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Creating Inclusive Spaces for Academic Staff with Caregiving Responsibilities

Guidance and Recommendations

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About this briefing

This briefing provides an overview of findings from research led by Prof. Moreau that looks at the relationship between care and academia for different groups in Higher Education (HE) in England. The most recent publication is an SRHE report which explores experiences of senior academic staff who are caregivers, with previous research projects looking at other academics, including Early Career Researchers, and students. The research reports are listed in the references section overleaf if you would like to read about this subject in more detail. This particular document focuses on academics with caregiving responsibilities. It presents recommendations for how practitioners and policy makers, at an institutional and national level, can work towards making academia a more inclusive space for these academics.

Background

In this document caregivers include those looking after young children as well as those who care, unpaid, for a friend or family member who is ill, disabled, or elderly. Academic staff with caring responsibilities represent a growing presence in the HE sector, yet up until recently limited work had been conducted about this group, with the work that was done tending to focus solely on those with parental responsibilities. This body of work aims to change this trend by looking at different categories of caregivers across the HE sector. HE institutions are referred to as universities throughout this document for readability purposes.

The studies have been qualitative in nature and involved semi-structured interviews with people with a range of caring responsibilities across a variety of

Why is this an important issue?

- Many people in Higher Education have caring responsibilities.
- While the flexibility often found in academia can make it possible to combine care and academic work, it can encourage a culture of long hours and can make the needs of caregivers less visible.
- Where arrangements are made to accommodate the needs of caregivers it often relies on informal arrangements made at the level of a supervisor or line manager which can create an inconsistent and precarious situation.
- While academic caregivers have very diverse experiences, their dual status often negatively affects their wellbeing, career progression and retention.
- By collecting more data about this group and creating inclusive policies at the institutional level, universities can enhance the ability of employees to work without unfair barriers to their success and facilitate the retention and wellbeing of their employees.

universities, as well as people responsible for equality and diversity in universities.

The recommendations overleaf are based on participants' own views and experiences, as well as analysis of institutional policies, and subsequent discussions with a number of university HR and equality and diversity teams.

Contact the research team

We would love to hear feedback on this briefing and invite discussions with policy makers and practitioners in universities and organisations that work with Higher Education who are using the recommendations or who are interested in doing so.

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This Briefing Paper was developed by Hazel Price, Research Facilitator, Anglia Ruskin University, in consultation with HE stakeholders.

Recommendations for inclusive policies for caregivers

National HE bodies and universities can better understand the needs of caregivers by collecting intersectional data about academics who are caregivers that incorporates demographic factors (e.g. position, gender and ethnicity).

For national bodies:

- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) should consider collecting national statistics on academic caregivers following UCU's 2018 survey of carers, Hidden in Plain Sight.
- Research funders should encourage the development of research about caregivers, particularly of research about those with caring responsibilities other than/as well as parenting.

For universities:

- Universities that do not already do so should establish a data collection system enabling them to collect reliable, comprehensive and regularly updated information on academic and other staff's caring status.

There is a lack of awareness among staff regarding information about caregivers and relevant policies so it is crucial for this information to be accessible.

For national bodies:

- A website should be developed by a national working group, and hosted by a key stakeholder, providing key information for policymakers and individual caregivers.
- The establishment of a national network of university Care Strategy Coordinators (see below) should also be considered to develop and share "good practice".

For universities:

- Universities should dedicate a specific webpage to caregivers and inform all staff about it, particularly caregivers and those in a line management role.
- Universities should develop a Carers Network for staff and students to share experiences and access information.

Universities can better support caregivers through the mainstreaming of care in policies and practices; and

the development of 'flexible' policies which acknowledge the diversity, intersectionality and fluidity of care.

For universities:

- Universities should be encouraged to develop a comprehensive Care Strategy, with objectives and action points, to be coordinated centrally by a member of staff with oversight of these activities and developed in consultation with staff and student unions.
- Universities should review the specific provision in place on a regular basis and consult with staff and professional organisations to assess whether it meets their needs.
- Institutions should provide flexible working policies for caregivers to acknowledge the diversity of their needs and circumstances, including facilitating switching between full-time and part-time, taking paid and unpaid leave, and managing expectations of working outside core hours.
- Specific attention should be given to those caring for ill, disabled, or elderly friends or family members, as well as to single parents, BAME groups and individuals in same-sex partnerships.
- Academic events should consider the needs of caregivers, for example avoiding running seminars in the evening or providing a care bursary for those attending these events.

References:

This policy briefing draws on the following reports:

M.P. Moreau & M. Robertson. 'Care-free at the top'? Exploring the experiences of senior academic staff who are caregivers. SRHE May 2019.

M.P. Moreau & M. Robertson. Carers and careers: Career development and access to leadership positions among academic staff with caring responsibilities. LFHE September 2017.

M.P. Moreau. Towards the family friendly university? Research evidence on student parents and implications for higher education policies. LFHE July 2014.

A short film was produced exploring similar issues:

M.P. Moreau & T. Bernard. Carers and Careers in Academia: What Works? LFHE November 2018