

# Supporting Carers at UNSW Sydney: Findings from the Career Coaching for Carers (3C) Initiative

## About this project

This research and peer support project was initiated by Associate Professor Lizzie Muller for the Women's Wellbeing Academy (Division of EDI, UNSW). 3C was supported by a donation by Emeritus Professor Richard Henry AM FRSN, and the late Dr Rachel Oberon.

Research and the evaluation of the 3C project was conducted by Dr Catherine Thomson and Dr Trish Hill from the Social Policy Research Centre with funding from UNSW's Athena Swan Program Office.

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The Evaluation of the 3C project was conducted under UNSW Human Research Ethics approval (no. HC220375). Data collection took place between September to December 2022.

This report can be cited using: Muller, L. Thomson, C. Hill, T. and Kusuma, A., 2023, *Supporting Carers at UNSW Sydney, Findings from Career Coaching for Carers (3C) initiative*, Women's Wellbeing Academy, UNSW, Sydney.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background to 3C

Career Coaching for Carers (3C) was UNSW's first initiative to champion staff with carer responsibilities beyond parental care. It was developed in 2021 as a targeted response to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the career progression of cis and trans women academics with carer responsibilities.

3C used the definition adopted by Carers NSW, the peak state body providing support and advocacy for carers: "A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail due to age."<sup>1</sup>

3C aimed to deliver immediate support to academic women carers at UNSW through career coaching (see Appendix 1). The associated research aimed to evaluate the impact of 3C, and to discover more about carers' experiences at UNSW and the kind of support required, through surveys, focus groups and interviews (see Appendix 2).

This report presents the findings of this research.

### Partnerships across UNSW

3C engaged partners across the university. It was initiated by the Women's Wellbeing Academy, with additional support provided by UNSW's Athena Swan Program Office.<sup>2</sup>

It leveraged UNSW research capacity through The Social Policy Research Centre in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture to conduct the associated research. Colleagues in Human Resources and the Division of Equity Diversity and Inclusion supported the design and delivery of the program. An advisory group brought together professional and academic colleagues with both research expertise and lived experience of caring from different faculties and divisions. This coalition of stakeholders ensures insights generated through the program reflect knowledge, experiences and strategic objectives held across the university.

## Gender, care, and COVID-19

People of all genders do care work; however, most carers are women.<sup>3</sup> 3C targeted academic women because existing gender inequality in academic careers intersects with the impact of care work to disadvantage women. This disadvantage was exacerbated by the acute gendered impact of COVID-19. The pandemic increased the multi-generational care-load for many working Australians, as support and medical services were closed or difficult to access. Carers and those they cared for experienced increased social isolation, anxiety, and distress.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence that the pandemic intensified gendered inequality in academic career advancement.<sup>5</sup> Gaps in publishing records and grant capture in 2020-2022 will continue to disadvantage researchers, impacting their ability to achieve their potential over the next five years.<sup>6</sup> Due to funding objectives 3C focussed on academic staff, further work addressing the needs of professional staff is required.

### Employed carers: The UNSW challenge and the national context

UNSW currently has little data about carers within its workforce and provides minimal specific support for carers (as distinct from parents and guardians) through its policies (Appendix 3). This gap in institutional provision is set against a backdrop of increasing national attention to the unpaid labour of employed carers. Care work across the Australian workforce is set to increase in coming years, as the ratio of working age Australians to people aged over 65 years decreases, placing pressure on health, disability, and social care systems.<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> Significant changes are occurring in the Australian policy landscape at all levels of government concerning the relationship between care and paid employment.<sup>9</sup> A recent report by the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care 2023 called for a new right to care, alongside the right to work.<sup>10</sup> Momentum is growing at a state, national and international level towards valuing employed carers, and ensuring equity and support in their workplaces. Positive changes have already begun at UNSW, including the Flexible Work Policy, the re-launch of the Vice-Chancellor's Childcare Support Fund as the UNSW Carers' Support Fund, and the increase of carer's leave in the 2023 Enterprise Agreement. **Now is the time for UNSW to take further action in recognising and supporting carers within its workforce.**

### Research overview

This report provides the first insight into carers' experiences at UNSW. The knowledge presented is based on the 3C initiative that offered support to a select cohort of carers. It provides small-scale qualitative data founded on practical engagement. The findings are based on evidence from literature, feedback from coaching sessions, and qualitative research with participants (see Appendix 2 for detailed methodology).

3C participants included 29 UNSW academic staff across 6 faculties and all academic levels, who self-identified as needing support with their careers. This group offers a rich picture of the challenges that staff face, and their desire to develop their careers and contribute to UNSW.

Further research is needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the wider cohort of UNSW's carers, including professional staff, and all genders. Further research is also required to know more about UNSW students who are carers. Such future research must address the fact that caring responsibilities can be transitory, and their impacts can continue after the period of care.<sup>11</sup>

## **Key Messages**

The following Key Messages, based on this research, present a pathway to positively impact the careers and wellbeing of carers employed at UNSW:

- UNSW employs an engaged, generous, ambitious community of carers who want to effect change, contribute to, and be valued by UNSW.
- The findings of this report support clear recommendations that will impact carers' day-to-day experiences and capacity.
- These recommendations align with the Carers NSW Carers + Employers program<sup>12</sup> that defines standards for supporting staff with caring responsibilities.
- Becoming a carer-inclusive workplace will: unlock potential in UNSW's workforce; benefit all staff as anyone can become a carer at any time; future-proof UNSW as the caring responsibilities of Australian employees grows and the legislative landscape shifts.

## **THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 01 UNSW Commitment
- 02 Carer Engagement
- 03 Policy and Practice

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the data: UNSW Commitment, Carer Engagement, and Policy and Practice. These themes structure 12 recommendations. The body of the report presents analysis of the data providing the evidence and context for each recommendation. Implementing all recommendations marked with a star will allow UNSW to achieve NSW Carers + Employers Level 1 accreditation.

### **01 UNSW Commitment**

A positive organisational culture that explicitly values carers' skills and societal contributions is the foundation of a carer-inclusive workplace. UNSW's commitment to carers should be recognised through accreditation with NSW Carers + Employers. Carer recognition requires a clear organisational definition of the term carer that recognises diverse care situations.

- 1.1 Establish UNSW's organisational commitment to recognise and support carers through a UNSW Carers Support Statement.\*
- 1.2 Commit to developing a carer-inclusive workplace, informed by national and international standards, recognised through NSW Carers + Employers accreditation at Level 1: Activate (by 2025), Level 2: Commit (by 2027), and Level 3: Excel (by 2029).
- 1.3 Develop an organisational definition of carer that aligns with the Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth) and clearly distinguishes between parental and carer responsibilities.\*
- 1.4 Establish a UNSW online carers information hub that details UNSW's support for carers.\*

### **02 Carer Engagement**

UNSW needs to know more about its carers to represent and engage them properly. Accurate data gathering is fundamental for evidence-based decision making and accountability. Carers must be directly involved in decision making to account for the diversity of carers' experiences, needs and

views. This theme recommends mechanisms for advocacy, engagement, and peer support across levels of university governance.

2.1 Develop regular, robust and sensitive data gathering about UNSW carers and their experiences, including the impact of UNSW measures to support carers.

2.2 Ensure carers are represented on University EDI Staff Consultative Group.\*

2.3 Appoint Carer Advocates within each faculty to support carers in work planning, carer's leave management, and career progression.\*

2.4 Establish and support a carer network with associated events and communications to raise carer visibility and build community.\*

### **03 Policy and Practice**

Organisational commitment and carer engagement must be underpinned by policies that provide equitable provision for carers at UNSW. Carer policy connects to many policy areas at UNSW, including promotion and flexible work, which are currently under review through the policy transformation project. The research identified the impact on carers of managers' and colleagues' varying levels of knowledge, empathy, and support: Training is needed to ensure practice matches policy.

3.1 Develop appropriate policy and provision for carers as part of the UNSW policy transformation project.\*

3.2 Review career planning processes, and pathways from casual to permanent employment to recognise the impact of caring on career progression.

3.3 Ensure university performance metrics and promotion processes positively acknowledge carer responsibilities and adjust for the impact of part-time status and carer's leave.

3.4 Develop training for Heads of Schools and other line managers to ensure that carer policy and all relevant policies are consistently applied and communicated to support carer-inclusive work practices and job design.\*

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In the following pages evidence is presented for each recommendation, drawn from several sources including:

1. Literature review that informed the design of the 3C program. This includes current research into working carers and specifically carer experiences in academia, including the gendered aspects. It also includes review of existing provisions for carers at UNSW (see Appendix 3).
2. A review of existing state, national and international policy frameworks for working carers.
3. Feedback and reflections from the facilitator of the 3C career coaching workshops.
4. Survey, focus group and interview data from the 3C participants.

The combined sources of evidence from this small-scale project, based on a purposive sample, create a multifaceted analysis that weaves together knowledge about national and international trends, with specific feedback from UNSW staff (See Appendix 2 for full methodology). Together these sources offer insight into the experiences and needs of carers at UNSW against a national and international backdrop of theory, practice, and policy. The result is a clear identification of gaps in provision in

UNSW policies, procedures and support when assessed against international good practice and achievable solutions for addressing those gaps.

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## 01 UNSW COMMITMENT

This theme addresses UNSW's organisational culture and its commitment to supporting carers. Caring is a universal human experience and an essential part of life'.<sup>13</sup> Research shows that support provided by unpaid carers is fundamental to the functioning of society, yet the valuable social and economic contribution of carers is often unrecognised.<sup>14</sup> Raising awareness of the value of care work within an organisation is the first step to creating a carer-inclusive workplace.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.1 Establish UNSW's organisational commitment to recognise and support carers through a UNSW Carers Support Statement\***

Currently there is little carer visibility or recognition within UNSW. Most carers who responded to the 3C survey indicated that they were unaware of other people at UNSW with caring responsibilities. Most also said they did not discuss their caring responsibilities in the workplace. The main reasons given for this in the survey were that: it would not change anything or be helpful; they did not think they should bring their personal life to the workplace; that discussing caring could cause problems for them in the workplace or negatively affect promotions or other aspects of their career. Respondents called for greater recognition of carers at UNSW as a mainstay of support that would help them balance work and care responsibilities.

**Carer recognition requires 'flipping the script' from a deficit model where care is seen as a problem, to a strengths-based approach.** Caring should be valued both for its societal contribution, and as a source of valuable skills that enrich primary work roles and benefit the employer. A carer in the focus group noted:

*Caring has its merits. I can have better communication with students because I have empathy. I'm patient. I'm good at making decisions. I can deal with coordination stuff. So look at our advantages, that's what I think is most important to change that mindset.<sup>16</sup>*

UNSW can establish its organisational commitment to positively recognise and support carers through a **Carers Support Statement**. Using strengths-based language, the statement would be the first step to establishing an organisational culture in which carers are valued and feel they can openly discuss their care work.

### **1.2 Commit to developing a carer inclusive workplace, informed by national and international standards, recognised through NSW Carers + Employers accreditation at Level 1: Activate (by 2025), Level 2: Commit (by 2027), and Level 3: Excel (by 2029)**

UNSW's organisational commitment to carers is set against growing international research and policy development on the value and needs of employed carers. There is increasing recognition that supporting carers in the workplace makes good business sense, with benefits such as improving staff retention and reducing recruitment and training costs, improving staff morale, and increasing productivity.<sup>17</sup> In response to global demographic changes in the field of ageing, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has developed carer-inclusive standards and guidelines for organisations to support employed carers.<sup>18</sup> In Australia Carer Recognition legislation at the national<sup>19</sup> and state<sup>20</sup> levels contain guidelines to assist agencies to meet their responsibilities to employed carers. Employed carers are also offered protection against discrimination under the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act and Disability Discrimination Act.<sup>21 22</sup> The National Employment Standards (NES) within the Fair Work Act (2009), contains provisions for access to carer's leave (paid and unpaid) and the right to request flexible working arrangements. The recent report by the Australian Senate Select Committee on Work and Care 2023 has introduced a more ambitious agenda. This includes recommendations to increase carers' access to leave, flexible work

arrangements and secure employment to ensure they do not experience lifetime impacts on pay and income in retirement due to their caring responsibilities.<sup>23</sup>

At a state level Carers NSW Carers + Employers program has defined good practice standards for employed carers. An organisation that meets these standards can become an Accredited Carer Employer. The accreditation process comprises three levels: Activate, for organisations developing carer friendly workplaces; Commit, which provides clear actions and pathways to improve carer conditions; and Excel, for organisations that aim to be recognised as leaders. Recommendations in this report have been made with NSW Carers + Employers standards and accreditation levels in mind. Reaching level one, Activate, is achievable for UNSW in the short term and the higher levels are attainable within 5 years or sooner. Actions required have been mapped against the recommendations in this report, and those required for level one have been marked with a star. Becoming an accredited Carer Employer contributes to staff wellbeing, attracting and retaining talent, and wider corporate social responsibility. It is valuable as organisations gain formal recognition of their commitment and become an employer of choice for carers.<sup>24</sup>

### **1.3 Develop an organisational definition of carer that aligns with the Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth) and clearly distinguishes between parental and carer responsibilities.\***

Carer recognition in an organisation requires a definition that accurately reflects who carers are, the diversity of care situations and experiences, and what care work entails. UNSW currently has no organisational definition for the term carer. For the purposes of accessing carer's leave, eligible caring is described in the 2023 UNSW Enterprise Agreement in terms of a family, household or legal relationship and covers injury, illness, or emergency.<sup>25</sup> To achieve accreditation through NSW Carers + Employers UNSW must develop a definition that aligns with that established in the Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth), which is not dependent on the relationship, but the support provided, as follows:

"For the purpose of the Act, carers are people who provide personal care, support and assistance to another individual in need of support due to disability, medical condition, including terminal or chronic illness, mental illness or is frail and aged."<sup>26</sup>

A carer definition must clarify that caring for a person with a chronic or mental illness, an older person or person with a disability is distinct from caring for children in general. Recent research by UTS<sup>27</sup> and the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care<sup>28</sup> highlights the need for this distinction, as extra-parental care requires specific forms of support. This necessary distinction is made within a context of respect for the societal contribution of parents and guardians, an acknowledgement of the impact caring for children has on careers, and the fact that support for employed parents and guardians has been achieved through years of advocacy.

An appropriate definition of the term carer is a vital foundation for all subsequent measures, including data gathering about carers, consultation, and policy development. It is also an important step in building organisational literacy about care work. Carers in the focus group and interviews, and survey participants noted that other staff and managers did not understand what caring entailed, such as its unpredictable nature, meaning that support cannot always be planned or organised in advance as compared to parental care which usually follows a more defined trajectory.

### **1.4 Establish a UNSW online carers information hub that details UNSW's support for carers.\***

Carer recognition also requires clarity and transparency about the support available within an organisation. As part of the 3C initiative staff from UNSW Human Resources compiled a presentation about the UNSW policies and support relevant to carers and delivered a recorded one-hour interactive information session (Appendix 3). Two key insights from this process were that 1) there was no provision available specifically for carers beyond carer's leave, and most relevant initiatives using the term carer were focused on parental care; 2) many participants did not know which UNSW policies may impact caring, or how to access information related to their status as carers. Participants in the focus group commented that they would benefit from "a central place that you could reach out to" to find out about carers support. A carer commented:

*There are funding sources that you can apply for, and a lot of information that you wouldn't know unless you were linked in, I'm sure there are lots of people out there that don't access support.*

Providing a central hub of information about UNSW and external carer support aligns with NSW Carers + Employers accreditation standards which require that “The organisation uses workplace communications to raise awareness and contribute to creating a culture of support for carers”.

## 02 REPRESENTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This theme deals with how carers are represented within the organisation and included in decision making processes. Carers must be directly involved in decision making to account for the diversity of their experiences, needs and views. This theme recommends mechanisms for advocacy, engagement, and peer support across levels of university governance.

### **2.1 Develop regular, robust and sensitive data gathering about UNSW carers and their experiences, including the impact of UNSW measures to support carers.**

Having a clear picture of carers employed by UNSW is fundamental for proper representation, evidence-based decision making and accountability. Currently, no data is collected specifically on employees with caring responsibilities, making it impossible to accurately estimate their numbers or employment status<sup>29</sup>. However, based on national statistics it is likely that there are considerable numbers of carers working at UNSW.<sup>30</sup>

Discussions with HR during the 3C project revealed some of the challenges that surround effective data gathering about carers that are also highlighted in existing research. Disclosure of carer status must be voluntary and confidential. Caring situations can be temporary, and subject to change. Carers themselves often do not recognise that they are providing significant amounts of support beyond what is usually provided in other households and may not think of themselves as carers. Carers may also be reluctant to disclose their caring responsibilities if they perceive disclosure will have no, or even negative impact on their work (see recommendation 1.1). Establishing a positive, carer-inclusive organisational culture, and raising literacy around care work through recommendations 1.1-1.4 will help address some of these issues.

To develop appropriate support for carers at UNSW robust information about them is needed.<sup>31</sup> This requires university wide mechanisms for gathering data on carers that are sensitive to the nature of care work. Data gathering must be based upon an appropriate definition of carers as described in recommendation 1.3. Due to the narrow definition of care required to access carer's leave, data about carers at UNSW cannot be solely based on who is accessing leave.

### **2.2 Ensure carers are represented on University EDI Staff Consultative Group.**

Directly involving employed carers in the development of policy and practice was seen as vital by carers in the focus group, interviews and surveys to address challenges they face. Carers suggested that employees with lived experience of caring should be included in decision making at different levels within UNSW to ensure policies are relevant and address employed carers' diverse needs. As one carer commented:

*We women don't want to be spoken for or represented by other staff without lived experience of the issue. We want to be at the tables of power.*

The workshops, focus groups and interviews highlighted the hidden resilience, insights and capacity of the women involved, but also that many struggled with insecure and part-time work due to their caregiving and the lack of social support in and beyond university. Insecure and part-time work often precludes carers from participating in executive decision making and thus the means to effect change. An important step would be to commit to ensuring that carers are always represented on the University EDI Staff Consultative Group, and that the group includes part-time and casual workers

who are remunerated for their involvement. Other UNSW initiatives such as a greater commitment to shared leadership would also make it more possible for carers to lead change.<sup>32</sup>

### **2.3 Appoint Carer Advocates within each faculty to support carers in work planning, carer's leave management, and career progression.**

A recurring theme across the research was the gap between the day-to-day experience of care responsibilities and the culture and requirements of the workplace. As one carer commented:

*I see a desire in academia to embrace people like me and my demographic. But I am frequently on the edge of giving up work because the care cultures I'm in everyday and the cultures of academia are worlds apart.*

Carers throughout the 3C project shared accounts of difficult work situations due to a lack of understanding and empathy for carer experience. Training for managers as described in recommendation 3.4 is part of the solution to address this issue. However, it is also important to ensure that people with lived experience of caring are more involved with carer support at school and faculty levels.

Carers called for advocates within faculties to positively mediate between carers and organisational processes. Caring situations are often emotional, and acute issues can be stressful and require full attention. Carers do not have the capacity to be both carers and advocates for caring at the same time. It is important to remove the burden from carers to educate managers about the nature of care work, and the need to repeatedly explain their caring situation. Carer Advocates with lived experience of caring, appointed from within the existing staff of each faculty, would support carers practically to overcome some of the barriers they face in management of work-life balance and career progression, including work-planning meetings, carer's leave management, MyCareer Conversations and promotion processes. The role should be recognised with an appropriate workload allocation and training. Carer Advocates would champion the contribution of carers within faculties and ensure they are supported to apply for promotion and leadership opportunities.

### **2.4 Establish and support a carer network with associated events and communications to raise carer visibility and build community.\***

A positive outcome of 3C for the participants was the impact of connecting with other carers (see Appendix 1). As one carer commented:

*The most valuable thing that I got out of it was a couple of connections. Then we connected afterwards and kind of built our own little community of practice.*

Knowing that there are others with similar experiences within the workplace helps to dispel stigma and build confidence amongst carers to discuss their care work and the challenges they face. Peer-to-peer support is also effective in generating examples of good practice that other carers can adopt, creating a shared body of knowledge.

Carers suggested the "funded facilitation of a network" to formalise and grow the sense of community that began to develop through the 3C project. The network would provide the kind of community and knowledge building events that were supported through 3C. As one carer commented:

*People will be drawn to this because it is a community where we are suffering a bit at times, and then there are really good times. Being able to share that.*

## **03 POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Carer recognition, engagement and advocacy must be backed up with concrete policy provision. Recommendations in this theme aim to put organisational commitment into action. This includes



addressing specific areas of concern raised by carers, such as university metrics, career planning, promotion, and pathways from casual to permanent employment. Carers make unique contributions to society and the university. But they require specific kinds of support and adjustments to ensure they can thrive in paid employment. Strengths-based policies must be carried through in practice. This theme also addresses the wide variation in levels of literacy and empathy for carers amongst Heads of School and other managers.

### **3.1 Ensure that appropriate policy and provision for carers is included in the policy transformation project.\***

UNSW is currently undertaking a major institutional policy review process. It is vital that the needs of carers (based on the appropriate definition established in recommendation 1.3) are explicitly addressed. This is a significant opportunity to establish a strong foundation for UNSW as a carer-inclusive workplace into the future. UNSW carer policy should be informed by the National Employment Standards, principles contained in the Carer Recognition Acts, and the relevant obligations under federal and state anti-discrimination laws. It should also proactively address the more ambitious agenda established in the recommendations by the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care 2023. The committee's report emphasises the importance of balancing care work with employment as a vital part of Australia's economic and social wellbeing in the coming decades. It also establishes the value of creating carer-inclusive work practices for all employees, because anyone can become a carer at anytime. Evidence of "written policies and procedures that specify organisational support for carers" is required for accreditation by NSW Carers + Employers. Policy provision for carers will touch on numerous policy areas including promotion, flexible work, and career development pathways for casual workers.

### **3.2 Review career planning processes, and pathways from casual to permanent employment to recognise the impact of caring on career progression.\***

Employed carers often face multiple challenges and although they want, or need to remain in paid work, many reduce work hours, forego promotions, or leave work or secure employment due to the difficulties of juggling caring and paid work responsibilities.<sup>33 34</sup> Carers also take on casual positions because it gives them more flexibility to meet their carer responsibilities.<sup>35</sup> A carer in the survey commented:

*Carers often take casual positions by necessity, or it just happens that way. Why is there no career development/mentoring for casuals who, let's face it, are the workhorses of any uni?*

Another carer commented:

*That's why I chose to take a research assistant role because this gives me more flexibility. I know I'm smart and I could compete, but I don't have the life situation to be able to compete when it comes to publish or perish.*

Career planning processes within UNSW, such as MyCareer conversations and pathways to secure employment for casuals, must positively address the connection between carer responsibilities and part-time and casual work. Research evidence shows that access to carer-inclusive workplace practices such as flexible working arrangements and access to carer's leave supports employed carers to remain in work.<sup>36 37</sup>

Moreover, career planning processes need to positively address the fact that carers may have non-typical career paths that do not conform to standard templates, as one carer commented:

*Acknowledge that carers experience work and life differently, and implement flexibility and processes to support employees, rather than reminding them of the expectations for publications, teaching workload and service.*

Care work may limit how much paid work a person can do, but it is a valuable and necessary contribution to society, and requires and develops significant skills and capacities. The professional output of a carer may be impacted by care work, but their ability, expertise and contribution as a worker may be enhanced. It is vital to develop and apply mechanisms for managing workload and career advancement that properly acknowledge this.

### **3.3 Ensure university performance metrics and promotion processes positively acknowledge carer responsibilities and adjust for the impact of part-time status and carer's leave.**

A clear message from carers in the research was that existing performance metrics penalise carers for not achieving outputs at the rates of other workers. On the other hand, they do not recognise the skills and expertise that caring gives people. Carers noted that one of the challenges they faced was attempting to achieve fixed academic standards while providing care:

*There's a certain standard that you have to reach in academia, and they expect you to be performing at this level. And when you are taking your people to hospital the day before or you're constantly worried about them, I don't think we can perform at that level like everyone else, it's cognitive overload.*

UNSW's research performance metrics system (BORIS) does not account for part-time status, nor career breaks, which are more likely to be taken by carers. Research findings suggest that this impacts workers' confidence and their willingness to apply for promotion.<sup>38</sup> In the focus group and interviews carers discussed the difficulties meeting the outcomes-focused requirements for promotion while working and providing care, particularly if they worked part-time. A carer commented:

*The rigidity of academic progression, it's all about what you've done. It's not about who you are or what you can do. It's only on track record.*

Carers acknowledged that they were increasingly encouraged to reflect their achievements relative to opportunity when applying for grants or promotions (ROPE). However, some felt that this was not always supported in practice. Carers from the focus group, interviews and survey wanted the skills they developed through caring to be captured in performance metrics, evaluation and promotion processes so that their contributions were positively recognised. As a carer commented:

*Emotional intelligence, what we might call soft skills are transferable skills, 21st century skills. They're hard to measure but doesn't mean that we shouldn't be taking them into account.*

The skills and capacities learnt and demonstrated through caring should be explicitly discussed and acknowledged in promotion guidelines and materials. In addition, the contribution of care work should be acknowledged as a positive part of a carer's overall social impact.

### **3.4 Develop training for Heads of Schools and other line managers to ensure that carer policy and all relevant policies are consistently applied and communicated to support carer friendly work practices and job design.\***

Some carers felt 'lucky' to have sympathetic and supportive supervisors. A carer who worked part-time commented:

*My supervisor is the world's nicest human. So I'm really lucky in that. She makes me feel valuable without making me feel like I need to reach a certain level.*

However, carers experienced different levels of support from Heads of School and managers. Flexible working arrangements, access to carer's leave and carer-inclusive work practices were not consistently applied. Training for Heads of Schools and other line managers is required to establish procedural support for carers, ensure practice matches policy and ensure consistency in working conditions. Staff engaged in promotion panels also require training in how to adopt a carer-positive, strengths-based approach to assessing performance, contribution, and potential. As one carer commented:

*I think there does need to be training around that for supervisors. It should be something that they're aware of. They should look at some case examples to get an idea of the impact.*

Participants in the research described difficult conversations with managers and colleagues and the need for greater awareness of how to address care work positively. One carer commented:

*That level of training needs to happen because I bring up my caregiving, but all people do is look horrified, and they don't know what to say. And that's really deflating.*

How carer experiences are heard and discussed is important. Whilst caring may be challenging, it is not necessarily negative, nor does it necessarily require sympathy. Carer experiences are a valuable and vital part of social life and need to be received and treated with respect. "Well done" may be a more appropriate response than "poor you":

Some of the intensity of dealing with managers could be mitigated through the creation of Carer Advocates (Recommendation 2.3). However, training is required across the workforce to ensure UNSW is a safe and welcoming place for carers. Ideally such training would involve carers in design, and even in delivery, and should prioritise carers' stories. Demonstrating a commitment to education and training to develop workforce capability to support carers is a requirement of the NSW Carers + Employers accreditation process.

## **Conclusion**

UNSW has an opportunity to significantly impact the careers of the carers it employs. This would positively affect the whole organisation, as one participant commented:

*Everybody should have some form of caring in their life, even if it's for their elderly neighbour. We should be encouraging UNSW employees to be caring humans and to be carers in their families and in their communities.*

The experiences and challenges of carers at UNSW are multifaceted. It is important that UNSW consider all these issues together to develop a coherent and holistic approach to carer career pathways. This includes an organisational commitment to valuing carers, including carers in decision making and establishing concrete support for carers through policies and practices. All of this must take place within an overall recognition that care work is a positive contribution to society. **To achieve this, care must be part of the conversation for UNSW leadership.**

## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Emeritus Professor Richard Henry AM FRSN, and the late Dr Rachel Oberon for their visionary support of this project.

Many thanks to:

- the carers who took part in 3C for their feedback and contributions.
- Georgia-Rae Cobon and Amy Kusuma for their work in managing the 3C project.
- Career coaching workshop facilitator Charity Becker.
- Creative workshop facilitator, artist Michele Elliot.

Thanks to the 3C advisory group, which included:

- Associate Professor Hugh Bainbridge, School of Management and Governance, UNSW Business School
- Reese Ghezzi, Athena Swan Program Manager, Division of EDI
- Associate Professor Mehera San Roque, Women's Wellbeing Academy
- Michelle Steel, Director, Human Resources
- Caroline Thierry, HR Business Partner, UNSW Science
- Associate Professor Susana Vaz Nery, UNSW Gender Champion

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: What 3C delivered

Appendix 2: Research methodology

Appendix 3: Existing UNSW policy and provision for carers

To view the appendices in full, please visit: <https://www.edi.unsw.edu.au/get-involved/womens-wellbeing-academy/career-coaching-carers>