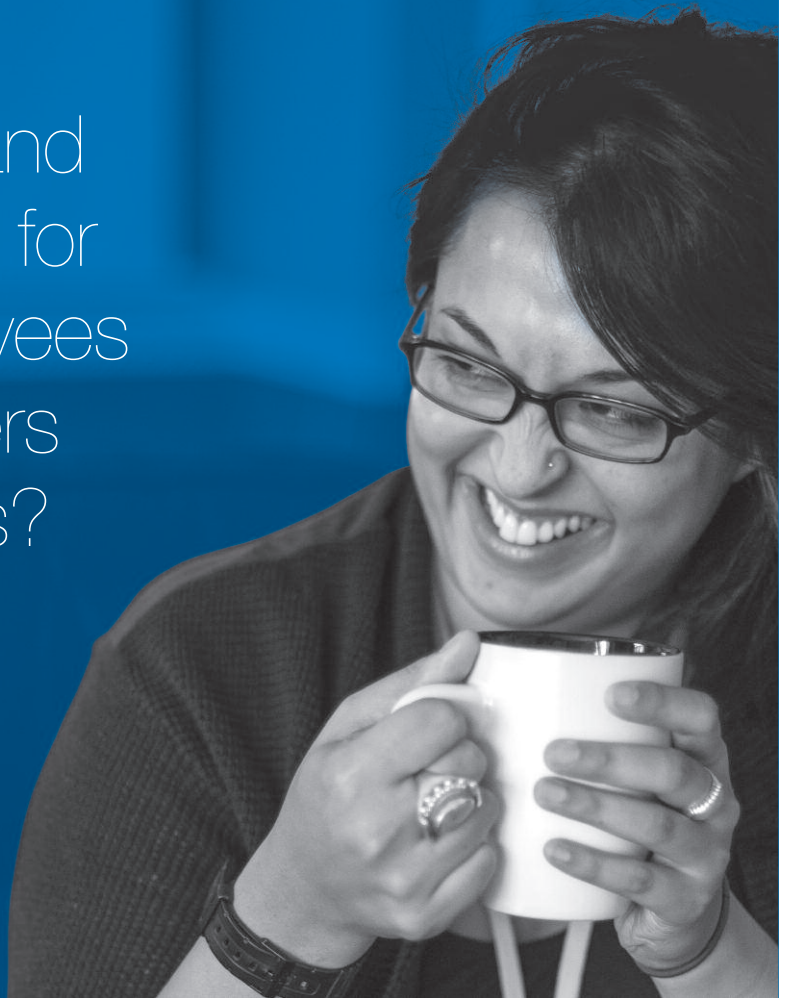


6. Learning and  
development for  
those employees  
who are carers  
– what works?



Social care employers know that investing time and effort into developing the skills of your workforce means a better quality of service. Employees who are juggling working and caring responsibilities may encounter particular problems with learning such as:

- Having to decline learning opportunities due to caring responsibilities
- Finding the right time/extra time to study
- Having to find replacement care for the times they are learning
- Problems with attending courses that are at times when they would be caring
- Having the energy, mental and physical, to access opportunities to learn new skills.

It's important to have a good understanding of how any learning or development activities may be perceived by your employees at an individual level. Through the use of supervision and HR processes, each employee should be offered the chance to discuss their learning requirements. Flexibility is often the key, so offering later completion dates, flexible studying times or peer support can be helpful to working carers.

'Understand that sometimes we don't want to sit in a classroom and we don't want to be there because we can't deal with what's going on at home. So if you could just send work home for us we could do it and it would encourage us..don't pressure us, we don't need more pressure, we have had enough already ... just be supportive'.<sup>28</sup>

### **Young adult carer**

As well as barriers to developing their skills, working carers face barriers in using their skills. Highly trained staff who are carers can feel that the energy and time needed to both apply for and hold down a role 'higher up' in the organisation is more than they can manage. They may also feel that their employer would want 'too much' from them, when they are already stretched. Employers themselves can also be guilty of assuming that working carers will be looking for a less skilled or responsible job. It is through these circumstances that employers lose skilled staff or fail to utilise skilled staff in the right way. Almost 45% of men and 55% of women who are in paid work and caring for more than 20 hours a week are in elementary occupations, in sales, customer service or personal services.

Employers should:

- Look at each individual's learning needs
- Be flexible in the way learning is offered
- Offer learning in different formats
- Introduce a learning 'buddy' scheme
- Engage in a holistic approach to learning, taking account of the personal circumstances of the individual and the impact of engagement in learning on other areas of their life, particularly their caring role
- Ensure that learning methods and outcomes allow the learner to be 'in control', thus allowing those who have caring responsibilities to plan their own learning around caring
- Recognise the expertise and insight that can be gained from undertaking a caring role and how the organisation and the employee can best use this. Is there an appropriate opportunity for the employee to help others learn from their experiences?

To help your organisation and its managers to be aware of these adaptations, it's also important not to overlook the need to raise awareness of carers needs through the general learning and development that you give to all staff. Perhaps you include it in your induction process, perhaps you place posters up to remind people of carers issues and what you do to support them or run a learning event to raise awareness throughout your staff group. Resources to be able to do any of the above are available at:

**[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/carers](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/carers)**

## Recognising and capturing existing skills of employees who are carers

Carers often carry a range of skills and knowledge developed through their caring responsibilities that are transferable into the workplace. Often these areas of knowledge and skills are areas that employers need in their workforce. It is important for employers to consider these areas both in recruitment practice and in future learning and development.

When recruiting, employers can actively consider the transferability of acquired skills to their specific workplace. You may need to help some carers to recognise the possibility of this transfer of skills or knowledge but in many cases carers are already aware. Previous experience and knowledge can help to 'speed' the development of a competent and confident employee and is a real bonus for the employer. Recognition of caring experience can also be a key factor in retaining staff.

Through learning and development, employees can be encouraged to gain recognition for their existing skills and knowledge, possibly through accreditation and eventually by gaining qualifications.

Currently many qualifications in social care are made up of small 'bite size' units. Many of these units can be 'banked' and then put towards small, medium or large qualifications in the form of various awards, certificates and diplomas.<sup>30</sup> It may be that employees who are carers feel they do not have time to consider gaining whole qualifications as their caring responsibilities take up all their free time. However, with encouragement they can be supported to realise that they may be gaining accreditation for what they already know and do. Although they may not be ready to take on a whole qualification they can gain a range of units which can then be banked and used as building blocks for qualifications when they feel ready for the bigger undertaking. The following scenario demonstrates how caring responsibilities can be more officially recognised in the accreditation of possible units. These are just some of the possibilities and there will be lots more.

<sup>30</sup>For more information, please see: [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications\\_and\\_training](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications_and_training)

**What skills and knowledge does Amy have that could be useful to an employer in social care?**

Skills	Knowledge	Evidence	Links to qualification units <sup>31</sup>
Communication skills	How to communicate in a range of ways to suit the person	Hairdressing career Relationship with mum	<b>SHC 21</b> Introduction to communication in health, social care or children's and young people's settings
Dealing with incontinence	How to manage incontinence with dignity	Managing her mum's incontinence	<b>HSC 026</b> Implement person centred approaches in health and social care <b>DEM 204</b> Understand and Implement a person centred approach to the care and support of individuals with dementia
Time management	How to manage your time effectively	Managing to care for mum and two children and work	<b>HSC 025</b> Role of Health and Social Care Worker <b>HSC 025</b> (Learning Outcome 3 – partnership working)
Advocacy	How to advocate on someone's behalf	Gaining of services/benefits Adaptation of house	
Working with range of professionals	Understanding of partnership working and other professional roles	Advocated and managed mum's bathroom conversion with the Occupational Therapist and the Council	
Risk management	How to assess risk	Manages mum's environment to manage the risk Manages her own time to lessen risk to mum	<b>HSC 027</b> Contribute to health and safety in health and social care <b>ASM 34</b> Administer medication to individuals and monitor the effects
Safe handling of medication	How to handle medicines	Manages all her mum's medication	
Communicating with individuals with dementia	Understanding of dementia	Learning about her mum's condition	<b>DEM 201</b> Dementia awareness <b>DEM 205</b> Understand the factors that can influence communication and interaction with individuals who have dementia
Supporting individuals in general daily living	Understanding of individual needs	Caring responsibilities	<b>HSC 2007</b> Support independence in the tasks of daily living <b>HSC 2013</b> Support care plan activities

<sup>31</sup> For more detail on the Qualifications and Credit Framework and qualifications in social care, please see: [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications\\_and\\_training](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications_and_training)

### Consider the following scenario:

Amy trained as hairdresser when she left school. For the past two years, she has been caring for her mum. Her mum has dementia and requires a lot of support. She often falls, has a very poor short term memory and is frequently incontinent. This incontinence has meant that Amy has had to advocate on behalf of her mum for adaptations to the house. Amy also deals with all her mum's medication as she gets confused. Amy still cuts hair when she can, to fit in around her caring responsibilities. She lives in the next street to her mum and has two school age children. She is considering a career in social care.



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