

Carer Confident

FAQs for small employers

Carer Confident is relevant and appropriate for all organisations, whatever your size and structure, including for **small employers**. If you are a small, medium size or micro employer, we encourage you to identify and develop your own activities as appropriate to your organisation. For example, small businesses may not have formal HR functions, policies or processes, but can achieve an open and inclusive workplace environment, and positive and supportive behaviours from owners/managers.

We don't have the resources to provide policies and support for carers, so how is Carer Confident relevant to us?

As a small employer you may think that you can't provide the type of support that larger organisations can because you don't have the size or structure to do this. However, while you may not be able to offer the range of help and assistance that larger organisations provide, you CAN create a supportive environment for carers and promote positive behaviours from owners/managers.

1

We find it difficult to offer flexible working because of the nature of our business – can we still become Carer Confident?

Small employers are often flexible in practice even if they may not talk about it in this way. They may view this as accommodating an employee's needs rather than as flexible working, especially if they don't have formal HR policies.

So, think about the range of flexibilities you may already be offering – or be able to provide - which could help a carer in your workplace. For example, this might just be about enabling someone to come in to, or leave, work, a bit earlier or later, and it might only be for a short period of time.

Sometimes it may not be possible to alter a carer's working hours, particularly in a small business with limited options for making alternative arrangements. However, there may be something else you can do like allowing flexibility to attend a hospital or GP appointment. Although caring crises will occur, sometimes medical appointments can be planned and discussed in advance and needn't alter a normal pattern of working. Where a caring situation is ongoing it is also helpful where possible to identify a Plan B in the event of an emergency.

We don't have formal policies (or a carer's policy) in place so how could we achieve this benchmark?

Carer Confident has been designed with the intention that all organisations, of whatever size, can achieve each level of the award and we will take into account the size and structure of your organisation when we assess your application. While small businesses may often not have formal HR functions, policies or processes, as mentioned above, they CAN promote an open and inclusive workplace environment and positive and supportive behaviours from owners/managers.

The **Guidelines and criteria** for each Carer Confident level include illustrative examples of the type of evidence organisations may wish to include with their application; however small employers are encouraged to identify and develop their own activities appropriate to their own working environment, size and structure.

Does it matter if we can't answer all of the questions on the application form?

Don't worry if you can't respond as fully as you wish to every question. It is likely that your responses will be stronger in some areas than others (and that this will also be the case for other organisations). Please answer what you can and then use the benchmark results to build on what you currently provide.

2

So, how can small employers support colleagues who are carers? Seven steps

- 1. Remember that small things can make a difference.** If there are things that you can't offer as an employer, think about what you CAN do. A simple adjustment or flexibility like giving a carer in your workplace permission to keep their mobile phone on, or make/receive a call, can help to reduce anxiety and provide some peace of mind.
- 2. Think flexibly.** Don't feel under pressure to accept requests to work flexibly immediately but don't dismiss them either. It doesn't have to be complicated - many flexibilities in the workplace are provided informally – and in some cases on a trial basis – and do not involve making a formal change to the employee's contract. The costs of remote working technology, for example, have reduced in recent years so it may be possible for some colleagues to work remotely and/or for more meetings to be held virtually.
- 3. Talk to your employees.** Be open to having a conversation about caring. Let your employee(s) know you want to support them and discuss what may be possible within the capacity of your business. Even more than in a large organisation, a small employer's staff can be the key factor for performance. If one person leaves because of difficulties in combining work and caring it can have a much bigger impact than in a larger organisation. Conversely, working practices which increase loyalty, motivation and retention should have a positive effect on performance.
- 4. If you source your HR support externally,** check what provisions might be included for carers, for example access to health and wellbeing information and support.

5. **Signpost colleagues to external sources of support**, for example information and advice from Carers UK at national level or from the local council or local carers organisations.
6. **Be aware of carers' legal rights in the workplace.** Information is available at Carers UK www.carersuk.org and ACAS www.acas.org.uk. The Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com has also produced guidance on the Equality Act for small businesses which is tailored for organisations which don't have in-house HR or legal advice.
7. **Recognise the business benefits.** As noted by the Federation of Small Businesses "more and more small firms are embracing flexible working" (which is the number one priority for working carers) with "many small firms recognising the benefits in terms of staff morale and satisfaction, which has a knock-on effect on business productivity, staff recruitment and retention, and ultimately sales and profitability"¹. The less hierarchical structures of small employers can mean that the impact of flexible working practices can be observed more easily than in large organisations, and that they can be more responsive when needed.

Small employer case study: Listawood

With a workforce of around 150 people, Listawood are a manufacturer of promotional products such as ceramic mugs, fridge magnets and mouse pads. The company have made a firm commitment to creating a culture of flexibility and support for those needing to balance their home and work lives, often at short notice, which they believe is a significant driver of their strong record of staff retention.

The recent economic downturn, and increased competition from emerging low wage economies has placed enormous strain on Listawood's sector, creating pressure to keep staff costs low. As part of their performance management framework, Listawood regularly survey their employees to measure staff satisfaction. The company are aware that they do not offer the best salary levels in the area – indeed only 56 per cent of staff surveyed felt their pay was competitive when compared with other employers locally. However their deep rooted culture of flexibility is well recognised by staff – 97 per cent felt that the company offered better opportunities for work life balance than other employers in the area.

Explaining their approach, Managing Director Alex Turner said: *'Losing highly trained staff is incredibly disruptive in any business. In the sales environment it fractures customer relationships which can result in reduced levels of business, and in the factory it compromises manufacturing efficiency. On top of this you then have to bear the costs associated with recruitment and training for their replacement. We are in no doubt that our staff retention levels are driven by our attitude to work life balance rather than the generosity of our remuneration packages. This makes it possible for us to remain competitive and profitable in a highly competitive market, even during these unusually difficult trading conditions.'*

¹ FSB Evidence to Select Committee on Work and Pensions, February 2018

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have further questions or need further clarification please contact us at carer.confident@carersuk.org or 0207 378 4956