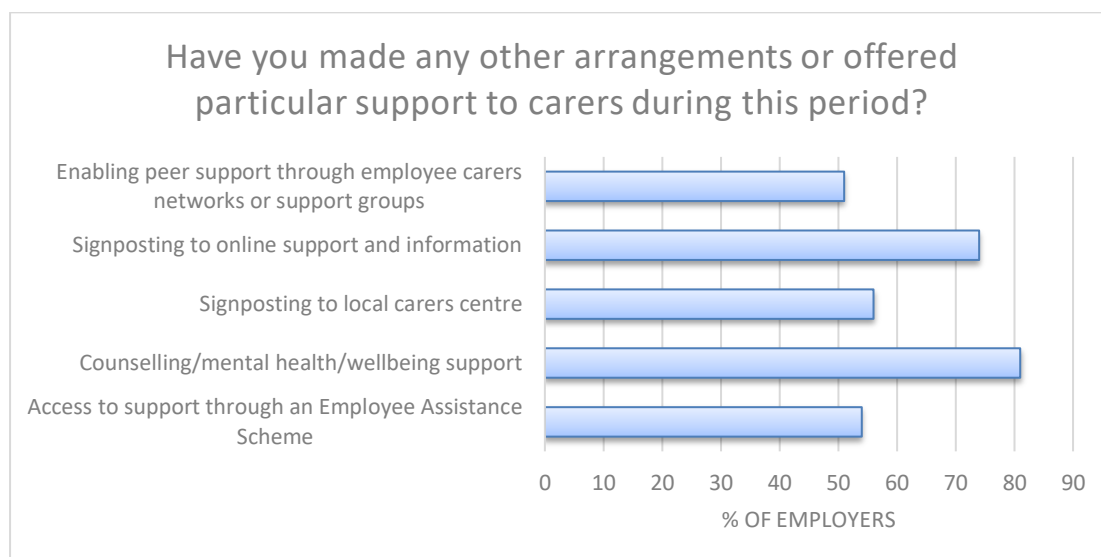
There was also a recognition however that for some carers, homeworking is difficult due to the nature of caring circumstances at home.

68% of employers said they had Carers Leave or Special Leave provisions in place for carers, and a number had enhanced this since the start of the crisis. Other leave options were Emergency leave and enhanced flexible working conditions such as reduced core hours.

32% of employers had made particular provisions for carers who were caring for someone in the shielded group - these included furlough and home-working where appropriate, but with reduced hours or greater flexibility within working hours/days.

34% of organisations had key workers in essential frontline roles - most of these staff who were carers have been moved to non-frontline duties or working from home on other duties with a minority furloughed or having taken carers leave. Those remaining in frontline duties had been issued with appropriate PPE and safety measures were in place.

Asked what other arrangements and/or particular support for carers had been made, **43 employers said they offered a range of other supports: 54% provide access to support through an Employee Assistance Scheme; 81% provide counselling, mental health, or wellbeing support; 74% signpost carers to online support and information, and 51% enable peer support through employee carer networks or support groups.**



Many specific examples of support were highlighted by employers – these included

- a range of online modules supporting employee health and wellbeing
- weekly drop-in Zoom sessions for carers to discuss challenges, remote peer support via Team meetings and virtual carer network meetings/skype calls etc
- access to an Unpaid Carers COVID Guidance booklet with links to national and local supports available for all unpaid carers
- Carer Support Facilitator available to speak to
- A Workbook on managing anxiety emailed to all staff
- 'Supporting each other in a crisis' webinar
- Work the hours you can and keep in touch
- reviewed special leave policy to allow unlimited paid special leave to carers and to make taking it in smaller chunks easier, rather than full days
- Fortnightly 'Wellbeing at Home' newsletter with support and signposting as well as general health

“We have been clear that we understand the challenges of being a carer and trying to work from home and that we have changed our mindset from working hours to achievement of tasks. Managers are in regular contact with staff and if they are having difficulty completing tasks due to caring responsibilities we are being flexible and reallocating work or amending deadlines. Staff are not expected to be working normal hours”

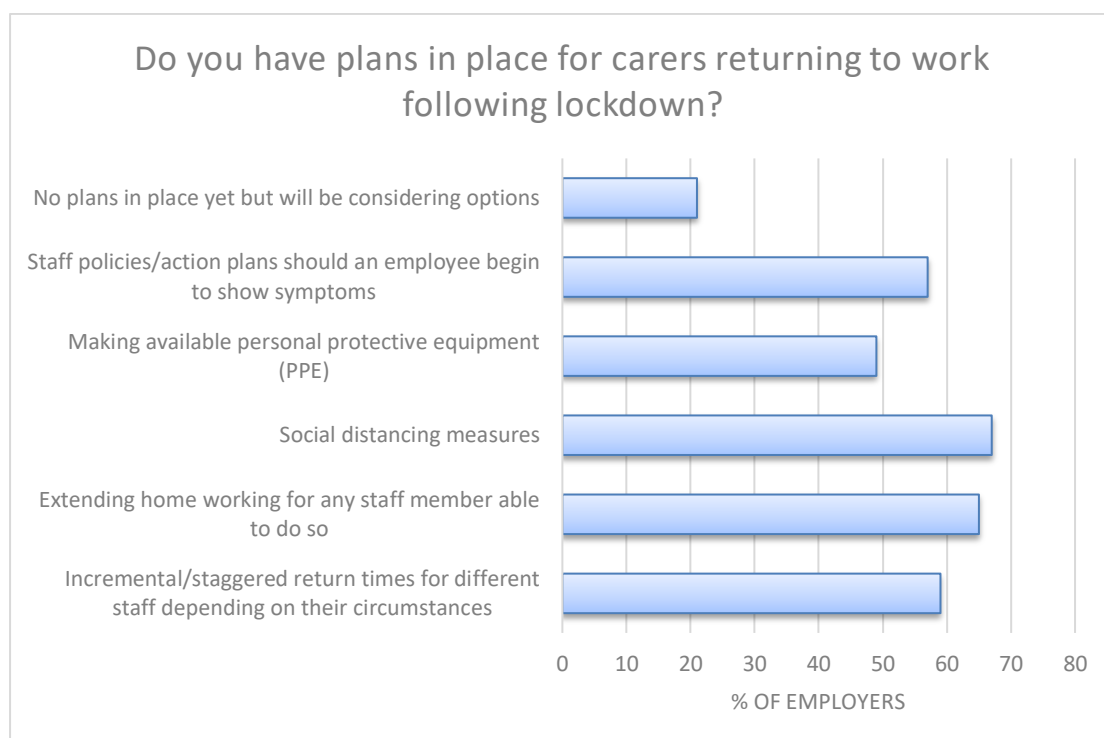
Only 5 (10%) employers said that there had been challenges which meant that they could not always support staff – reasons for this included the speed of change and the time it took for management to accommodate changing rotas and finding suitable home duties, as well as IT difficulties in a new system of remote working. Also being unable to meet for face to face support was mentioned as a drawback.

Employers were asked if they had developed, or plan to develop any **new organisational/ HR policies or procedures** as a results of the pandemic. **48% said they had, and 30% are planning to do so.**

These included new Pandemics policies; Homeworking and remote working policies; policy addendum for absence management, sick pay scheme, Health and Safety policies; updated Carers Policies – including additional paid carers or special leave provisions; a variety of HR Guides have been created to support employees during the pandemic - e.g. homeworking guidance, remote working top tips, conducting virtual meetings, FAQs documents etc.

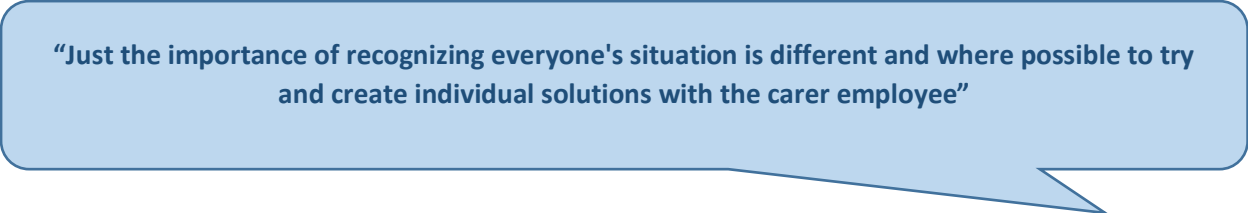
“We are still at early stages of our planning for this but given we are small and have been able to work from home effectively, we will be able to work with individuals to make a plan for each person. Alongside more general policies around hygiene, symptoms etc. for the office environment”

Employers were asked if they had any plans in place for **carers returning to work following lockdown**. **78% had plans in place** and 20% said although there were no plans in place yet, they would be reviewing this. Plans considered included policies and action plans should an employee begin to show symptoms; social distancing measures; making PPE available; extending homeworking; and incremental/staggered return times for different staff depending on circumstances – eg if staff are caring for someone in the shielded group.



Asked if there were any lessons employers have learned that they think will help in supporting carer employees in the future, **42% said that useful learning had already been gathered**. Of the remaining employers, some said they hadn't had a chance to reflect on this yet or that they will need to gather feedback from carers.

There was generally a recognition that greater flexibility and homeworking would become a key feature of how carers can balance work and caring roles, but also that individual needs and circumstances should be taken into account when managing work responsibilities and requirements.



“Just the importance of recognizing everyone's situation is different and where possible to try and create individual solutions with the carer employee”

For more information about the Carer Positive award scheme and how we can support organisations to become recognised as Carer Positive Employers, please visit our website at www.carerpositive.org. You can also contact us at info@carerpositive.org.