



Lost Connections

Supporting carers in the workplace in 2021 and beyond

A WPI Strategy report for Vodafone UK

March 2021

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About Vodafone

Vodafone UK is a technology communications company that connects people, businesses and devices to help our customers benefit from digital innovation. Our services span mobile, fixed line connections, home and office broadband, and the Internet of Things (IoT).

We have a strong track record as a tech pioneer, making the UK's first mobile phone call, sending the first text message, and making the UK's first live holographic call using 5G in 2018. We were also the first to start carrying live 5G traffic from a site in Salford, Greater Manchester. As of October 2020, we have 5G in 57 locations in the UK and 193 across Germany, Spain, Italy and Ireland.

In September 2020, leading mobile benchmarking company, umlaut, named Vodafone as London's best network for 5G. Our 4G network coverage currently reaches over 99% of the UK population. And in October 2020, Vodafone was named Network Provider of the Year by readers of leading technology advice website, Trusted Reviews.

Today, Vodafone serves more than 18 million mobile and fixed-line customers in the UK. To help deliver Gigabit UK, our full-fibre broadband roll-out programme now covers 15 UK towns and cities through partnerships with CityFibre and Openreach.

For more information about Vodafone UK, please visit: www.vodafone.co.uk

Foreword

COVID-19 has had a profound impact on our society and economy. But the pandemic has affected some groups of people more starkly than others: those working on the frontline of our hospitals, care homes and schools, for example. It has also heightened and highlighted the challenges facing unpaid carers – those helping another person, usually a relative or friend, in their day-to-day life.

An estimated 2.8 million workers took on additional caring responsibilities when the pandemic hit, and this number would be even higher if we included those parents who have found themselves juggling home schooling and work. This has in turn made the challenges facing those with caring responsibilities more visible. How many of us, for example, have had a colleague's child unexpectedly join a virtual meeting?

This is not a new challenge. Prior to the pandemic, an estimated 6,000 new people were taking on unpaid caring responsibilities every day. With the UK's population continuing to age, this number is expected to grow.

New polling commissioned by Vodafone has found that 39 per cent of people who work full time saw their caring responsibilities increase due to COVID-19 in 2020. Yet it had been suggested that even before the pandemic, as many as three in 10 workers would be forced to leave their current jobs if they had to take on greater caring responsibilities.

We could, therefore, be facing a mass exodus of the UK workforce. This not only risks the loss of years of expertise and experience, it could have a detrimental impact on the lives of carers who would otherwise wish to remain at work.

There is no getting away from the fact that this is also a major gender challenge - the majority of carers are women. Our polling identified that, of the 77 per cent of respondents who reported sharing caring responsibilities, women were more than twice as likely to do the larger share of caring. Failing to support carers therefore risks heightening pre-existing gender inequalities around pay, progression and participation in the workplace.

To prevent this, we need to consider how we can provide greater support to those juggling work and caring responsibilities. COVID-19 has demonstrated that not every role requires a physical presence in the workplace every day, a change likely to be welcomed by the 36 per cent of carers we polled who stated that they would like the option to work from home occasionally.

Employers should reflect on the benefits of flexible working witnessed during the pandemic and identify which areas might best suit the needs of their organisation and workforce moving forwards. Clearly, different businesses and organisations will have different needs and a one-size-fits-all approach won't work. But where a more flexible approach to work locations and hours can be taken without impacting productivity – indeed where it may well support it – this is something employers should consider.

At Vodafone, for example, we expect that for many of our employees their future working patterns will see an increase in remote working, giving employees the best of both worlds: the benefits of flexible working, with its reduced commuting time and costs, and the benefits of physically coming together with colleagues when needed to help teams be more creative, collaborative and social.

Of course, our roles vary hugely across the company and our working patterns will reflect that. Overall though we hope that this model will help us attract more people with different perspectives, cultures and skills and enable us to access a wider geographical pool of talent, supporting the business goal to become an even more diverse employer.



Employers should also consider how their parental leave policies can be updated to foster a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Creating an environment where all parents have the opportunity to spend more time with their children not only reduces concerns around the impact of parental leave on the finances and careers of new parents, but helps to challenge the idea that caring is a 'woman's job'. This in turn helps to reduce the stigma around taking time off for caring responsibilities for all employees, but will particularly help male carers who may otherwise feel unrecognised or unsupported.

The Government and employers need to collaborate to ensure that unpaid carers, including parents, are able to continue working if they wish and it is crucial for businesses to set an example. At Vodafone, any employee whose partner is having a baby, adopts a child or becomes a parent through surrogacy will have the flexibility to take up to 16 weeks paid leave at any time during the first 18 months. This will be available to all non-birthing parents regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or length of service.

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the importance of connectivity, especially for those with caring responsibilities. Of the carers we polled, 92 per cent said that it would be harder to balance work and caring responsibilities without access to technology, while 92 per cent also said that technology and connectivity had become more important to them since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wearable devices and monitoring systems, as well as digital connectivity in our health and social care system, can provide peace of mind for carers and independence for those being cared for. And remote working technology can enable carers to continue working while being close to those they are caring for. Embracing these technologies could have a profound impact on those who need help the most. Supportive HR policies and flexible working are important, but it is digital connectivity and devices that will enable carers to be fulfilled in both their work and caring responsibilities.

We are living through challenging and extraordinary times, but I hope that as life gradually returns to normal, we will continue to recognise the importance of unpaid carers to society and adapt our workplaces and society to support them better.

Helen Lamprell
General Counsel & External Affairs Director, Vodafone UK



Introduction

According to Carers UK, there were 9.1 million unpaid carers in the UK before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising by 4.5 million (of which more than half - 2.8 million - were workers) by June 2020 as a result of the impact of lockdown.ⁱ

With one in seven of the UK's population predicted to be over 75 by 2040,ⁱⁱ unpaid carers will be increasingly important to our economy and society. As the need for carers continues to rise, more and more people will find themselves having to juggle providing care with work.

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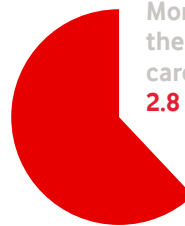
Rising by 4.5 million



By June 2020 there were

13.6 million

unpaid carers due to the impact of lockdown.



More than half of these additional carers were workers. **2.8 million**

This is making unpaid carers an increasingly important part of the workforce. Yet unless both the Government and employers ensure that carers are supported, we could see an exodus of carers from employment – taking their experience and expertise with them and risking the associated negative impacts on the carers' economic and mental wellbeing.

This is a particular concern for women, who make up the majority of carers.ⁱⁱⁱ A failure to support working carers therefore exacerbates the pre-existing inequalities around the pay, progression and participation of women in the workforce.

Whilst looking after your own children is not included in the definition of carers, nor do the majority of parents classify looking after their children as a 'caring responsibility', working parents and carers often face similar challenges. This report therefore considers the caring responsibilities of parents in addition to those of carers identified by the 2014 Care Act. This also allows us to account for the 'sandwich generation', the rising proportion of carers who have caring responsibilities for both their parents and their children.

Identifying carers

As defined by the 2014 Care Act, a carer is "someone who helps another person, usually a relative or friend, in their day-to-day life. This is not the same as someone who provides care professionally or through a voluntary organisation." These can also be referred to as 'informal' or 'unpaid' carers.

We welcome the progress the Government has made in supporting working carers and hope to see further progress in its response to the Good Work Plan consultations and in the expected Industrial Strategy. The report also considers how the Government can encourage greater uptake of technology that will allow carers to better balance their competing responsibilities, and how greater digital connectivity across our society and in health and social care can be supported.

Employers should also lead by example by promoting policies and supplying the resources, such as technology, that support carers where they can. This report provides suggestions for how employers can do this, with the aim of encouraging the implementation of carer-friendly policies that ensure carers are able to continue working alongside their caring responsibilities.

Two polls were carried out by Survation in October 2020 to support this report; a nationally representative poll of 1,018 UK residents and a poll of 1,096 UK residents aged over 18 with unpaid caring responsibilities.



Chapter 1: The gendered impact of caring

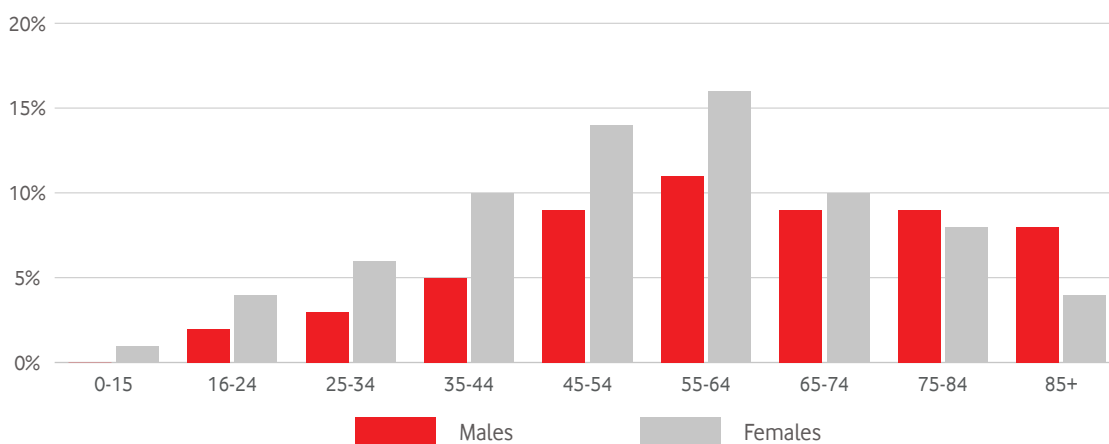
With 6,000 new people taking on caring responsibilities each day before COVID-19,^{iv} carers will continue to make up an ever-growing portion of the UK’s workforce. Yet, without the right support, balancing work and care is unsustainable for many people – forcing carers out of the workforce.

The current gender split of caring means that women are more likely to be carers than men, resulting in a greater number of women leaving the workforce. By enabling carers to balance working and caring, we can not only better support carers but also address wider gender inequalities, such as the gender pay gap.

Identifying the gendered impact of caring

Caring continues to be dominated by women, who make up the majority of carers.^v Of the 77 per cent of carers we polled that share caring responsibilities, women were almost twice as likely to do the larger share of caring.

Chart 1: Percentage of people providing unpaid care by age and gender



Source: Family Resources Survey, 2018/19

The higher burden on women is also a result of the difference in the type of caring men and women do. Whilst men are most likely to provide caring support for their parents or partner, women typically provide care to a broader range of people including those they are not related to.^{vi} Women are also more likely to have multiple caring responsibilities, with almost one third of female carers providing care for more than one person, in comparison to one in five male carers.^{vii}

The UK’s ageing population is also seeing an increased occurrence of carers with multigenerational caring responsibilities – dubbed the ‘sandwich generation’ – who are caring for both their parents and their children. In 2019, the ONS estimated that there were 1.3 million sandwich carers in the UK.^{viii} Almost a third (30 per cent) of those we polled with caring responsibilities for their own children also cared for an elderly relative. However, as many parents do not classify looking after their own children as caring, this number may in fact be higher.

The double burden facing this ‘sandwich generation’ is most felt by women in their forties and fifties, who may find themselves balancing work, raising a family and caring for ageing parents.¹⁶ If these women feel as though they have to leave the workforce as it has become untenable to work alongside their caring responsibilities, the issues of the gender pay gap and lack of women in senior positions become harder to address. The higher burden of caring placed on women means that female carers make up 90 per cent of those who are economically inactive due to caring.¹⁷ 66 per cent of male respondents to our poll of carers were able to continue working full time, almost double the percentage of women, whilst women were twice as likely to work part time.

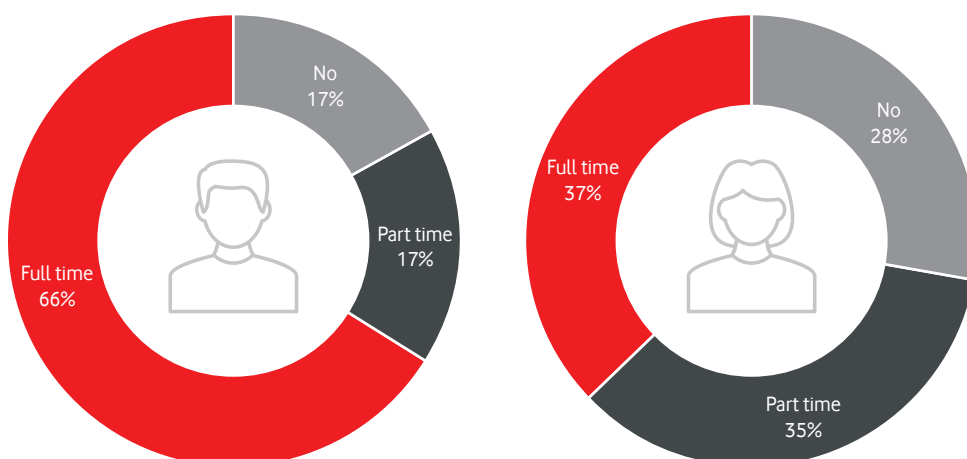


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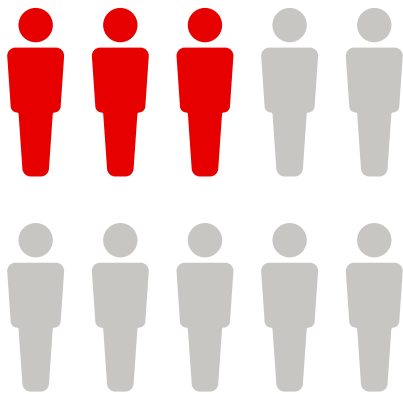
1.3 million sandwich carers with multigenerational caring responsibilities in the UK

Chart 2: Percentage of respondents able to continue working alongside their caring responsibilities



Benefits of supporting carers in the workplace

Of the carers we polled, seven per cent of respondents indicated that caring was the main reason for leaving their last job. Given that the number of working carers will continue to rise, this could amount to a significant loss to the workforce later down the line. For example, it has been estimated that unless action is taken to make workplaces more supportive, three in 10 workers could be forced to leave their current jobs if they found themselves having to take on greater caring responsibilities in the future.^{xi}



Three in 10 workers could be forced to leave their current jobs if they found themselves having to take on greater caring responsibilities in the future.

The number of women who had left their last job due to caring was more than double that of men (nine per cent in comparison to four per cent). This is particularly worrying when we consider how women make up the majority of carers.

The biggest driver of the gender pay gap is the difference in labour market participation between men and women.^{xii} This is fuelled by women providing the majority of caring and childcare, as taking time out or reducing working hours to care has a significant impact on pay and progression.^{xiii} The higher incidence of female carers leaving the workforce therefore creates a substantial barrier to reducing the gender pay gap, increasing the percentage of women in senior roles and, ultimately, achieving workplace equality.

There are clear benefits for employers who implement supportive policies, with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) finding that carers who work in supportive organisations are less likely to reduce their hours, leave or turn down promotions.^{xiv}

There is a serious risk of losing carers and their expertise from the workplace unless the Government and employers work to support carers. This has an economic impact on carers themselves through loss of pay, on employers through the loss of experienced and skilled employees, and on the exchequer through loss of tax revenue. In particular, there is a risk of losing women from the workforce exacerbating wider issues around the gender pay gap and the lack of women in senior positions.

Chapter 2: The challenges facing working carers

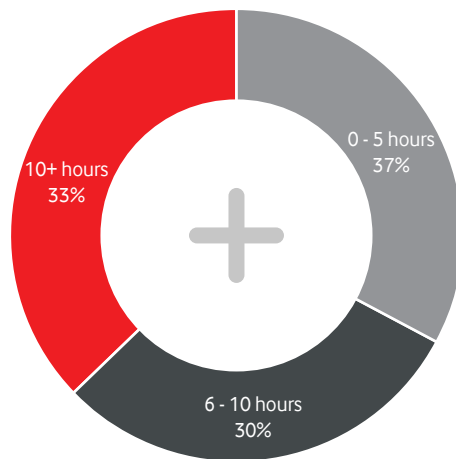
To better support working carers, we must understand the challenges they face. Time pressures are a considerable challenge, particularly for carers who work full time. If a carer is unsupported by their workplace or feels unable to ask for support, they are more likely to use their personal leisure time to undertake working or caring responsibilities. This leads to higher levels of ‘burnout’ amongst working carers, alongside other detrimental physical and mental health outcomes.

Balancing working and caring

One of the most considerable challenges facing working carers is the time pressure that occurs when balancing caring alongside work, resulting in around one quarter of carers feeling that they can no longer do both and considering giving up their job entirely.^{xv}

Almost two fifths of respondents who had caring responsibilities before COVID-19 reported having to leave work or adjust their hours at least twice a week due to caring responsibilities. These time pressures were compounded by COVID-19 where millions of people had to take on additional caring responsibilities such as caring for children unable to go to school. Of those who took on additional caring roles due to COVID-19, one third reported spending more than 10 hours on additional caring. A further 30 per cent reported an additional six to 10 hours.

Chart 3: Amount of time respondents spent on additional caring responsibilities due to COVID-19 per week



Two in five respondents...



had to adjust their working hours..



at least twice a week...



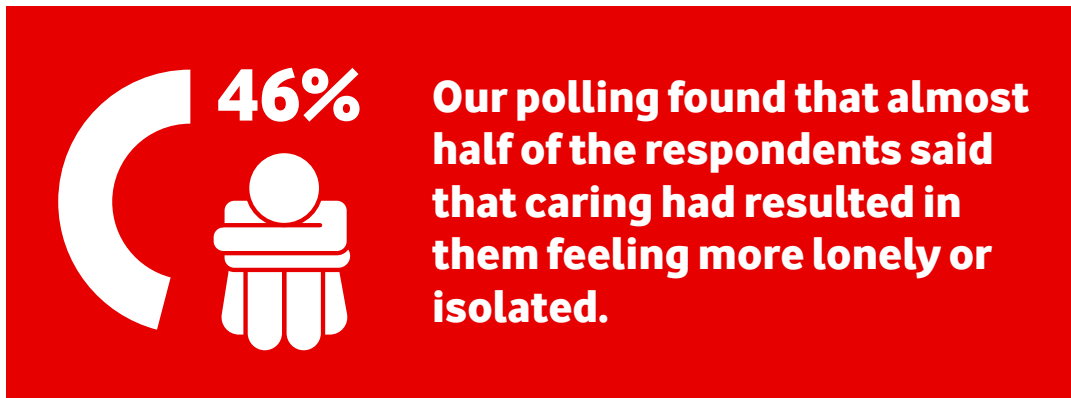
due to their caring responsibilities before COVID-19.

This in turn leads to carers using their personal time to make up for missed hours. The CIPD has found that almost half (46 per cent) of working carers have used their annual leave to provide care, 24 per cent have worked in the evening to make up hours spent caring and 23 per cent have worked at weekends to make up hours spent caring.^{xvi} This reduces the already constrained time those juggling work and care already have for themselves, resulting in carers in general experiencing lower life satisfaction.^{xvii}

Health impact of caring

These competing time pressures have both physical and mental health repercussions for carers such as the increased occurrence of sickness, exhaustion and 'burnout' in carers. Research by Carers Week indicates that six in ten carers experience worsening physical health as a result of caring.^{xviii}

The impact on the mental health of carers is also a concern, particularly when we look at loneliness. Our polling found that almost half of the respondents (46 per cent) said that caring had resulted in them feeling more lonely or isolated. This was particularly true of women (51 per cent) and younger age groups (53 per cent of 18 to 34-year-olds) but was fairly evenly split between those who work alongside caring and those who do not.



In order to retain working carers, employers should help carers juggle their caring and working responsibilities. But helping carers to better balance their competing time pressures is only one part of the problem. Carers must also feel comfortable in asking their employer or line manager for support, which requires organisations to embed a culture of inclusivity. The next chapter will explore how this can be achieved.



Chapter 3: Organisational change to support working carers

Carers who work in supportive organisations have higher levels of mental wellbeing.^{xix} One of the most effective ways that employers can better support carers is therefore through fostering an inclusive working environment based on meaningful policies that are embraced throughout an organisation.

To help carers balance their working and caring responsibilities and reduce the mental and physical health impacts that working carers experience, employers should look to create a welcoming and supportive environment through organisation-wide policies. For example, flexible and home working, where it works for the employer and employees, more equitable parental leave, and transparency and promotion of these policies in the recruitment process.

Flexible and home-based working

48 per cent of the carers we polled stated that they would like to have greater flexibility in their hours to accommodate for their caring responsibilities, and 36 per cent said that they would like the option to work from home occasionally. Our nationally representative poll found that when it comes to post-COVID working arrangements, there is a fairly even split between those who would like to work from home full time, those who would like to work at their place of work full time and those who would like a mixture of both.

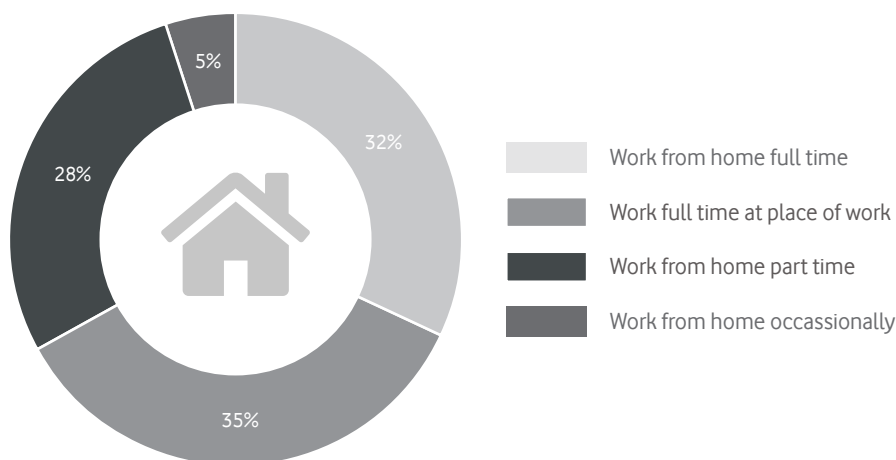
Our polling results show that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and employers should instead identify which aspects of flexible working best suit the needs of their organisation and workforce. It is important that flexible working is embraced throughout an organisation, particularly at a senior level, as this drives forward change. By their employer normalising flexible working, carers will feel more supported in altering their working patterns in a way that allows them to better balance their working and caring responsibilities, decreasing the need for them to use their leisure time to care. This will also help improve gender equality as it will offer women a viable choice to remain in work and allow them to progress to senior roles. This is supported by previous research from Vodafone which has found that companies who embrace flexible working are more successful in achieving senior female representation targets.^{xx}

Flexible working

Flexible working is defined by the Government as a “way of working that suits an employee’s needs,” relating to where and when people work. As different employees will have different needs, flexible working can take various forms:

- Working from home
- Job sharing
- Part-time working
- Compressed hours
- Flexible start and end times
- Annualised hours
- Staggered hours
- Phased retirement

Chart 4: Where UK adults would like to work post-COVID-19



Parental leave

To further bridge the gender equality gap, adopting more equal parental leave policies will help to reduce the stigma around taking time off for caring responsibilities.^{xxi} Whilst the introduction of Shared Parental Leave allows parents to share up to 50 weeks of leave between them, non-birthing parents are only entitled to two weeks of non-transferable leave which serves to reinforce the view that women are the primary carers. Normalising and equalising paternity leave would therefore indicate that caring is not solely a ‘woman’s job,’ and can also serve to make male carers feel more supported by their employer. This in turn helps to reduce the negative impact of taking caring or parental leave on the progression, earnings and, ultimately, the wider labour market participation of women.^{xxii}

Supporting carers during COVID-19

During the initial months of the pandemic, Vodafone UK encouraged employees to engage with their line managers and discuss changes to their working arrangements which could support them. Many people made adjustments to their working hours and Vodafone UK also changed its policy on Unexpected Care Leave to enable employees to take their entitlement either a few hours at a time, or in days, and to take it all as one block if they wanted to.

From March to September 2020 and in early 2021 when schools were closed, Vodafone UK introduced an ‘impacted productivity’ option for those colleagues balancing working from home with caring for children or other family members. This allowed Vodafone UK to support carers by accepting that they may not be as readily available or able to produce the usual level of work during their normal working hours. Vodafone UK continued to pay employees fully even if their productivity was impacted in this way.

Vodafone supports families with global policy offering 16 weeks paid parental leave to all employees

Vodafone employees worldwide will be offered 16 weeks of fully paid leave through a global policy designed to support families by giving every parent the opportunity to have more time with children new to their family. Any employee whose partner is having a baby, adopts a child or becomes a parent through surrogacy will have the flexibility to take up to 16 weeks paid leave at any time during the first 18 months. By the end of March 2021, this leave will be available to all non-birthing parents – regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or length of service.

Transparency

The fear of being discriminated against for being a carer or having to take family-related leave is enhanced by a lack of transparency around caring and parental support policies. This is particularly true of the recruitment process as, whilst many employers already go above and beyond the statutory minimum, potential applicants may be unaware of the support they could be entitled to if family-related policies are not included in job adverts or job descriptions.^{xxiii} This not only deters potential applicants from applying for positions in companies that they fear will be unsupportive of their caring responsibilities, but further reinforces the taboo around asking about family-related leave policies, with some people still fearing that they will be discriminated against if they ask.



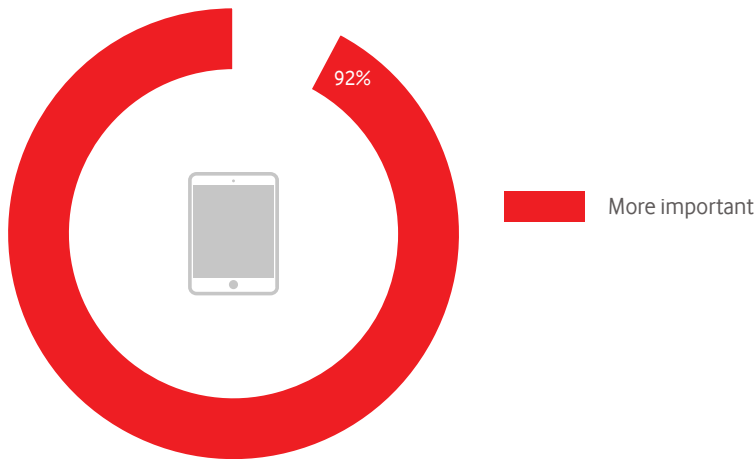
Chapter 4: Technology to support working carers


Alongside organisational changes, the greater uptake of technology by employers and employees can be used to support working carers through the facilitation of greater and easier connections with both the workplace and those they care for. From remote monitoring and alerts to medication managing, there are many ways that technology can not only support carers in their day-to-day responsibilities but help to reduce the time required to undertake them. High quality digital connectivity across the UK must underpin this increased uptake of technology, with government support to create the right policy and investment environment for digital rollout.

Importance of technology

The crucial role of technology has become clearer than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic with, for example, the uptake of video conferencing allowing carers to attend work meetings whilst remaining physically close to the person they care for. Our polling found that, in terms of supporting their caring responsibilities, 92 per cent of respondents said that technology and connectivity had become more important to them since the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to another question, 92 per cent of respondents said that it would be harder to balance work and caring responsibilities without access to technology, including 45 per cent who said it would be much harder.

Chart 5: Percentage of carers who responded that technology had become more important to them since COVID-19





92%

of respondents said that it would be harder to balance work and caring responsibilities without access to technology...

including

45%

who said it would be much harder.

More generally, public attitudes have shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic, with technology playing an increasingly important role in helping people to stay in touch with loved ones and friends.

Supporting remote working

Reliable connectivity is clearly important in supporting remote working and technological innovations, such as 5G and the Internet of Things (IoT) which will have the capacity to help transform workplaces, further helping to support remote or flexible working. In the short term, organisations of all sizes will likely use technology to ease their way back to normal life; working from home and altering offices, serving customers remotely and using new networks and technology to produce innovative products and services.

While significant progress has been made in the UK's digital infrastructure due to industry investment and through pioneering projects such as the Shared Rural Network, Government should work with industry to ensure that people, businesses and services across the UK can take advantage of new and innovative technology and create the policy and regulatory conditions to support the rollout of high quality digital connectivity.

Remote Working Solution

Vodafone UK's Remote Working Solution helps businesses adapt to their employees' remote working needs such as Vodafone Device Manager Cloud (VDM Cloud) and 5G-ready Vodafone Red tariffs. Vodafone also provides a flexible working e-book to help guide businesses into flexible working practices.

Dialling into the future

In 2018, Vodafone UK achieved a significant milestone in UK communications by conducting the UK's first live holographic call using 5G technology.

The call from Vodafone's Manchester office featured England and Manchester City Women's Football Captain, Steph Houghton MBE. Using 5G technology, Steph appeared as a live 3D hologram on stage in front of an audience at Vodafone's UK tech centre in Newbury.

Steph's hologram gave footballing tips to 11-year-old Manchester City and Lionesses fan, Iris, in Newbury. Using the power of 5G Steph and Iris could chat and interact seamlessly as if they were in the same room – despite a massive 190-mile distance between them.

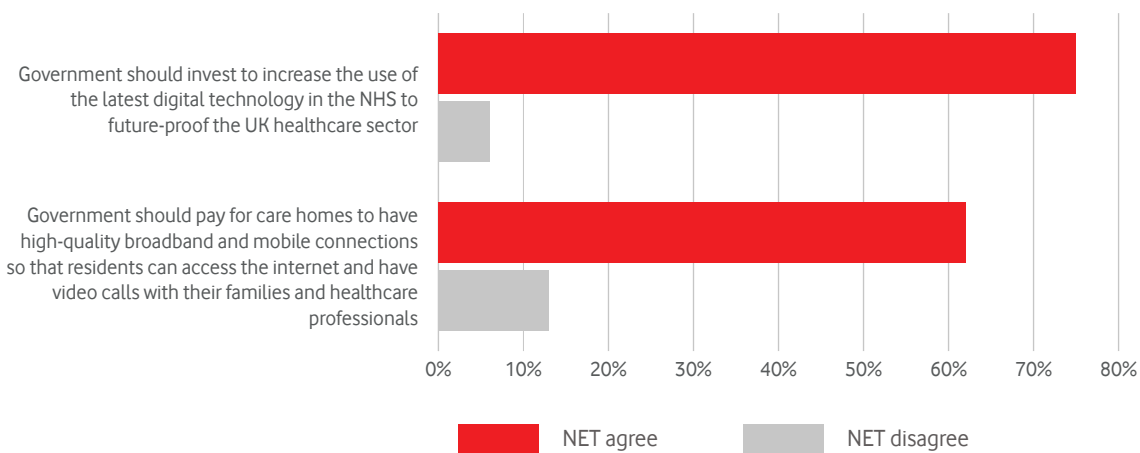
While holographic calls are not yet a part of our day-to-day working life, new technology such as 5G can provide smooth, crystal-clear HD video calls, faster downloads and the ability to make a call or use data even when it is busy such as on station platforms. This could help to support a more flexible way of working for those that require it.

Increasing independence and technology in healthcare

Technology can also help to increase the independence of those being cared for and their contact with loved ones, further reducing the pressure placed on carers. To ensure that those providing and receiving care have access to the necessary technology, the Government and the NHS should continue to make it easier for GPs and NHS practitioners to prescribe technology and offer services such as video consultations. In addition, thousands of care homes currently have little or no internet access. Government should support connectivity in care homes, allowing video calling between residents and their families and healthcare professionals.

Polling carried out on behalf of Vodafone UK in 2020 shows that a clear majority of the public want the NHS to use 5G and IoT applications. For example, three out of five people polled believe that video consultations are more convenient than visiting a GP surgery or hospital in person. A similar proportion (57 per cent) would be comfortable having medical appointments via video even once the coronavirus pandemic is over. The same polling found strong support for the idea that the Government should invest in new technology in health and social care. Three quarters of respondents agreed that Government should invest to increase the use of the latest digital technology in the NHS to future-proof the UK healthcare sector, with just 6 per cent disagreeing. And almost two thirds agreed that the Government should pay for high-quality broadband and mobile connections in care homes for the benefit of residents and their families.^{xxxiv}

Chart 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



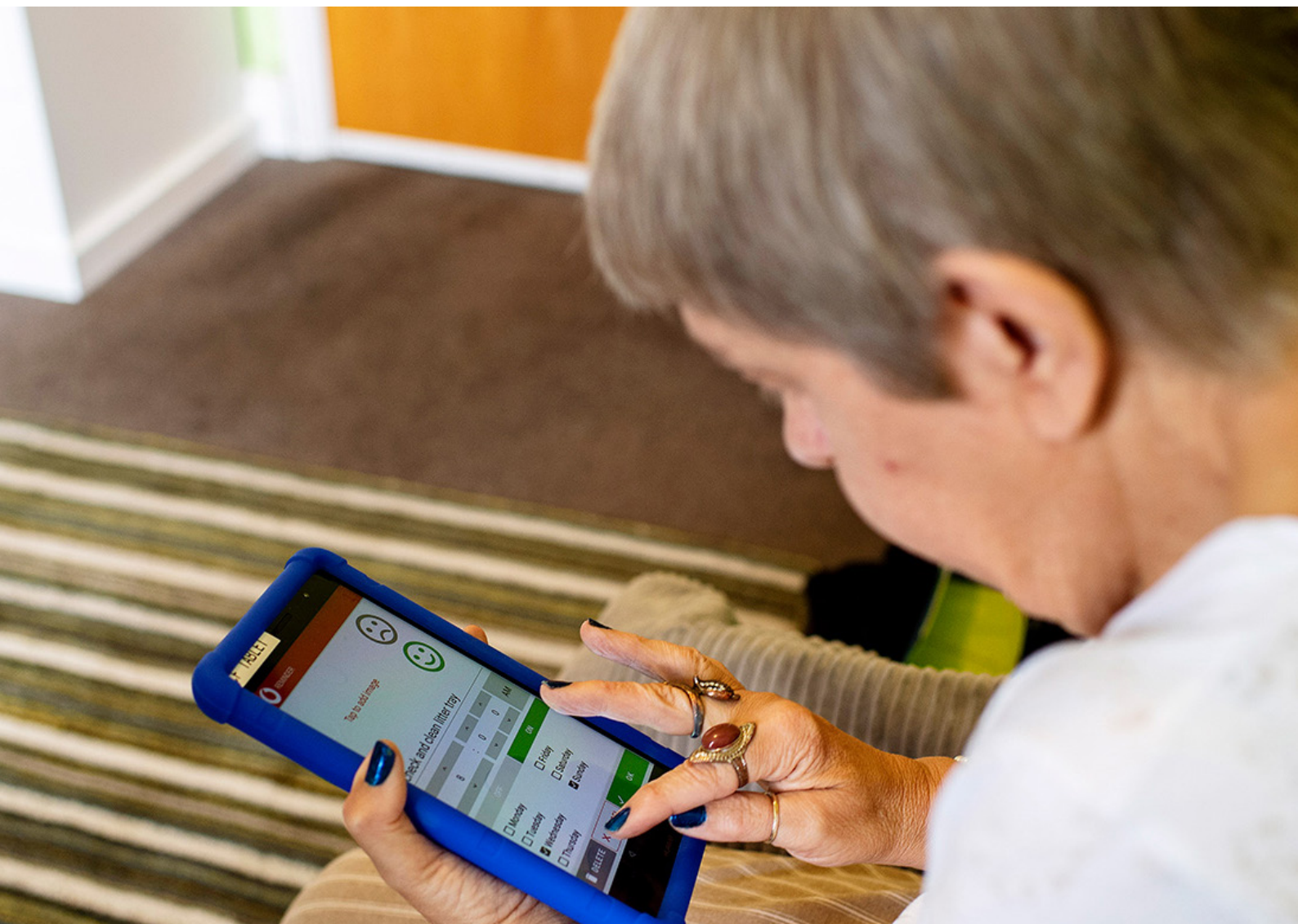
As we begin to look towards a post-COVID future, employers should not simply return to the way things were but reflect on how they can continue to incorporate aspects of flexible and remote working in a way that best supports their workforce moving forward. We should also continue to embrace the technology that has supported us throughout the pandemic, and work to ensure that this is accessible to employers and employees. Government policy and incentives should support the uptake of technology for employers and employees, while also creating the right policy and investment conditions to help aid the rollout of high-quality digital connectivity across the UK. Technology also provides a unique opportunity in health and social care to support both those caring and being cared for – good progress has been made in digitising many health and social care services, but Government should now go further.

No Isolation

Vodafone UK's partnership with No Isolation helps the elderly and vulnerable feel more connected through the use of KOMP video units. These simple-to-use devices are tailor-made for people who have little or no experience using smartphones, computers or tablets. They have high-contrast screens, clear audio and the ability to share photos, messages and video calls with loved ones and carers. Family members can keep in touch via an app on their smartphone.

Connected Living

Vodafone and Mencap have teamed up on the ground-breaking Connected Living project, co-designed by people with learning disabilities and their support workers. Connected Living aims to provide people with learning disabilities greater independence, choice and access to technology through IoT enabled devices and personalised digital services. The technology has been designed to help improve quality of life for over 1.4 million people living with learning disabilities in the UK, their families and carers.



Chapter 5: Policy recommendations

This report has demonstrated the challenges facing working carers, and the importance of ensuring that they feel supported and able to remain in the workforce.

Recommendations for employers

We believe that employers should set an example, and encourage them to take the following measures where possible:

Employers should adopt enhanced parental leave policies



- Adopting an enhanced approach to parental leave challenges the stereotype that caring is a ‘woman’s job’, helping to reduce gender equality in the workplace and allowing more women to stay in the workforce if they wish. Providing non-birthing parents with a larger amount of leave also encourages more men to take on caring roles, whilst making those who already care feel recognised.

Employers should reflect on the benefits of remote and flexible working during the pandemic and, where suitable, continue with these practices post-COVID



- Whilst every organisation will have different needs, the closure of spaces such as offices during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that not every role requires a physical presence in the workplace five days a week.
- Employers should reflect on the benefits that remote and flexible working have for carers and consider how they can continue to incorporate such changes moving forward, including through the technologies that will help support this, in a way that works for both the employer and employees.

Employers should be transparent about their care and parental policies, particularly in the recruitment process



- Many people fear that they will be discriminated against if they ask about family-related policies, particularly in the recruitment process. To challenge this, employers should be transparent about and promote the policies they have in place.

Recommendations for the Government

Government should also consider the following:

Government support for digital infrastructure rollout



- Technology cannot function without having the digital infrastructure to underpin it and significant progress has been made by the industry to rollout high-quality connectivity across the UK to support communities and businesses.
- The importance of connectivity has been accepted by the UK Government, as highlighted by the laudable 2025 Gigabit broadband commitment and support for the Shared Rural Network.
- There is more to be done, however, to take advantage of the technology available now and in the future. Existing government programmes to support gigabit-capable networks must continue apace and the Government also needs to commit to change the current investment and policy model to free up the resources that will be needed to drive technology rollout and adoption.

The National Infrastructure Commission to bear in mind remote working in its future plans and targets



- Given the likelihood of many employers continuing some form of remote working after the pandemic, as well as the way in which this supports carers in balancing work and caring responsibilities, we welcome the National Infrastructure Commission's recent commitment to considering how potential long term trends following the Covid-19 pandemic could influence demand for and use of infrastructure.
- We suggest the Commission considers the vital role of digital infrastructure in supporting remote working as part of this. This would entail ensuring all have access to the infrastructure needed to work from home such as reliable mobile connectivity and broadband connection, through government support for digital infrastructure.

The Government should make supportive technology more accessible to carers and employers



- The Government should expand the scope of the technology provided to support carers and employers so that it includes the latest innovations in digitally-enabled caring and technology to support more flexible working arrangements.
- This should include both software and hardware, and could be implemented through a voucher scheme, tax incentive such as the salary sacrifice scheme or grant to employers and/or carers. This would allow employers and carers to purchase the technology most beneficial to their needs. In particular, incentives should be considered to encourage SMEs move to newer, more efficient mobile technology, including 5G, which would help support more flexible forms of working.

Greater digital connectivity in healthcare



- The NHS is already working on ways of digitising and personalising the experience of those with long-term health conditions. Making it easier for GPs and NHS practitioners to hold video consultations and prescribe technology such as wearable devices and monitoring systems can help people who are at risk of social isolation and reduce the impact on carers, as well as support independent living.
- The Government should prioritise and accelerate this work, with a social and technological prescribing challenge fund of £100m set up within 12 months, aiming for full introduction of social and technological prescribing by 2022.
- The Government has committed to building 40 new NHS hospitals by 2030, with six NHS Trusts already earmarked to receive funding to completely rebuild existing acute hospitals by 2025. This is an unmissable opportunity to remodel the whole NHS estate, designing in new 5G and IoT technology.
- In addition, the Government should invest a further £500m to encourage the creation of 5G healthcare applications through regional innovation centres, to get even more out of the potential of 5G connectivity and ensure that the UK is a global leader in healthcare technology.
- Social care is behind the NHS on digital connectivity, with thousands of care homes having little or no internet access. The Government should cover the £4m cost of providing these care homes with one year of broadband connectivity, allowing video calling between residents and their families and healthcare professionals – as well as the other benefits of internet access.

Endnotes

- i Carers UK (2020) Carers Week: 4.5 million become unpaid carers in a matter of weeks
- ii Government Office for Science (2016) Future of an Ageing Population
- iii Department for Work and Pensions (2019) Family Resources Survey 2017/18
- iv Carers UK (2020) Facts and figures about carers
- v Department for Work and Pensions (2019) Family Resources Survey 2017/18
- vi ONS (2019) Living longer: Caring in later working life
- vii ONS (2019) Living longer: Caring in later working life
- viii BBC (2019) Overstretched 'sandwich carers' trying to help parents and children
- ix Evandrou, M. and K. Glaser (2004) Family, work and quality of life: Changing economic and social roles through the lifecourse, *Ageing & Society*, 24 (5), 771-791
- x Office for National Statistics (2019) INAC01 NSA: Economic inactivity by reason (not seasonally adjusted), November 2020
- xi Phoenix Group (2020) 4.7 million working carers at risk of being forced to leave their jobs in the future due to unsupportive employers
- xii Government Equalities Office (2019) Gender equality at every stage
- xiii Government Equalities Office (2019) Gender equality at every stage
- xiv Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020) Supporting working carers: How employers and employees can benefit
- xv Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020) Supporting working carers: How employers and employees can benefit
- xvi Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020) Supporting working carers: How employers and employees can benefit
- xvii Social Market Foundation (2018) Caring for the carers
- xviii Carers Week (2018) Supporting carers to be healthy and connected
- xix Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020) Supporting working carers: How employers and employees can benefit
- xx Vodafone (2019) Driving Gender Diversity at the Top: 2019 & Beyond
- xxi Social Market Foundation (2018) Caring for the carers
- xxii Rønsen and Kitterød (2017) The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle, OECD, page 203
- xxiii Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2019) Good Work Plan: Proposals to support families
- xxiv Vodafone UK / WPI Strategy (2020) Better health, connected health - How 5G and IoT Technology Can Transform Health and Social Care





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