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Leading learning and skills

Including Carers: Towards a Framework for Meeting the Needs of Carers in Further Education and Adult Learning

July 2009

Of interest to organisations and individuals
with an interest in improving learning and skills
opportunities for carers across England

Further information

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Terms used in this report

Carers

A carer is someone of any age whose life is restricted because they spend a substantial amount of time looking after a relative, friend, partner or child who cannot manage without help because of illness, age, disability or mental health needs.

Carers centres

Carers centres are local centres that offer information, advice and help to carers and are funded in various ways, such as local authority grants or a mix of sources. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers is the largest provider of support for carers through 144 independently managed carers centres.

Learning opportunities

By learning opportunities, we mean access to learning at every level, from informal or non-accredited learning to accredited education and training for employment.

Educational provider

This study focuses on further education (FE) colleges and personal and community development learning (PCDL) services. We have used the term educational provider to cover both.

Equality, diversity and social inclusion

The interaction between equality, diversity and social inclusion is complex. 'Equality' is based on the legislative rights and duties that address traditional discrimination. 'Diversity' celebrates the benefits that people from different backgrounds and life experiences can bring to all areas of life, such as employment, education, service delivery and community leadership. 'Social inclusion' works to enable people who have been socially excluded by such things as poverty, low skill levels and poor housing to be able to participate more effectively in society (adapted from Greater London Authority equality and diversity policy statement, April 2005).

Executive summary

This report sets out the findings of a pilot project to investigate the needs of carers as learners, current provision for carers wanting to study in further and adult education, and support for carers' learning available from social services, carers centres and other voluntary organisations. It sets out recommendations on how mainstream educational provision could be made more accessible to carers. The methodology is described in Annex C.

The study identifies practical, psychological and systemic barriers to mainstream education for carers. It analyses in detail the range of policies and practices in further and adult education that contribute to systemic difficulties, and how they could be modified. It discusses key drivers for change and presents specific recommendations for government departments, government agencies, further and adult education providers, social services and carers centres and other voluntary organisations that support carers.

Carers have a range of reasons for wanting to study and an equally wide range of educational and employment aspirations. Individual needs for support vary but one thing that all carers have in common is the unpredictability of their caring situation. A carer's capacity to attend regularly, complete assignments and sit exams is not dependent on their own commitment and self-discipline but on the health of someone else, and the needs of the person they care for which can change suddenly and dramatically.

To enable carers to access and succeed in education, educational providers need to understand the impact of unpredictability, and to adapt their policies and practices to offer carer-students tailored flexibility and supportive learning arrangements, at the key points where these are needed.

Recent commitments by government to support more flexible opportunities for lifelong learning by carers (HM Government, 2008) and to introduce measures such as greater flexibility of provision or home-based learning (House of Commons, 2008b) are to be welcomed.

There is now an opportunity for all organisations with an interest in learning for carers to contribute ideas to the shaping of that commitment into national and local policies, and models of good practice, to improve carers' access to mainstream education.

Recommendations

Government departments responsible for the Carers Strategy to consider the need for:

- ***accurate baseline data on carers' access to learning.***

There is no accurate baseline data on how many of the total 6 million adult and young carers in the UK are currently in learning, want to access learning, or are unable to access learning. Young adult carers aged 16-25 are a particularly hidden group.

- ***good-quality information on learning opportunities for carers.***

All carers and organisations working with carers need good-quality information about educational opportunities from informal learning to accredited courses and work-based training, learning support and sources of funding. This should be an integral element of any information service for carers. This information could be disseminated through the carers national helpline, Carers Direct, national carers organisations (for example, Carers UK and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers), the Department of Health Caring with Confidence programme; social services, carers centres and further and adult education providers, JobCentre Plus, and information, advice and guidance (IAG) services such as Nextstep.

- ***wider consultation with carers on access to mainstream education.***

Consultation with a wider representative group of carers would enable government departments, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and local educational providers to:

- gather baseline data about the number of carers unable to access mainstream education;
- test and further refine the recommendations from this study; and
- identify the most effective mechanisms for informing carers about learning opportunities.

- ***improved access to information technology.***

Educational opportunities for carers on low incomes could be significantly improved by offering them computers and home access to the internet, along the lines of the government's Next Generation Learning initiative which provides computers and internet access to children in low-income families.

Department for Work and Pensions to consider:

- ***implementing the Work and Pensions Select Committee recommendation on the Carers Allowance.***

This recommendation would make the Carers Allowance a fee-remitted benefit and could be used as an interim measure while plans for reformed carers' benefits are worked out.

- ***removing the 21-hour rule.***

This would mean carers who get Carers Allowance could study full time without losing benefits.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to consider:

- ***allocating funds via local authorities.***

The aim would be to provide a training budget and function for all carers centres, linked to implementing a local strategy for carers' education and training.

- ***classifying carers as volunteers.***

This would have the effect of making carers eligible for Train to Gain funding.

LSC and Ofsted to consider:

- ***reviewing and clarifying attendance, completion and achievement requirements that disadvantage carer.***

They could further explore how these could be more appropriately aligned with the needs of carers for flexible and distance learning, breaks from study if necessary, and flexible or slower rates of progress.

Bodies responsible for professional and national occupational standards in FE (Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), Learning and Skills Improvement Agency (LSIS) and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)) to consider:

- ***including awareness of carers' needs and inclusive strategies to meet them are in training standards for principals, senior managers, learning support staff, equality and diversity managers, student services managers, etc.***

LSC and future Skills Funding Agency to consider:

- ***consultation with carers.***

This consultation would be on the proposals for skills accounts and how these can contribute to improving carers' access to education and training.

- ***a specific form of skills account for carers.***

A carers learning account would be protected to allow the individual carer to follow a non-linear learning pathway over several years.

- ***adding carers as a specific category on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR).***

Further and adult education providers to consider:

- ***embedding support for carers in the following areas of policy and function:***

- the equality and diversity policy and action plan/ social inclusion policy;
- self-assessment and inspection;
- current strategic, development and marketing plans;
- learner support policy and practice;
- student services; and
- staff training and development.

- ***making changes to systems to:***

- identify full-time carers and claim the LSC's 12 per cent uplift funding;
- revise the institution's prospectus and website to attract carers;
- collaborate with other providers to produce a regional or locality based online prospectus for adult learners, similar to that for 14-19 year olds;
- establish and support a named carers' champion to represent the needs of the carer-student within the institution;
- develop links with carers' organisations and social services;
- include the needs of carers in induction, continuing professional development and equality and diversity programmes for staff;
- introduce courses or pathways tailored specifically for carers, allowing for flexible attendance, submission of coursework and so on;
- develop an outreach service to deliver courses in carers centres, mobile units or carers' homes; and
- make arrangements for special needs childcare for parents of children with disabilities.

Social services to consider:

- ***changes in services to individual carers including:***
 - a review of the carer's assessment process to ensure education is discussed and information about educational opportunities is available, whether or not the carer is offered services after assessment;
 - better advice and guidance on educational opportunities and funding; and
 - an offer of respite care to carers wishing to access education.
- ***the potential for joint working with educational providers at a strategic level to:***
 - develop a local plan with FE and HE institutions and a local employment and training strategy for carers;
 - establish a central database of local learning opportunities and contacts for carers;
 - improve liaison with educational providers to develop appropriate models of support for carers as learners;
 - designate a named, trained person with a job description to signpost carers to appropriate educational opportunities;
 - allocate a proportion of the Carers Grant to fund educational opportunities; and
 - ensure suitable funded respite for carers' children is available in the college crèche.

Carers centres and carer support organisations to consider:

- ***A dedicated training budget and/or 'training wing' to support carers who want to learn, linked to a wider local plan for carers' educational needs to:***
 - increase carers' awareness of and access to learning opportunities;
 - develop innovative first-step or taster courses and routes to mainstream progression for carers who wish to go further; and
 - make links with educational providers interested in joint working to meet carers' needs.

Services developed by innovative centres such as Suffolk Family Carers could provide a model for other centres to use or adapt.

For all local agencies to consider:

- ***improving and developing joined-up working.***

Social services, carers centres and FE providers could consider ways to:

- facilitate the development of local networks, partnerships and joint working; and
- share and disseminate examples of good practice that emerge.

Introduction

1 This report sets out the findings of a project to investigate the needs of carers as learners. The voices of carers have guided the project: why they wish to learn, the range of courses they are interested in, and their particular needs as learners.

2 Their views have informed a linked scoping exercise to investigate available provision among a range of FE and adult education providers and how this fits with the needs of carers.

3 The study also looks at how potential learners who are carers are signposted and supported by social services and carers centres, and the role of the voluntary sector in providing education and support for carers as learners. It concludes with recommendations to government, the LSC, social services, further and adult education providers and the voluntary sector on how provision of learning for carers can, in the future, be made more accessible.

Background and Policy Context

4 This study of carers' learning needs is timely as the number of carers in the population is set to increase over the following decades.

5 It is estimated that there are currently 6 million carers in the UK. Research by Carers UK suggests changes in life expectancy coupled with the direction of community care policy will see a 60 per cent rise in the number of carers needed by 2037, equating to an extra 3.4 million carers in that time. Every year, over 2 million adults become carers and a similar number of adults stop being carers. Around three in five people will be carers at some point in their lives (Carers UK, 2001).

6 Studies have shown that people who spend a substantial amount of time caring over a long period are more likely than other people to:

- be in poor health;
- experience mental health problems;
- experience deteriorating health; and
- become permanently sick or disabled.

7 Two important contributing factors are low income and lack of a break from caring (Carers UK, 2009).

8 There is growing recognition of the value of the caring role to families, communities and the state. Carers UK (2009) estimates that carers save the economy £87 billion a year, an average of £15,260 per carer. In response to campaigning by carers' organisations, the government has recognised the need to increase support for people who spend a substantial amount of time caring, and has in the past year made specific commitments to increase education and training opportunities for carers, especially those of working age. This is an important element in the range of support needed by carers if they are to maintain their own health and well-being and continue caring effectively.

What are the benefits of learning for carers?

9 This section discusses the benefits of learning to carers, drawing together the experiences of carers enrolled on the National Extension College (NEC) Carers into Education project (NEC, 2009), and social services and carers centre interviewees (see Annex C for details of the methodology).

10 The Work and Pensions Select Committee report *Valuing and Supporting Carers* (House of Commons, 2008a) is important in taking forward the recognition of carers' needs for training and employment. That said, NEC's experience of supporting hundreds of carers as distance-learning students, and feedback from our carer-student surveys show that the benefits of learning for carers go well beyond providing education and training routes into employment. The benefits for individual carers are far broader, and the availability of learning opportunities can help to meet a range of needs, contributing to emotional, mental and physical health, and social and economic well-being.

11 Many of these benefits will be familiar to practitioners working to widen participation in education:

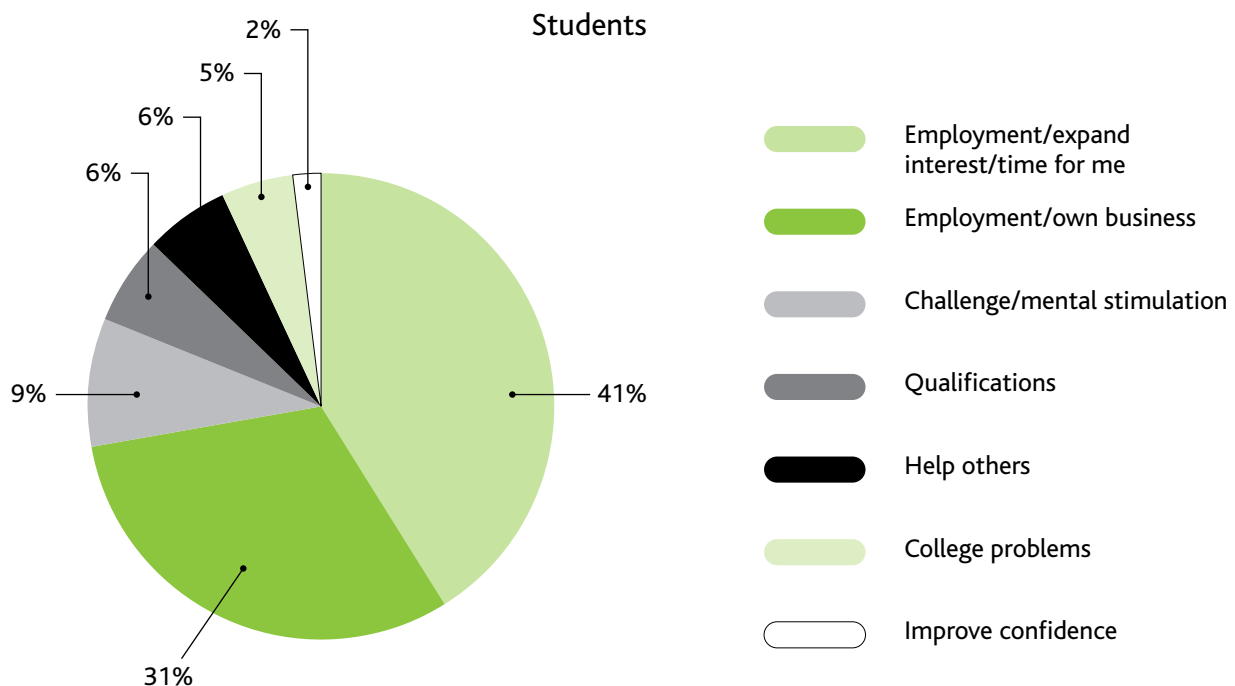
- learning opportunities are one means by which carers can have a life of their own outside caring;
- learning in general is recognised as a valuable way of promoting mental health and well-being;
- creative writing and creative arts courses are recognised as therapeutic for mental health, offering an effective way of reflecting which can support people who are likely to experience distress or depression;
- non-accredited courses provide leisure opportunities and a sense of personal fulfilment or achievement;
- short, bite-size courses build confidence and offer an access route to other educational opportunities for carers with a low level of skills or confidence, or with negative previous experience of education;
- accredited courses can lead to progression to further study or employment; and

- some courses, (for example, book-keeping and business skills) directly increase a carer’s capacity to work from home and may lead to the generation of additional income while continuing to care.

12 Figure 1 sets out the main reasons carers give for enrolling on NEC distance-learning courses. It shows a wide range of motives for choosing to study, all of which might be seen as contributing to ‘a life outside caring’, which is a central goal of the government’s Carers Strategy (HM Government, 2008). Most students study for enjoyment, but almost one-third chose a course with a view to gaining employment or starting their own business, and 1 in 20 said they chose a distance-learning course because their caring situation prevented them from accessing college courses.

- Carers will be supported so that they are not forced into financial hardship by their caring role.
- Carers will be supported to stay mentally and physically well and treated with dignity.
- Children and young people will be protected from inappropriate caring and have the support they need to learn, develop and thrive, to enjoy positive childhoods and to achieve the five outcomes of Every Child Matters:
 - be healthy;
 - stay safe;
 - enjoy and achieve;
 - make a positive contribution; and
 - achieve economic well being.

Figure 1: Reasons for choosing a distance-learning course



Policies that support carers who want to learn

13 Several recent policy initiatives emphasise the importance of educational opportunities for carers.

Carers Strategy

14 The Carers Strategy (HM Government, 2008) sets out important commitments that support carers who want to learn:

- Carers will be able to have a life of their own alongside their caring role.

15 In explaining what is meant by ‘a life of their own’, the Carers Strategy is more specific about educational opportunities for carers:

3.3 In giving carers a life outside caring, we believe there should be a greater emphasis on the provision of planned breaks, which will provide carers with the time to take up the same work, education, leisure and training opportunities as anyone else.

(HM Government, 2008:70)

4.33 New commitment: *To allow carers to have every opportunity to ensure that their skills are such that they can combine work and caring, we will encourage more flexible opportunities for life-long learning to be made available to carers (for example, through more flexible hours and modular courses), in particular for those who have been out of the workplace. These provisions are often already available for parents who wish to learn flexibly.*

(HM Government, 2008:97)

Work and Pensions Select Committee report

16 The Work and Pensions Select Committee report *Valuing and Supporting Carers* (House of Commons, 2008a) recommends further action to improve carers' access to education and training:

40. *There is much evidence that carers are currently disadvantaged in accessing education and training. More needs to be done to introduce greater flexibility of training courses, including home-based courses, which can be fitted around caring responsibilities (Paragraph 278).*

(House of Commons, 2008a:96)

17 The government response to this report (House of Commons, 2008b) gives a clear commitment:

80. *Research indicates that there are often barriers, such as the lack of flexible provision, which prevent carers engaging in learning. The Government is, therefore, introducing measures such as greater flexibility of provision or home-based learning to ensure that carers – particularly those aged 16 to 24 who are less likely to be in education or training than non-carers – can access the education or training they need. Increased skills levels increase carers' chances of finding a job and progressing in a career.*

(House of Commons, 2008b:18)

18 Other recent legislation, policy and national initiatives relevant to education and training for carers include the Carers Equal Opportunities Act 2004, the forthcoming Single Equality Act, the welfare reform White Paper *Raising Expectations and Increasing Support* (DWP, 2008) and the replacement of the LSC by the Skills Funding Agency.

Carers Equal Opportunities Act 2004

19 The Carers Equal Opportunities Act 2004 requires local authorities to inform carers of their rights to assessment and to consider carers' needs or wishes to work or undertake education, training or organised leisure activities.

Single Equality Act

20 Equal rights and protection from discrimination for carers has been at the heart of a debate about including carers in the forthcoming Single Equality Act. This brought together three existing strands of anti-discrimination legislation (race, sex and disability).

21 Initially, the response of the government was that there was 'no intention to extend the new duty to carers as carers' (House of Commons, 2008b:25 para. 115). Nevertheless, in the light of the Coleman case¹, the government has now agreed that carers will form the fourth strand in this Act and will thus form a specific group in anti-discrimination legislation. Once the Act becomes law, this will have major implications for providers of goods and services to carers including education providers.

22 Legislation to protect carers from discrimination is already in place in Australia².

23 In the meantime, the European Court of Justice ruling strengthens the argument that service providers should consider the specific needs of carers in equality and diversity and social inclusion policies and practice, as this will help reduce the risk of litigation for discrimination by association³.

24 *Raising Expectations and Increasing Support*, the government's welfare reform White Paper (DWP, 2008) includes plans to make local authorities responsible for the educational opportunities offered to all young people under 18 and to establish a new agency, the Skills Funding Agency, to provide training and skills for adults. The LSC will be dissolved by 2010 and the new Skills Funding Agency will offer skills accounts to adult learners. The government says in the Carers Strategy that carers are intended to benefit from skills accounts:

¹ The European Court of Justice found that Sharon Coleman, the mother of a disabled child dismissed by her employer for taking time off work to care for her child, had been discriminated against because of her association with a disabled person – 'discrimination by association'.

² South Australia's Equal Opportunity (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2008 makes it unlawful to discriminate against voluntary carers, including indirect discrimination such as setting unreasonable requirements that are too difficult for a carer to meet.

³ See the explanation of these terms on p. 2.

4.34 *From 2010, we will introduce national skills accounts to motivate individuals into learning by giving them greater purchasing power over their training. A key principle of skills accounts is that the flow of public funding to providers will follow learner choice, giving individuals maximum incentive to learn and providers maximum incentive to offer what learners need. Skills accounts will enable carers to update their skills, increasing their opportunity to return to work if they would like to do so. **They will also help break the isolation some carers face by offering a life outside caring** [our emphasis].*

(HM Government, 2008:97)

25 An important issue highlighted in the recent evaluation report of the Carers into Education project (NEC, 2009) is that carers may take several years, often with stops, starts and detours, from first-step, informal learning to gaining a qualification that will help them return to work or get a more suitable job. Over two or three years, funding streams to support vulnerable learners may come and go or change their priorities. The principle of a skills account attached to the individual learner could perhaps be extended for carers, so that a protected 'carers account' or virtual learning voucher would be made available to the individual carer for at least five years, and which could be used for informal learning as well as accredited courses.

26 In short, for the care and hard work they give, the benefits to family and community, and the money that they save the state, carers deserve recognition and support. The government has acknowledged in recent policy statements that learning must be an important element in that support. There is now an opportunity for all organisations with an interest in learning for carers to contribute to the shaping of national and local policies to improve and develop carers' access to mainstream education.

What Support do Carers Need in Order to Learn and Achieve?

27 This section explores the views and experiences of carers who are students on the NEC Carers into Education project, and those of interviewees from social services departments and carers centres.

Experiences of barriers to learning

28 Many carers would choose to attend a course at a college, adult and community education centre or other local provider where possible; like most students they enjoy peer-group contact and find face-to-face teaching more effective than learning from home. However, to do this they face three sets of problems:

- practical;
- psychological; and
- systemic.

Practical problems

29 The structure of carers' lives is determined by the needs of those they care for, and for this reason even distance learning can be problematic. The practical obstacles that prevent carers pursuing a college course include:

- lack of suitable courses: for example many education providers offer only a narrow range of academic or leisure courses;
- cost of tuition fees, equipment and so on; carers are often on low incomes, whether they receive means-tested benefits or not;
- a need for flexible and unorthodox course timings (10.30am-3pm is a popular arrangement for courses run in carers centres);
- travel difficulties if the course is not local;
- respite care needs, which, if a carer wants to attend college, may be reassessed by social services;

- unpredictable health of the person they care for, meaning regular attendance may be disrupted if there is a crisis or deterioration in the health of the person needing care; and
- poor health in carers themselves, which is common and can prevent them from completing a conventional college course.

Psychological problems

30 Carers face psychological barriers specific to their situation, such as:

- Feelings of guilt: carers find it difficult to put their needs and interests first, even on a part-time basis.
- Lack of confidence: because many carers have few or no qualifications, have been out of learning for a long time, have had negative experiences of the education system, or are afraid of officialdom, they may be less likely to consider learning as an option, even where suitable courses are available.
- Isolation: carers often lack social support or feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities. They therefore need extra support while enrolled on a course.

Systemic problems

31 Carers may wish to enrol on non-accredited courses simply for pleasure or interest, but there is a large group of working-age carers who wish to retrain after a long period out of work. However, in the experience of carer-students, education and training provision is rarely designed with carers in mind. For example:

- Colleges and other providers have little awareness of the specific problems faced by carers, hence appropriate forms of support (such as mentoring and pastoral care) and flexible provision are absent or inadequate.
- Opening times of support services, libraries and so on are often inconvenient.

- Although colleges offer childcare arrangements for student parents, suitable childcare for the parent of a child with a disability may not be available.

32 To sum up, carers are individuals like everyone else, with a range of reasons for studying and an equally wide range of educational and employment aspirations. Individual needs for support will vary but the one thing that all carers have in common is the unpredictability of their caring situation. A carer's capacity to attend regularly, complete assignments and sit exams is not dependent on their own commitment and self-discipline but on the health of someone else, and the needs of the person they care for can change suddenly and dramatically.

33 Because of this unpredictability, the thing that carers most need to succeed as learners is flexibility. A carer is by nature an individual who is motivated, committed and reliable. To succeed in education, they need providers to recognise these qualities, understand the impact of unpredictability, and adapt their policies and practices to offer carer-students tailored flexibility and supportive learning arrangements at the key points where these are needed.

Findings: How are the Learning Needs of Carers Being Addressed?

34 While carers often find it difficult to access college courses, growing numbers of social services and carers centres do offer some form of training or support for learning. Interviewees from social services and carers centres were asked what learning opportunities and support they offer, either directly or through commissioning or working with other agencies. This section describes what is offered to carers and how this is provided and financed.

Carers centres

35 A total of 12 carers centres were subject to interview and of these, 11 provide some form of education or training for carers. There is a striking diversity in the range of courses offered. Many are short taster courses or one-off day or half-day sessions (Table 1). The courses are timed to fit carers' needs.

Table 1: Range of courses and learning support offered at 12 carers centres

<p>Practical skills for caring</p> <p>Moving and lifting (6)</p> <p>Access to social services in-house training for paid care workers (4)</p> <p>First aid (4)</p> <p>Caring for someone with mental health needs (2)</p> <p>Back care</p> <p>Creative</p> <p>Arts and crafts</p> <p>Music and drama</p> <p>Digital photography</p> <p>Creative writing (2)</p> <p>Carers into learning (five-week writing course)</p> <p>Other</p> <p>One-off courses run through local training agency</p> <p>For Black and minority ethnic carers: English language, IT, arts and crafts, yoga</p> <p>Help in finding courses run by other agencies</p>	<p>Skills for health and well-being</p> <p>Self-esteem/self-development/assertiveness (3)</p> <p>Stress management (3)</p> <p>Anger management</p> <p>Microwave cooking</p> <p>Healthy eating</p> <p>Keeping healthy</p> <p>Safety</p> <p>Practical skills for managing home/money work</p> <p>Computing (3)</p> <p>Income and benefits (2)</p> <p>Money management</p> <p>Legal and financial</p> <p>Business ideas course</p> <p>Preparing for life beyond caring</p> <p>Back to work</p>
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Note: The number of centres offering the course where this exceeds 1 is indicated in parentheses.

36 The number of carers centres offering learning to carers shows there is a demand for educational opportunities. Even so, half the centres interviewed say they do not have links, or have no strong links, with local educational providers. In some cases this is because centres feel they lack the time and capacity to develop such links due to the greater priority given to the more pressing support needs of carers.

37 As most carers centres are already providing learning in some form, there may be value in exploring opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working with local colleges or adult education services.

38 Suffolk Family Carers (SFC) has a well-established and innovative programme for carers and learning delivered by its learning, education and employment team. The team co-ordinates a wide programme of activities for life skills learning, formal educational opportunities and preparation for employment. SFC projects include outreach work across five outreach link centres, offering short life skills learning sessions. This learning leads to other services that aim to help carers step into education or employment, including training days on skills for returning to work and an information, advice and guidance appointment with a trained advisor. Carers are also supported to sign up for accredited courses at college, university or remote e-learning or distance learning provision. In partnership with the local business enterprise agency, carers can attend a 'start your own business' day.

Social services

39 All but one of the social services interviewed provided training themselves or funded other providers such as the local carers centre or other voluntary organisations to provide the training. Several said the training offered was limited or in development. Again, there is marked diversity between local authorities in the type of courses offered or commissioned, but the focus is more on training to support individuals in their role as carers, rather than to support a life outside caring:

- stress management;
- information and awareness training;
- assertiveness and confidence;
- first aid;
- lifting and handling;
- finance;
- looking after people with mental health needs; and
- carers with learning disabilities.

40 In three local authorities, carers can access council-sponsored training courses for paid care workers. One interviewee, however, thought this was unsatisfactory for family carers who may well feel out of place in a cohort of paid care workers.

41 One authority had a care voucher scheme which eligible carers could use to pay for respite care in order to attend courses.

42 Of the authorities that directly offered some form of training to carers, three said that the main source for learners was the carers' assessment. Carers who are not eligible for a carers' assessment, or who are assessed as not eligible for support, would therefore not be offered training.

How learning is provided and financed

43 As well as marked differences in what is offered, there is wide variation in how courses and learning support are provided and financed by carers centres and social services. The information offered by interviewees only gives a partial snapshot of this diversity and shows that funding and provision is very much a postcode lottery (Table 2).

Table 2: Provision and financing of courses by provider

<p>Practical skills for caring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • core funding from social services • primary care trusts (courses related to mental health and health and well-being) • National Lottery • Barclays Bank • Princess Royal Trust for Carers • grants from charities (for example, Gulbenkian Foundation, Lloyds TSB Foundation) • enterprise agencies (business courses) • social services in-house courses (free to those who have had a carers' assessment) • other voluntary organisation (for example, Relate, Southend Association of Voluntary Services, Lighthouse Project in Sandwell) • in partnership with local FE colleges • carers referred to local Women's Centre courses • European Social Fund
<p>Social services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commissioned from other agencies (courses in education, health or voluntary sector) • commissioned through voluntary sector providers • care vouchers to pay for respite care to attend courses • Carers Grant for individual carers

Examples of good practice

44 Bedfordshire social services have an arrangement with Nextstep for an individual training needs analysis but this is only free for carers who do not have a qualification at level 2 or who are on benefits. Those with qualifications at or above level 2 are funded from the Carers Grant at a cost of £150. This support is only available to carers who are deemed eligible for support following a carers' assessment.

45 Norfolk and Lincolnshire social services use direct payments to fund individual carers to do courses. Carers already use direct payments from social services to purchase the services they are assessed as needing to support them in their caring role. This includes support that may help maintain their health and well-being. The DirectGov website (www.direct.gov.uk) gives the example of driving lessons or a holiday to give a carer time to themselves. Again, this support is only available to carers who are deemed eligible for support following a carers' assessment.

46 Not all social services are prepared to make direct payments available specifically for educational purposes, despite the evidence that learning helps health and well-being (James, 2001). There is also disparity among local authorities in their use of Carers Grant to fund educational opportunities. Several social services interviewees thought that clearer guidance was needed from the Department of Health on what proportion should be allocated to support carers' education and training.

47 Overall, the diverse and piecemeal funding available to social services and carers centres for carers' education reinforces the case for stronger links between social services, carers' organisations and educational providers. While both social services and carers centres can access certain funding streams individually to provide courses for learners, joint working would widen access to other sources of funding for both. For example, carers centres, as voluntary organisations, can access charitable funding that local authorities cannot, but such funding is usually short term. Joint working increases the potential to pool resources and identify more secure or matched funding for educational initiatives.

What are educational providers doing to support carers?

48 Carers, carers centres and social services identified the issues that make it difficult for carers to study in mainstream education. These were explored further in questions put to educational providers; their responses ranged from innovative and proactive to interested but relatively unaware.

49 This section explores how far further and adult education policies and practice currently support carers, highlights good practice and makes recommendations for ways in which policies and practice could be modified or adapted.

Staff policy that specifies carers

50 Employees who are carers have a legal right to request flexible working arrangements and time off in emergencies⁴. About half the colleges interviewed said their policies on flexible working and/or time off in emergencies specify carers' employment rights. In the other colleges, this had not been formalised but they emphasised that management would be sympathetic to carers. One college said it would be difficult if the member of staff had time off unpredictably but they could cope with a reduction in the number of days worked.

Good practice: Employers' policy documents that set out employees' statutory rights should specify the statutory rights of carers.

Student policies that specify carers

51 Most colleges have policies and action plans to promote student equality and diversity, and social inclusion. However, none of the colleges took steps to routinely identify carers among their students, nor did any have a formal policy or action plan to meet their specific needs.

52 Generally, interviewees considered this was sensitive information that would be difficult to elicit during enrolment because carers could be reluctant to offer information about their home circumstances that might prejudice their application.

53 Most providers felt the onus was on the carer to explain their caring situation, if they chose, during the initial interview or during personal tutorials.

54 However, in the absence of any formal policy of support for carers, it is not realistic to expect carers to take responsibility for self-disclosure. It is also at odds with approaches to other under-represented or vulnerable groups, such as black and ethnic minority applicants and people with disabilities, where there are positive policies and action to promote and monitor equality of opportunity.

Recommendation: A policy for carer-students would raise the profile of carers and formalise the educational provider's support for carers.

Links with carers' organisations and social services

55 Some colleges have links with social services, often through learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities partnerships or other social services stakeholder groups, and so have contacts with carers or professionals responsible for services to carers through this route.

56 Several of the colleges saw advantages in making closer links and these interviewees were given contact details for social services or carers' organisations after the interview.

Good practice and recommendation: Colleges and other providers could seek representation on relevant stakeholder or partnership groups (for example, the local authority may convene a carers strategy implementation group; carers partnership group or a carers subgroup of the learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities partnership). These networks can give providers links with carers' organisations, access to a source of carer-students, and potential access to financial support for eligible carer-students through the Carers Grant. Providers could also explore joint working with primary care trusts, which could access funding to promote the mental health and well-being of carers.

Fee remission and equivalence

57 In 2008, the government decided to withdraw funding to FE colleges for students who want to study for an equivalent or lower qualification (ELQ) to one they already hold, in order to prioritise funding for learners with low-level or no previous qualifications.

58 Ruling out ELQ funding potentially discriminates against people who have been out of education for some time because of caring responsibilities or a disability. Such potential learners may be compelled to retrain because their previous skills or qualifications are no longer current.

59 Interviewees were asked how the equivalence rule would apply in their college. All except one⁵ said that benefits would over-ride equivalence for **accredited** courses, so any applicant on a means-tested benefit would receive full fee remission. They would only have to pay an administration fee and exam fees.

⁴The Work and Families Act 2006 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 give working carers rights to help them manage work and caring including the right to request flexible work and leave entitlement.

⁵In this one exception, the interviewee was not fully confident of her answer.

60 The picture is less clear for **non-accredited courses**, some of which are funded by personal and community development learning (PCDL). Some providers give full fee remission for those on means-tested benefits while others do not, and it was not clear whether these were only for those courses that are PCDL funded. Sources of funding and the application of funding rules for non-accredited courses varied markedly among the 12 providers in this study. Further work is needed to get a general overview of current practice.

Financial support for travel, equipment, childcare and respite care

61 Carers on low incomes may need financial support to travel to college if the course is not local and they therefore incur regular travelling expenses, and they may not be able to afford the equipment needed for study (for example a laptop, or equipment for science or technical courses). A major cost for many carers who wish to study is respite care, that is, someone to look after the person they care for while they are at college.

62 Interviewees told us that student support funds are available for students on LSC-funded programmes to help with travel, equipment and childcare for parents with young children. These are means tested.

63 While parent-carers can therefore access childcare support for certain courses, there is no LSC support for other carers needing respite care. Help with respite care to study is arranged through social services or carers centre funding mechanisms, but this is rare.

64 The Carers Strategy includes an additional £150 million of new funding for respite care over two years.

Recommendation: Social services need to clarify whether carers eligible for respite care will be able to access these new resources for study.

Uptake of LSC 12 per cent uplift funding for full-time carers

65 The LSC's funding guidance allows colleges to claim a funding uplift for specified categories of disadvantaged students. There are several categories, including students from deprived neighbourhoods (areas of multiple deprivation as identified in the 2001 census, designated by postcode) and full-time carers, defined as those who care for more than 35 hours a week and who are therefore eligible for the Carers' Allowance.

66 Disadvantage uplift (identified by postcode) is the simplest for colleges to process. Other categories of uplift require colleges to gather sensitive data from individual learners, which learners may be reluctant to disclose.

67 Only one of the colleges formally collected this information via a tick list which the student could mark off with their tutor during a personal tutorial or, if appropriate, via the counselling team. This information was collated at the end of the year before it was passed to the Learner Management System (LMS). Otherwise, the information is held confidentially by the personal tutor and only discussed with other staff if the learner agrees and it affects their learning – for example, if they need to arrive late for a session. The extra funding goes into the curriculum pot, but this college said that if it targeted a group of carers, the uplift could be used to reduce fees.

68 There was a mixed response from the other colleges and some were unaware that carers were listed as a disadvantaged group. Some felt this data was too sensitive to collect and had no system in place to collect it or to pass it to their LMS. Others saw it as an oversight. One college with 80 per cent of students living in disadvantaged postcodes thought it was not necessary to collect data about students in other disadvantaged categories because the postcode disadvantage gave, on average, a greater uplift. According to the LSC's funding guidance, however, postcode disadvantage uplift ranges from 8 per cent to 24 per cent, with an average of 12 per cent, so in some catchment areas, it may be less than or only the same as the 12 per cent uplift currently used for carers and other excluded groups.

69 There was a willingness among providers to look into sensitive ways of identifying full-time carers, for example via a revised enrolment form or tutorial reviews. It was pointed out that if a carer were referred from a carers' organisation, such information could be captured automatically.

70 It was interesting to note that interviewees talked in terms of 'disclosure' and 'sensitivity' as though there might be a stigma attached to being a carer. This is perhaps by association with other categories of disadvantage that qualify for uplift (for example, people with mental health needs, those recovering from alcohol or drug problems and ex-offenders), which may well be stigmatised.

71 This perception that carers might be stigmatised or fear of being stigmatised reinforces the need for policies that clearly specify carers as a student group eligible for support. It suggests there may be social and cultural barriers to supporting carers within mainstream education that could be addressed through awareness raising.

Recommendation: Providers already collect data on ethnicity, gender and disability, and could consider sensitive ways to collect information about carers. Providers could use the additional funding from claiming uplift to support carers. Identification of carers on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) would encourage colleges to identify carer-students.

72 There is a clear policy anomaly in that full-time carers qualify for LSC uplift funding as a disadvantaged group, yet people caring over 35 hours a week who are eligible for Carers' Allowance are not eligible for fee remission. This is discussed at paragraph 108.

Flexible learning arrangements

73 Interviewees were asked about current aspects of flexible practice that would make it easier for carers to access mainstream provision.

74 On the whole colleges try and fit in with the needs of the individual learner, particularly adults (for example, parents with children who need to start later or finish earlier), often at the discretion of the individual tutor. However, several interviewees considered this to be a difficult balance, as the necessary flexibility for carers could be interpreted by others as a lack of commitment, and could send the wrong signals to young people about the discipline of study.

75 Generally providers are willing to negotiate revised deadlines with individual learners for handing in work, if there is a good reason. They are also willing to help with flexible arrangements for taking exams, if necessary, depending on the nature of the exam and the flexibility of the exam board.

76 Most providers have in place or are developing virtual learning environments (VLEs) or learning platforms, and a broad range of ICT systems is used to deliver and support learning. Moodle is one of the most widely used systems. In some colleges, some students with internet access may be able to get some or all of their course materials online. One college aimed to get online a minimum specification for each of its courses.

Good practice: VLEs or learning platforms are gradually increasing flexible and accessible delivery of learning for students who cannot always attend classes at a fixed place and time.

Recommendation: As education providers expand their ICT support and virtual learning capacity, the government could significantly improve information and educational opportunities for carers on low incomes by offering them computers and home access to the internet, along the lines of the government's Next generation learning initiative which provides computers and internet access to children in low-income families. Examination boards and the QCA need to be made aware of the particular needs of carers.

77 Generally, providers aim to offer some form of support to learners who needed to catch up on work. Most interviewees suggested the VLE is or will become the best way of doing this.

78 Funding constraints make it difficult to offer one-to-one sessions with a tutor, though this is sometimes done by tutors on a goodwill basis. One college operates a formal buddy system with mature learners, one of whom collects handouts for absent colleagues.

Studying from home

79 Most providers said that studying from home was feasible in principle, either through one-to-one support, the VLE, online courses and/or podcasts. However, about half said this was only acceptable as a one-off, temporary arrangement, for example 'if a student had to take a week off due to a broken leg'.

80 Some interviewees thought working from home with submission of work would not be accepted as evidence of attendance under Ofsted rules on attendance.

81 Several interviewees pointed out that both the LSC and Ofsted require a high level of on-site attendance, so lower attendance would reduce LSC funding received by the college for that student and could affect its Ofsted inspection rating.

82 There was some confusion on the LSC and Ofsted requirements for on-site attendance. Colleges quoted different figures (from 80 per cent to 90 per cent). One interviewee thought the level of on-site attendance was irrelevant, provided that the student achieved. Another thought that working from home could count as attendance if the student was in contact with tutor during this time.

Recommendation: LSC and Ofsted should offer specific guidance to educational providers in relation to the definition of 'attendance' for students who are full-time carers, and state the circumstances in which working from home might be considered attendance.

Distance learning

83 None of the providers we interviewed offered courses by distance learning (study at home with access to a distance tutor) because of poor success rates in the past and lack of funding. Most interviewees saw the growth of VLEs, e-learning and other online learning resources as replacing the need for distance learning.

Recommendation: The funding rules for distance learning need to be relaxed when applied to disadvantaged groups such as carers.

Outreach

84 Most colleges already have a range of outreach activities (for example, taster courses in local community centres) to engage under-represented groups of learners. For example, one college has an adult learning block

separate from the main college building where mature learners feel more comfortable. Carers might well take advantage of outreach activities if colleges target their outreach publicity appropriately and take account of carers' needs in the way outreach is offered, for example, by adjusting the times of classes to fit respite care. There are, however, difficulties in finding suitable venues, resources, staffing and funding to offer outreach within local communities.

Additional support for carer-students

85 All providers are able to offer additional support to vulnerable learners and have a wide range of support services: personal tutoring, counselling, careers guidance and general student welfare. Carers can in principle access all these forms of support but unless colleges publicise the fact, current and potential carer-students may not be aware that such support exists or that they are eligible for it.

Targeted support for young carers

86 Large numbers of children and young people under the age of 18 provide some kind of care for members of their family. Because young carers are more likely to experience problems with schoolwork and attendance, they may need specific support to access and benefit from further and higher education and employment opportunities. There is a full discussion of the issues affecting young carers and young adult carers in a recent report for the Princess Royal Trust for Carers by Becker and Becker (2008).

87 None of the colleges had a formal system for identifying young carers – occasionally information about a learner may be passed on to the college via Connexions (the school careers service), child protection records or a social worker, but no information is passed on from schools. A young carer might be identified after enrolment through the tutorial system, if the learner discloses he or she is a carer or if a tutor notices problems. There were no support systems in place specifically for young carers. One college tried to set up a young carers' forum but no one attended. One interviewee thought that young carers might be wary of identifying themselves for fear of being stigmatised by tutors.

88 These findings reflect some key messages in a Social Care Institute for Excellence briefing paper (SCIE, 2005), which were that:

Only small numbers of young carers are currently being identified or assessed for support. The reasons for this include blurred boundaries of responsibility between adult and children's services; a lack of awareness among many professional groups of young carers' needs and concerns; and young carers' own lack of awareness of their entitlements, and their reluctance to seek formal help.

(SCIE, 2005:online para. 3)

Social workers and teachers have been recognised as the people potentially most capable of identifying and supporting young carers, but young carers report that they consider themselves to be stigmatised by teachers and their peers, and feel that little support is forthcoming from schools.

(SCIE, 2005:online para. 6)

Recommendation: A number of young carer projects have found effective ways of identifying, reaching out to and supporting young carers. Post-16 educational providers could learn from their methods and explore ways of joint working to engage and support 16-18 year olds in further education opportunities.

Childcare for students who have children with disabilities

89 Students who are parents of young children with disabilities need childcare that is appropriate for the needs of their child. Most providers can either accommodate disabled children in their own nursery or arrange a place at an appropriate nursery. However, the carer may need to find extra funding from social services for a support worker if a child has a high level of needs. This is often difficult to obtain.

Recommendation: Social services should work closely with education providers to ensure suitable, funded childcare support.

Other funding streams to support carers

90 Apart from LSC funding, sources of funding for FE and adult education courses are very limited. Government funding for personal and community development learning (PCDL) is decreasing in real terms each year, and in some areas this is assigned to adult learning through the local authority rather than to individual FE providers. Some colleges have, however, used PCDL funding to offer taster courses designed to lead to a full qualification at level 2. Two colleges pointed out that Train to Gain funding is available to volunteers, meaning if carers were classified as volunteers they would be able to access this funding (as foster carers already do).

Recommendation: Explore possible structures through which carers might qualify for Train to Gain funding as volunteers.

Carer-specific courses

91 Educational providers are constrained in their capacity to offer courses specifically aimed at carers. They are concerned about the difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of carers; finding staff with expertise in the areas required; and the financial viability of non-accredited, unfunded courses for which the provider would need to recover the full cost from participants.

Combined prospectus

92 Even where suitable courses are offered, carers have difficulty getting hold of information about what is available in their area and can only find out by asking individual providers. A combined prospectus is available online in all areas for 14-19 year olds, but there is virtually no cross-college information for adults.

Recommendation: Educational providers in a locality or region should be required and funded to offer a prospectus for adult learners. The Floodlight prospectus already covers many parts of the UK for example, see Floodlight prospectus for Birmingham at <http://birmingham.floodlight.co.uk/>) and a possibility might be to fund and expand this prospectus to cover the whole of the UK.

Staff training

93 No colleges currently run specific awareness training for staff on the needs of carer-students, but there was a positive response to the idea. Interviewees thought this could be done as part of induction, continuing professional development and/or equality and diversity training. Some carers centres offered to provide this training free of charge.

Recommendation: Colleges should liaise with their local carers centre to obtain support for such training.

Carers' champion

94 Only one college had a named carers' champion, but all the interviewees thought this was a good idea and easily put in place. Most saw this as a role that could sit within student services or learner support. At strategic level, it was suggested that a senior member of staff should liaise with carers' organisations and social services.

Recommendation: Colleges should consider appointing a carers' champion.

Overview of responses

95 It was very pleasing that all the educational providers who were interviewed responded positively to the survey questions. Most commented that it had given them food for thought and some said that as a result of the interview, they would look at the needs of carers as an area for development. Some asked for contact details of social services and managers of carers centres.

96 Some significant trends in college policies and practices emerged from the interviews that could benefit carers:

- The growing availability of college facilities for virtual learning online (VLEs, Moodle, and so on) could allow more flexible learning arrangements for carers. However, LSC and Ofsted requirements for a high level of on site attendance do not yet allow students to take full advantage of this potential flexibility.
- There are some positive developments in partnerships and joint working with social services and carers centres, but emerging good practice in this area is piecemeal and by happenstance. In general, colleges do not see themselves, and are not seen by social services, as significant stakeholders in the local implementation of the Carers Strategy.
- All colleges have in place policies, infrastructure and processes to support vulnerable learners in general but, with some notable exceptions, these do not yet include carers.

Systemic Barriers and Drivers for Change

97 This section explores the barriers to mainstream learning identified through the research and possible ways of overcoming them.

What are the systemic barriers in further education?

Carers are a hidden cohort

98 There is no systematic approach to capturing data on the number of carers in the student population. Colleges record data on some categories of vulnerable learners at enrolment (for example by postcode for deprivation, ethnicity and disability) but only one of those interviewed currently seeks to identify carers.

99 At the moment, the onus is on the student to make the college aware of his or her caring role and to ask for flexible arrangements. This is an unrealistic expectation of learners who may lack confidence or fear of being stigmatised. The lack of any specific policy to support carers works against disclosure and prevents the collection of accurate knowledge about who they are.

100 Because they are a hidden cohort, there has been little systematic analysis of the kinds of courses that carers need, or the level these courses should be pitched at. There is also a huge national variance in the range of courses available to them.

Existing processes to widen participation do not include carers

101 Organisational mechanisms and structures exist to support vulnerable learners, address equality and diversity and promote inclusion but these do not currently include carers. Processes to widen participation and promote equality are not therefore attuned to carers as a group of learners who have a shared need for flexible learning arrangements, and individual needs requiring tailored support.

Carers are not offered targeted support to take the first step

102 In the experience of carers centres and the NEC (2009), carers who lack confidence or learning skills can and do access educational opportunities if these are tailored to their needs, and a proportion then progress to

mainstream accredited courses. Colleges have the capacity for targeted publicity, outreach, advice and guidance, taster courses and mentoring, and these activities could be directed at carers, but are not at the moment.

There are systemic and cultural barriers to college flexibility

103 Distance learning where learners can study in their own home, in their own time and at their own pace works well for some carers. However, college provision of distance learning has shrunk to the point where it is non-existent. Accredited FE courses are offered by national distance-learning providers such as the NEC and Home Learning College, but these organisations are not eligible for LSC funding. This means that carers on low incomes cannot afford the cost of studying independently by distance learning.

104 College facilities for virtual learning online increase the potential for home study or more flexible on-site attendance for carers. However, most interviewees said that LSC funding rules and Ofsted requirements defined 'attendance' as 'in the classroom', which rules out the options of home study or partial attendance on-site.

105 This highlights a deeper issue. Comments by interviewees showed that the ideas of 'flexibility' and 'home study' run counter to educational provider *culture*, as well as counter to LSC and Ofsted policy requirements, because the priority is to instil committed and disciplined study in 16-19 year olds. In discussing flexibility, some interviewees said this could 'undermine' the college regime, 'send the wrong message' to younger students or 'indicate lack of commitment'.

LSC funding for attendance and achievement rules out flexibility

106 LSC funding rules reward high attendance, completion of the course within a set time, and achievement. Colleges lose a proportion of funding for students who do not reach between 80 per cent and 90 per cent attendance, do not complete within one academic year, or achieve only partial learning aims by the end of the year. Carers who might not fulfil these targets therefore represent a financial risk for colleges.

107 Interviewees' responses suggested that there is wide variation in the way that funding rules on attendance are interpreted and applied. Some required 90 per cent attendance, some required 80 per cent, and one said attendance requirements could be waived provided the student's achievement was on target.

Carers Allowance does not qualify for fee remission

108 Carers Allowance is a benefit paid to people who care for someone for more than 35 hours a week. Carers wishing to retrain for work that fits with their caring role, or to prepare for a return to work when caring ends, face the difficulty in that many vocational and academic courses only attract funding if the participant studies within a particular timescale. This may be impossible for some carers.

109 Those who could manage full-time study face the obstacle that Carers Allowance is withdrawn if the carer studies for more than 21 hours a week. This effectively forces carers to choose between caring and education (House of Commons, 2008a).

110 A further barrier is that Carers Allowance, which is a taxable benefit that is less than Income Support, is not included in the list of benefits that qualify learners for fee remission. This has the perverse consequence that someone on Income Support pays less for a course than someone on Carers Allowance.

111 The Work and Pensions Select Committee made the following recommendation:

163. *Carers currently face a stark choice between engaging in education and training without any financial support or living on benefits. Many carers would be able to undertake education or training in addition to providing in excess of 35 hours of care per week. We recommend that the Department evaluates the effect of lifting the 21 hour study rule for carers on Carer's Allowance to enable carers to engage in education and training as a route into paid employment. We also recommend that the Department evaluates the effect of adding Carer's Allowance to the list of qualifying benefits for reduced education and training fees.*

(House of Commons, 2008a:46)

112 Interviewees were asked about the likely impact if Carers Allowance were added to the list of fee-remitted benefits. Some interviewees thought this might attract more carers but others were concerned about the costs of supporting an increased number of carers.

113 The government has said that Carers Allowance and the rules surrounding it will be considered as part of proposed single benefit reforms. It also says the adult

advancement and careers service to be launched in 2010 will be able to offer specific advice to target groups such as carers.

114 However, in the welfare reform White Paper *Raising Expectations and Increasing Support* the government has said, in the light of consultation with carers' organisations, that it will not alter benefits for carers 'until we have a clear and detailed plan setting out how we will make changes to carers' benefits' (HM Government, 2008:36 para. 2.17). As the timetable for this plan is not known, reclassifying Carers Allowance in the interim as a fee-remitted benefit would be an obvious and useful measure.

What are the drivers for change?

115 Several factors may help to drive or support improved access to mainstream education for carers:

- Government policy commitments to support carers (see above) alongside current or planned government reviews of adult informal learning and funding priorities for adult learning present a valuable opportunity in the next few months to contribute to the way these are shaped into concrete policies and practice.
- Data on carers is improving so that all local agencies should in future be able to estimate the number of hidden carers among their service users and local population, and plan accordingly. For example, a forthcoming survey by the NHS Information Centre, the GHS Survey in 2010 and the 2011 census will both gather specific information about carers (see also the recommendation at paragraph 118).
- Effective frameworks for widening participation and supporting vulnerable learners already exist within most colleges, so it should be a relatively simple exercise to lever awareness of carers and action to support them into these frameworks.
- The introduction of the Carers Strategy in 2008 means that managers in social services and primary care trusts are actively looking at ways of working with other agencies to implement their local carers strategy for 2008-11. The door is open to innovative joint working with educational providers.
- The Coleman judgement (see paragraph 21) and the continuing campaign for carers to be included in UK equality legislation mean that government policy is likely to strengthen carers' rights to equal treatment over time, even if in a piecemeal way. In the light of the Coleman judgement, employers and service providers who can clearly demonstrate they are flexibly accommodating carers needs will reduce the risk of discrimination by association and the possibility of subsequent litigation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

What needs to be put in place?

116 This survey has identified some important steps to help to remove barriers and improve ease of access to education and training provision for carers. The recommendations in this section are based on the views and experiences of interviewees and the NEC's Carers into Education project team.

Counting carers who want to learn

117 A major issue is the lack of accurate data on the numbers of adult and young carers currently in learning, wanting to access learning, or who are unable to access learning. A recent report (Becker and Becker, 2008) has highlighted that young adult carers aged 16-25 are a particularly hidden group.

118 The 2011 census will include a question about carers to enable local agencies, including colleges, to accurately identify by small neighbourhood areas the number of carers in their catchment area. Educational providers then need to improve their own data capture to measure the effectiveness of their services in reaching those carers. Accurate data will also help to raise professional awareness of carers as an excluded group.

119 Gathering more specific data about carers as learners could also be done as part of the implementation of local carers strategies, for example with collection of data undertaken by:

- carers centres on registration;
- social services at carers' assessment, even for carers not identified as a priority for support; and
- educational providers on enrolment.

120 A question or questions on carers' learning needs and aspirations could be included in the carers' survey to be carried out by the NHS Information Centre, due to be field tested in summer 2009 and rolled out in 2010.

Informing and consulting carers on learning opportunities

121 All carers need good-quality information about what services are available and what they are entitled to. Access

to good information about educational opportunities, learning support and sources of funding should be an integral element of any information service for carers. This could be disseminated through key national information points such as:

- the carers' national helpline, Carers Direct;
- national carers' organisations such as Carers UK and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers;
- the Caring with Confidence (expert carers) programme run by Carers UK, which might offer a session or resource pack on learning opportunities for carers; and
- through local social services, carers centres, colleges and IAG services such as Nextstep.

122 As educational providers expand their ICT support and virtual learning capacity, information and educational opportunities for carers on low incomes could be significantly improved by offering them computers and home access to the internet, along the lines of the government's Next Generation Learning initiative to provide computers and internet access to children in low-income families.

123 Every learning opportunity offered to carers could be used to raise awareness of opportunities for progression to other courses, and to provide information about local mainstream learning provision, the range of support available for learning from local agencies, and the short- and long-term benefits of learning.

124 Consultation is needed with a wide, representative group of carers to understand more about the range of their learning aspirations and experience of education and training. This purpose of the consultation would be to:

- test and further refine the recommendations in this report; and
- identify the most effective mechanisms for informing carers about learning opportunities.

Recommendations for FE providers

125 Areas of college policy and functions in which support for carers could be considered or embedded include:

- the equality and diversity policy and action plan;
- self-assessment and inspection;
- current strategic, development and marketing plans;
- learner support policy and practice; and
- student services.

126 Interviewees were asked to suggest changes that could be made quite easily, at little or no cost, and to consider changes that would be more complex or involve greater cost.

Changes at little cost

127 Changes at little cost could include:

- Identify full-time carers and claim the LSC's 12 per cent uplift funding.
- Revise the enrolment form so that carers can identify themselves if they wish.
- Revise the institution's prospectus and website to attract carers, flagging up suitable courses and explaining the support available.
- Collaborate with other providers to produce a regional or local online prospectus for adult learners, similar to that used for 14-19 year olds.
- Establish and support a named carers' champion to represent the needs of the carer-student within the college.
- Develop links with carers' organisations and social services.
- Include the needs of carers in induction, CPD and equality and diversity programmes for staff.

128 It was suggested that the carers' 12 per cent uplift could pay for some of these changes.

Changes at greater cost

129 Some interviewees suggested colleges could design courses or pathways that are tailored specifically for carers, allowing for flexible (and sometime erratic) attendance, coursework submission dates and so on. Changes to make provision more flexible are likely to involve costs for staff time, for example:

- one-to-one mentoring or learning support;
- tailored bite-size or taster courses that are subsidised or free;
- small-group teaching; and
- the development of an outreach service to deliver courses in carers centres, mobile units or carers' homes.

130 Other tailored support for carers might include:

- support with fees for carers on low incomes;
- free counselling; and
- special needs childcare arrangements for parents of children with disabilities.

131 A mechanism for colleges to share emerging good practice, such as an online innovations directory, could help to facilitate some of these changes.

Recommendations for social services departments

132 Suggested changes in services for individual carers included:

- Review the carer's assessment process to make sure education is discussed and information about educational opportunities is available, whether or not the carer is offered services after assessment.
- Improve advice and guidance on educational opportunities and funding.

133 Various suggestions were made about the potential for joint working at strategic level between social services and educational providers:

- Develop a local plan covering the employment and training strategy for carers with FE and HE institutions in the area.
- Establish a central database of local learning opportunities and contacts for carers.
- Improve liaison with educational providers to develop appropriate models of support for carers as learners.
- Designate a named, trained person with a job description to signpost carers to appropriate educational opportunities.
- Allocate a proportion of the Carers Grant to fund educational opportunities.

Recommendations for carers centres and similar organisations

134 A training budget and/or a training wing for all carers centres, linked to a wider local plan to increase carers' access to learning, would increase carers' awareness of and access to learning opportunities, and could be used to develop innovative access or taster courses and progression routes for carers. This would need to be funded centrally but would help reduce the marked disparity in carers centres' capacity to support access to learning for carers. Other small actions that would have a prompt and beneficial effect include:

- actively identifying and supporting carers who want opportunities to learn;
- informing carers about flexible learning opportunities; and
- seeking out FE providers interested in joint working to meet carers' needs.

Promoting joined-up working

135 As some of the recommendations above have shown, almost all the organisations interviewed thought access to education for carers could be improved through better local networking between social services, carers centres and FE providers. To facilitate the development of local networks and/or joint working, it would be helpful to:

- consult a wider group of providers to test and refine the findings and recommendations of this study; and
- disseminate examples of good practice in networking and joint working.

Recommendations for government departments and agencies

136 In relation to the **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**:

- implement the Work and Pensions Select Committee recommendation to make Carers Allowance a fee-remitted benefit, as an interim measure while plans for reformed carers' benefits are worked out; and
- remove the 21-hour rule so that carers who receive Carers Allowance can study full time without losing benefits.

137 In relation to the **DWP and Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)**:

- allocate funds via local authorities to provide a training budget and function for all carers centres, linked to implementing a local strategy for carers' education and training;

- explore the feasibility of providing carers on low incomes with computers and home access to the internet, along the lines of the government's Next Generation Learning initiative to provide computers and internet access to children in low-income families; and
- classify carers as volunteers for eligibility to Train to Gain funding.

138 In relation to the **LSC and Ofsted**:

- review the attendance, completion and achievement requirements and look at how these can be more appropriately aligned with needs of carers for flexible and home-based learning, and flexible rates of progress collection; and
- add carers as a specific group on the ILR. This would both raise the profile of carers and ensure that a college captures this information at enrolment.

139 In relation to the bodies responsible for professional standards in FE (**Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), Learning and Skills Improvement Agency (LSIS) and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)**):

- ensure that awareness of carers' needs and inclusive strategies to meet them are included in training standards for principals, senior managers, learning support staff, equality and diversity managers, student services managers, and so on.

140 In relation to the **LSC and its successor the Skills Funding Agency**:

- consult with carers on the implications of skills accounts and how these will be used to improve carers' access to education and training.

141 This study, funded by the LSC, has broken new ground in understanding the fine detail of the systemic barriers in educational provision that are likely to disadvantage or potentially discriminate against carers who want to learn. The interview programme raised awareness of carers' learning needs and aspirations among educational providers, carers centres and social services, and met with a very positive response from educational institutions that had not previously considered carers as a specific group of potential learners. In some cases, it has led to useful networking between educational providers and other local agencies working with carers.

142 This study is a step towards widening the awareness of carers' learning needs and the barriers they face more generally. It is hoped that it represents the beginning of more concerted work across educational provision for adults to identify and remove barriers, and actively design educational opportunities so that they include carers.

Annex A

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Annex B

Best Practice in Supporting Carers

The checklist of suggested best practice below is derived from the discussion of policy and practice at paragraphs 34-96. One or two educational providers are already offering some forms of the support listed here. The checklist is offered as a starting point for discussion by educational providers about what steps could be taken in the future to better meet carers' needs.

- Staff policy on employees' statutory rights includes specific information about carers' statutory rights (for example, rights to request flexible working and time off in emergencies).
- Student policies specify what educational support is available for carers and what is in place to promote equal opportunities for carers.
- There is a carers' champion who is known to all staff and publicised with contact details in student information booklets, websites etc.

Good practice to support flexible learning arrangements:

- Carers are offered the option of flexible start and finish times where appropriate.
- Carers can request flexible assignment deadlines and examination arrangements where necessary.
- Carers are made aware of the institution's ICT resources (for example, virtual learning environments) and how these can be used to increase flexibility in where and how they learn.
- Catch-up sessions are offered where appropriate and carers are made aware of this.
- Carers are able to discuss attendance requirements and the possibilities and limits of working from home to make up for lost time in college.
- The institution has good links with carers' organisations, social services and other relevant agencies (for example through the local authority carers' partnership group or similar).
- The institution makes active use of these networks to recruit carers and access financial support for them.
- Clear information is available about who is eligible for funding for accredited and non-accredited courses. Carers are invited to enquire about sources of funding, and are signposted to possible sources of help.
- Information is provided about eligibility for support with travel, equipment and childcare. This information makes reference to carers and signposts to sources of information about respite care.
- The institution seeks to identify full-time carers and collates this data to apply for the LSC's 12 per cent uplift funding.
- Carers' uplift funding is used to reduce fees for carers.
- Distance-learning resources and other flexible options are considered for carers.

- Outreach activities are publicised to carers and carers' organisations and where possible take account of carers' needs.
- Information about additional support for carer-students is publicised in the information aimed at current and potential students.
- There are links with young carers' projects and targeted support for young carers and young adult carers.
- Appropriate childcare is available for students who have children with disabilities.
- The institution is active in seeking funding streams to support carers.
- Carer-specific courses are piloted and learning from these is shared with other local agencies.
- There is a local combined prospectus with cross-provider information about courses for adults (see for example the Birmingham Floodlight prospectus at <http://birmingham.floodlight.co.uk/>).
- Awareness of the needs of carer-students is included in staff training (for example, as part of induction, CPD and equality and diversity training).

Annex C

Methodology

1 This study was carried out in 2008 by the National Extension College in collaboration with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), and funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It was agreed to restrict the regions in the survey to those covered by the NEC's Carers into Education project: these were the East and West Midlands and the Eastern Region (NEC, 2009). This meant that good use could be made of our contacts in these regions, particularly in social services and carers centres.

2 It was decided to identify carers centres, social services and educational providers located in the same area for the research so we could get an in-depth understanding of what was happening in a locality and, where appropriate, encourage a joined-up approach.

3 The interviews were carried out in the following order: carer students, carers centres, social services and finally FE colleges and adult education services. All the interviews, apart from those with educational providers, were carried out via a structured telephone interview. It was decided to interview educational providers face to face because it was felt this would give more detailed information about what was happening in these institutions and their willingness to fit their systems around the needs of carers.

Interviews with carer-students

4 The students were chosen for interview on the basis that they would provide more detailed information on why they wanted to do a course, the real and perceived barriers to learning and their support needs. A sample of 36 students from the Carers into Education project were chosen to provide a range of ages, gender, type of course, benefits received and location. Of these, 19 did not reply, 9 refused and 8 agreed to take part. A further 4 students were approached via their mentors, giving 12 in all. The sample was therefore very biased and did not include, for example, any young carers or a regional spread. The responses to these questionnaires informed the content of all further questionnaires.

Interviews with local agencies

5 The aim was to interview an educational provider, social services department and carers centre in each of 12 localities, that is, 36 local agencies. This was achieved apart from one social services department which proved unreachable within the timescale of the project.

6 We would like to thank the following people and organisations who participated in the study:

7 The 12 carer-students from the NEC Carers into Education project, who gave up their valuable time to answer a telephone questionnaire.

Carers centres

Carers in Bedfordshire
CLASP (Leicestershire) Carers Centre
Derbyshire Carers Association
Herefordshire Carers Support
North Lincolnshire Carers Support Centre
Nottinghamshire Carers Centre
Sandwell Carers Centre
Southend Carers Forum
South Warwickshire Carers Support Service
Suffolk Family Carers
West Norfolk Carers Association
Worcestershire Association of Carers

Colleges

Bedford College
Hereford College of Technology
Leicester College
New College Nottingham
North Lincolnshire Adult Education
Sandwell College
Southend Adult Community College
Warwickshire College
The College of West Anglia
West Suffolk College
Worcester College of Technology

Social services

Bedfordshire County Council
Derbyshire County Council
Herefordshire County Council
Leicester County Council
Lincolnshire County Council
Norfolk County Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Suffolk County Council
Warwickshire County Council
Worcestershire County Council

Annex D

Legislation and Guidance on Carers' Rights

1 The following list sets out the main legislation and national guidance that impacts on carers. It is adapted from the Bristol City Council (BCC) *Joint Carers' Strategy 2008-2011* (BCC, Bristol PCT & The Princess Royal Trust, undated).

2 Carers at the heart of 21st-century families and communities (HM Government, 2008) is the national Carers' Strategy, which sets the agenda for supporting carers for the 10 years to 2018. It includes emphasis on improving respite provision, support for carers (including education and training), support through the NHS, recognition of the needs of young carers, and carers in employment.

3 Carers Grant 2008-11 is central government funding to local authorities to enable them to continue to develop innovative and personalised outcomes reflecting the needs of their local carer population. The Carers Grant can be used to fund carers' education but this use varies widely between authorities.

4 Aiming High for Disabled Children (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2007) announced additional funding in three priority areas to improve outcomes for disabled children: access and empowerment; responsive services and timely support; and improving quality and capacity. There is a new national indicator for parental experience of services for disabled children (aged 0-19) and to assess the extent to which services for disabled children are delivered according to the core offer standards.

5 Putting People First Agreement (2007) is a commitment to the transformation of social care services, confirming the intention to integrate health and social care services to create systems that are fair, accessible and responsive to the individual needs of those who use services and their carers.

6 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 set up local involvement networks (LINKs) requiring the primary care trust and the local authority to consult and involve service users.

7 Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance to parents.

8 Our Health, Our Care, Our Say (DoH, 2006) is a White Paper which set a new direction for the health and social care system, emphasising promotion of independence, choice and a stronger voice for both carers and the people they care for.

9 Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 confirms the duty to inform carers of their rights to assessment and requires consideration of carers' needs or wishes to work or undertake education, training or organised leisure activities.

10 Children Act 2004 places a duty to co-operate on public bodies in relation to organising services for children, supported by the introduction of the common assessment framework.

11 Local Authority Circular 24 (2004) Community Care Assessment Directions provides a legal framework and guidance on conducting care assessments and care planning.

12 Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc) Act 2003 confirms the right of carers to have their needs assessed as part of the assessment of needs of a person who may require a community care service to achieve safe discharge from hospital.

13 Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 extends carers' rights to assessment in circumstances where a service user refuses assessment or services and empowers local authorities to provide services to carers.

14 Education Act 1996 states that schools and the local authority have a responsibility to identify, assess and make provision for a child's special educational needs based on a shared perspective.

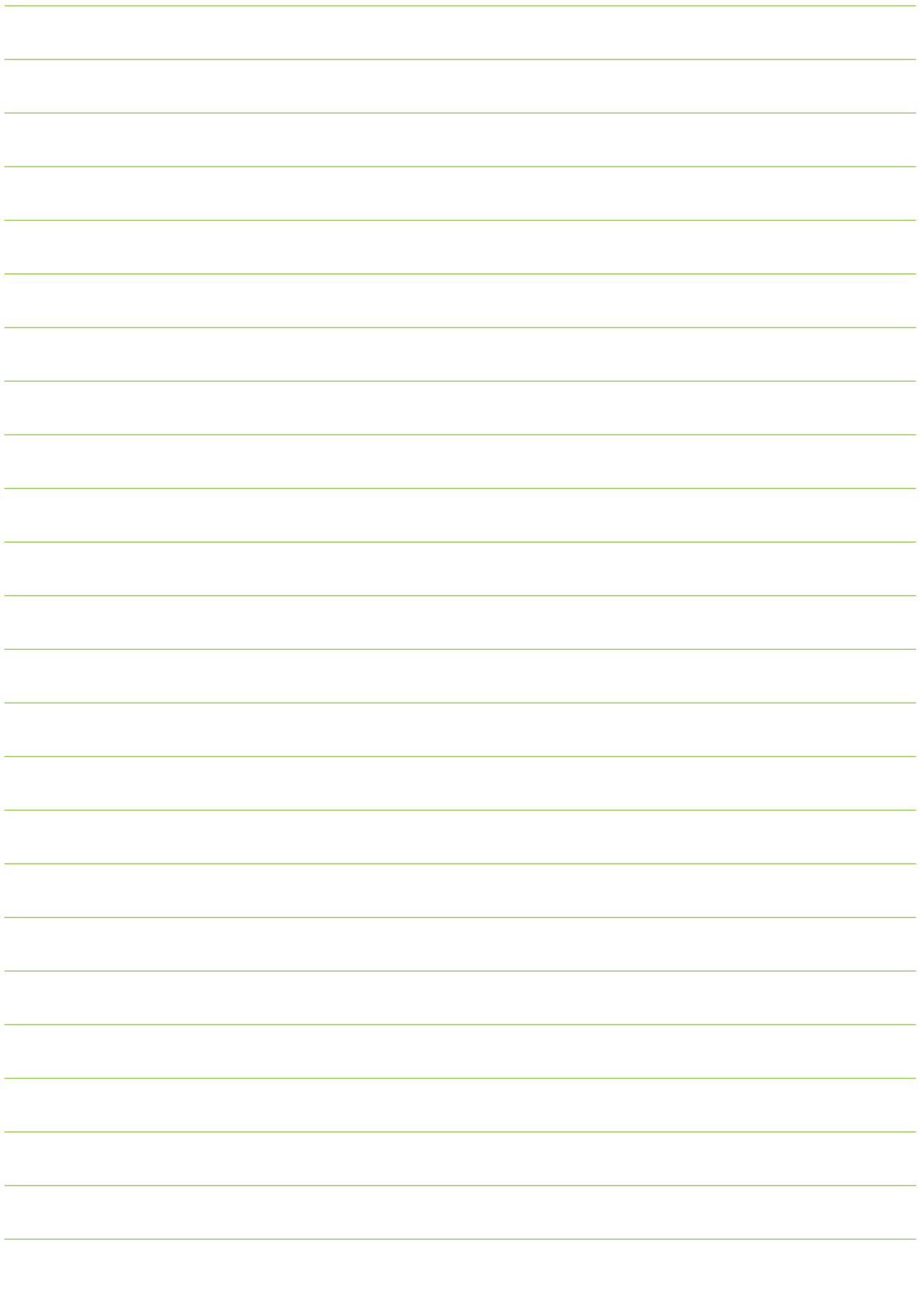
15 Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 requires a local authority, as part of its assessment of a service user, to assess the needs of a carer who is providing or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis.

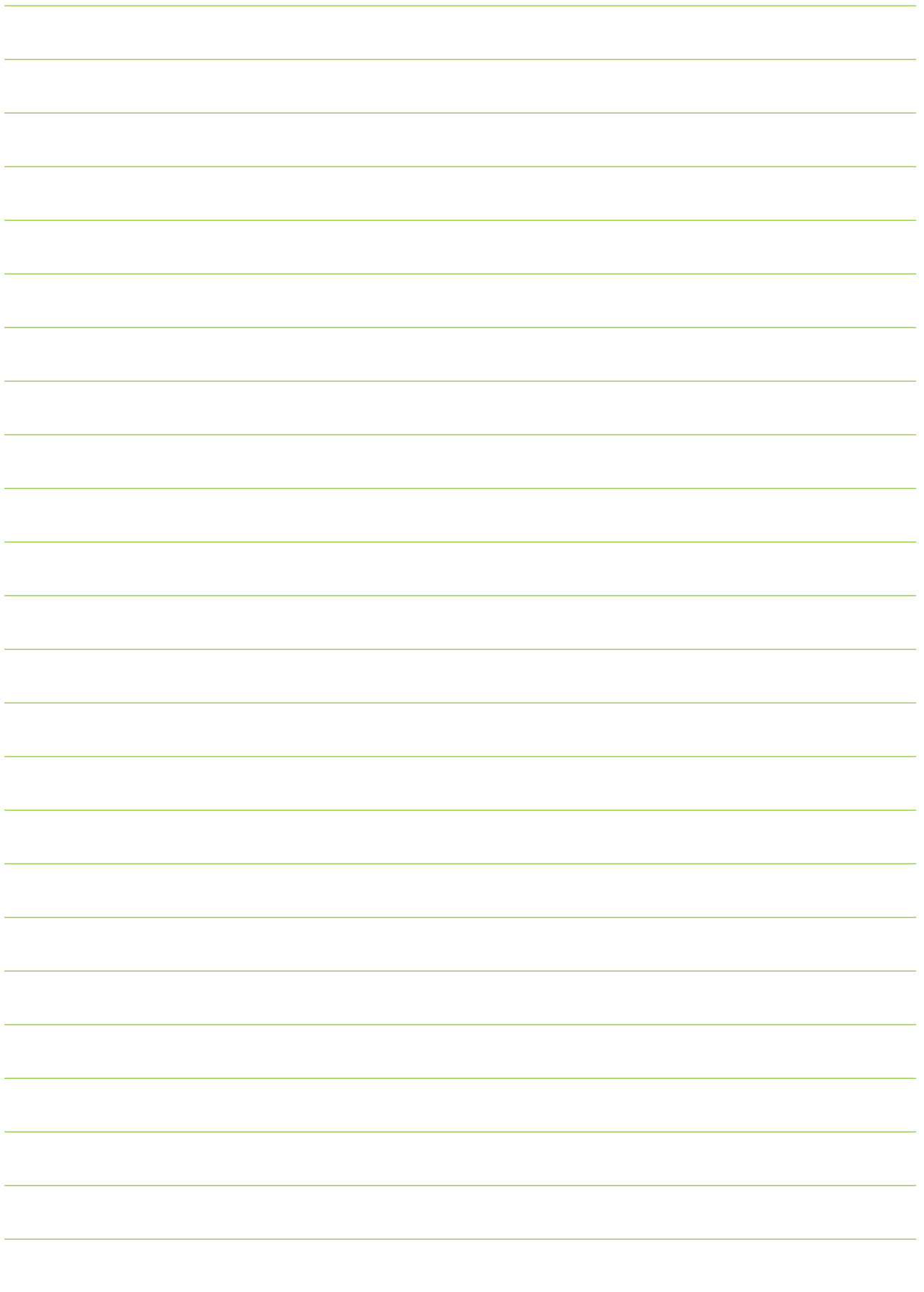
16 NHS and Community Care Act 1990 requires a local authority to assess the needs of a person aged 18 or over if it appears that that person may be in need of community care services.

17 Children Act 1989 restates the principle of the welfare of the child being paramount and stresses the importance of family support services for children in need. The definition of children in need includes disabled children and children unlikely to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of development without the provision of services or support.

18 Disabled Persons (Services Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 requires a local authority, during its assessment of a disabled person aged 18 or over, to take into account carers' abilities to continue caring.

19 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements to provide services to individuals it had assessed as needing them.





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