



## **LEARNING AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Introduction**

The importance of learning and training to carers was recognised by the government as long ago as 1999 when the first National Strategy for Carers was produced:

"Training can empower carers - by giving them new confidence, allowing them to make new contacts and equipping them with skills which will enrich their lives and, perhaps, help them with plans to return to work when their caring responsibilities end."

Caring About Carers: A National Strategy for Carers, DoH, 1999:62)

Many carers find that undertaking some form of learning or training provides them with an ideal opportunity to update their skills or learn new ones that will help them to get a job. For a lot of people, unsure if they are ready to make the step back into work, it can also be a great confidence booster. Of course, there are a lot of other reasons why carers may want to learn. Some of these are given later on in this section, followed by a brief discussion of learning and training options. There is also a list of organisations and places where you can go for further information and advice.

To begin with, though, it's worth taking a look at some of the problems which carers have said make it difficult for them to access learning and the kind of support they need to overcome these.

### **Barriers to learning and support that can help**

#### **Lack of time**

The majority of carers have only a limited amount of spare time and are wary of committing themselves to a course which they may not be able to attend regularly or even complete. Some carers are also concerned about the length of time it could take them to gain the qualifications they need for the type of job that they want. Whilst these are legitimate concerns they should not be used as an excuse: try to think about the outcomes and benefits of pursuing a course of study rather than concentrating on the negative aspects.

Knowing what kind of commitment is expected may give you an idea of the suitability of a particular course. It also helps if college and adult education staff,

are aware of your situation and can make provision for this. If you are interested in a specific course, explain your circumstances and find out what the implications might be if you have to drop out at any stage, or fail to meet the minimum attendance requirements. It may be possible to restart the next term, or the following year, and be credited with what you have already covered.

### **Lack of money to pay course fees**

The cost of learning and training can be prohibitive for many carers. Even courses that are provided free of charge (for example to people in receipt of certain benefits) may turn out to be quite expensive when the cost of books, transport, respite care and registration and examination fees, is taken into account. It is therefore a good idea to look into the type of financial help that may be available at the same time as enquiring about courses.

Adults aged 19 or over, attending college for a minimum of 12 hours a week and studying for a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 2 or 3 may be eligible for the Adult Learning Grant (ALG). This is a weekly allowance, paid by the government, which is intended to help with the cost of returning to education. There is a similar payment, called Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), for young people aged 16, 17 or 18 who wish to continue their studies in order to acquire more qualifications or vocational skills.

To find out more about ALG, EMA and the other help which is sometimes available (for example with childcare and travel costs) contact the Learner Support Helpline ☎ 0800 121 8989. If you are an adult aged 19 or over you may also find the Learning and Skill Council's booklet 'Financial Help for Adults in Learning or Training' useful. Order a printed copy of the booklet by calling the LSC help desk ☎ 0870 900 6800 (email: [info@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:info@lsc.gov.uk)) or download it from the Directgov website.

Some statutory bodies and carers organisations have bursaries or grants that carers can apply for to help them with attending a course of education or training. For example, if you are an adult looking after someone aged 18 or over you can apply to Wigan Council's Department of Adult Services for a 'Time for Carers' (or Time for Me') grant. The maximum amount of the grant is currently £100. Talk to your social worker or call the Carers Support Team on ☎ 01942 705983.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers also maintains an educational bursary scheme for carers who want to learn. Applications must be made through a Princess Royal Trust Carer's Centre. For details of your nearest centre contact the Princess Royal Trust ☎ 0844 800 4361 or visit the website: [www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org)

## **Lack of confidence**

If you have not done any studying for a while you may feel very worried about your ability to concentrate and 'keep up'. You may even wonder about the effect on your energy levels. Some carers can also experience feelings of disappointment if, after completing a course of work-based learning or training, they cannot find a job. Very often this will put them off doing any similar courses in the future.

Try not to be deterred. Those carers that have been prepared to take the plunge often say that studying has given them confidence and a sense of achievement as well as the desire to go on and do more. Of course it can also be a real challenge and it is important to start off at a level and pace that is right for you. A lot of useful tips, as well as encouragement, can be picked up from other carers who have returned to study.

## **Difficulties organising respite care**

Due to the difficulties in obtaining cover many carers look for a course that will fit around their caring responsibilities.

It may be worthwhile requesting a carer's assessment. Attending a course for a couple of hours a week could be seen as providing you with a much needed break and it may be possible for Adult Services to help you to arrange care cover while you are at college. Since the implementation of the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act in 2005 the wish of a carer "to undertake, education, training or any leisure activity" must be taken into account when an assessment is carried out.

## **Feelings of guilt**

A lot of carers feel guilty about taking time out for themselves, particularly if they think it will impact adversely upon the rest of the family. Although similar feelings of guilt are often associated with returning to work, some carers may feel this is justified because they are at least earning money, whereas pursuing a course of training or study could actually be a financial drain. It is important to think about the long-term benefits to you, and your family, of pursuing a course of learning or training if you experience feelings of guilt.

## **Lack of information and lack of flexible courses**

It is often difficult for carers to find out about courses that are suitable for them. They would like to see more support and encouragement to access learning opportunities and staff that not only understand the situation they are in but are also able to offer practical advice on overcoming barriers such as funding, transport and respite care. More flexible ways of learning are also needed if carers are to have the same opportunities to participate in education and training as everyone else.

## **The advantages of learning and (re)training**

Why learn? For carers there can be all sorts of reasons:

### **For pleasure and self-development**

Many carers enjoy learning for its own sake, because they find it pleasurable and stimulating. It may also give them an identity apart from being a carer and a sense of recognition and achievement.

### **To gain work related skills**

Despite the popularity of computer and IT related courses, many carers have little idea about the sort of work they would like to do, or the training and skills that might need. Some people would like more guidance regarding the kinds of opportunities that are available and the appropriateness of these to their particular situation. Others have 'open minds' and are willing to consider any type of learning or training option that could help them into work.

Unless you have, or are prepared to gain, some sort of formal qualification, you may find yourself at a disadvantage when looking for a job. The alternative is to settle for low-paid, unskilled employment where such qualifications tend to be less important. Although they may have acquired a lot of experience and skills over the years, most carers feel these are not going to be recognised by employers and that they have to be able to prove what they can do with 'paper' qualifications.

Embarking upon a course of learning or training is seen by some carers as a kind of trial run for what it might be like when they actually start work. Just like having a job, serious study requires a commitment of a certain number of hours each week. You must also be able to organise your own workload and meet deadlines laid down by the course administrators. For many people there will be the added problem of having to find alternative care.

### **To improve basic skills**

Improving basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and ICT (information and communication technology), is not only desirable in itself, it can also greatly increase your chances of getting a job.

For those who begin their caring responsibilities while still young barriers to learning can be especially difficult to overcome. Without the necessary support and understanding, young carers can sometimes fall behind in their education and may miss significant periods of time at school because of their caring responsibilities. If they fail to meet the minimum standards required in certain

core areas such as reading writing and numeracy it can have a seriously detrimental effect on their future college and work plans.

### **To work towards academic qualifications**

Having a higher level qualification, such as a degree, is necessary for certain types of job. However, there are a lot of carers who undertake academic qualifications simply for their own personal development and sense of achievement. In most cases, working towards academic qualifications can be done at a place and level to suit the individual which is something that appeals to many carers. On the other hand it may take them several years to achieve the qualifications they want, particularly if their caring responsibilities will only allow them to do a course part-time. For some carers, the time that it takes to obtain qualifications is a real concern. They may even worry about being 'too old' to get a job by the time they finally qualify.

Although embarking on a longer course of study means putting off getting a job for a while the long term rewards are often very substantial. Depending on the type of course there may also be financial assistance available in the form of a bursary, grant or other payment.

### **To develop skills relevant to caring**

Some carers choose to undertake learning or training which is linked to their caring role and builds upon the experience and skills they have acquired as a result. The prime motivation is not always getting a paid job. They may simply want recognition for existing skills or help with developing new ones. Short courses in lifting and handling, how to cope with specific care situations, learning Makaton or sign language are just a few of the options which have been popular with carers in the past.

For some carers doing a course of learning or training relevant to caring may prompt them to think about what they would like to do as a paid job and the wide range of job opportunities where their skills and experience as a carer could be put to good use. There are even carers whose main reason for undertaking training is so that they can pursue a career in social care - as a social worker or counsellor, for example.

### **To regain confidence and meet other people**

A lot of carers think that the social aspects of learning and training, especially the opportunity of meeting and mixing with a larger circle of people than they generally come into contact with, are very important. They also value the help which it can provide in regaining, or building up, their confidence.

### **To have a break from caring**

As well the opportunity to learn, doing a course of learning or training can provide carers with a break from caring and time to relax and recharge their batteries.

Some courses are specifically designed with this in mind, such as the 'Taking Care of the Carer' residential courses provided by Lancashire Adult Learning.

## **What learning options are available?**

Learning is for everyone and whatever you want to do, for whatever reason, the choice is very wide. Listed below are some of the main learning options.

### **Vocational courses**

Vocational courses are designed to help give you the skills you need to get a job or enable you to update existing skills. Most vocational courses will involve studying for a recognised, accredited qualification and the duration of courses will vary. Vocational courses take place in a variety of venues including colleges, schools and local community centres and at different times during the day and evening.

The range of vocational courses available is vast and you may find it helpful browsing a local college prospectus or website database in order to help you decide what you want to do. Details of many community based courses can be found on the Wigan Council website. To access these go to the Learning and Employment page and look for 'course finder' on the menu bar.

If you prefer to speak to someone face to face try visiting one of the borough's several 'Skills Shops'. These provide information, advice and guidance to anyone aged 18 and over, on issues relating to learning and work. A similar service, called 'Connexions', is aimed at younger people aged 13 to 19\* (\*up to 25 in the case of someone with a learning difficulty or disability).

There are a number of government training and employment schemes (Work Based learning for Young People and the various apprenticeship programmes, for example) which you may also want to consider. However these are not suitable for all carers and access to them is sometimes at the discretion of a careers adviser.

### **Basic Skills**

Basic skills courses are aimed at helping you to improve certain key skills such as reading, writing and maths.

If you are an adult aged 16+, no longer in full-time, compulsory education, you can now study for nationally recognised qualifications in: adult literacy, adult numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Called 'Skills for Life' these courses are usually free to access and take place at convenient local venues. To find out more contact Wigan and Leigh College or the 'Get On Helpline' 0800 66 0800.

For those who want to brush up on their computer skills there are also a number of 'UK Online' centres located throughout the borough. Often based in libraries and community centres these provide free or low cost access to computers and the internet together with help and advice on how to use them. For more information visit the UK Online website: [www.ukonlinecentres.com](http://www.ukonlinecentres.com) or call 0800 77 1234.

## **Learndirect**

Learndirect courses give you the opportunity to study and learn new skills in bite-sized chunks to suit your needs.

Most courses are provided online so, as long as you have access to the internet, you can learn at a time, place and pace to suit you. You can choose to study by yourself at home or at one of the learndirect Centres located in the borough (see below). Many carers appreciate this kind of flexibility as it enables them to organise the time they spend studying around their caring commitments.

There are a wide range of learndirect courses available, from beginners to advanced. These are grouped in the following main areas: Maths and English; Home and Office IT; and Business and Management. You can find out more by enquiring at your local centre, ringing the learndirect advice line 0800 101 901 or checking the website: [www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk) Help is usually available (either complete or partial) with the cost of courses. If you cannot decide what course you want to take, there are also a number of free taster courses, which may help you to make up your mind.

Learndirect Centres in the Borough of Wigan:

Abraham Guest High School  
Wigan  
WN5 8HN  
☎ 01942 776192  
Email: [aghlearndirect@btinternet.com](mailto:aghlearndirect@btinternet.com)

Alliance House  
Leigh  
WN7 1BU  
☎ 01942 267952  
Email: [Helen.lockwood@alliancelearning.com](mailto:Helen.lockwood@alliancelearning.com)

## **Access Courses and Higher Education**

If you are thinking about studying for a higher qualification – perhaps because you enjoy the challenge or because it will make it easier for you to pursue your chosen job or career – but find the prospect of returning to education a little daunting, a 'Pre-Access' programme may be the answer. These programmes are

designed to give you confidence and improve your skills in preparation for an Access to Higher Education course.

Access programmes can provide you with the entry requirements for many higher education courses, including nursing, social work, occupational therapy, art and design, psychology, and teaching. They have been developed with the needs of mature learners in mind and many allow you to study part-time or in the evenings. If you would like more information about the Access courses run by Wigan and Leigh College call ☎ 01942 761477.

Like a lot of other further education colleges, Wigan and Leigh College offers higher education programmes at Degree, Foundation degree, HND and HNC level. Details of these are published in the College's Higher Education prospectus which you can download from the website: [www.wigan-leigh.ac.uk](http://www.wigan-leigh.ac.uk) or request, free of charge on ☎ 01942 761111.

If you would like to know more about how higher education could set you on the path to a new career there is a very good free guide published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills called 'Make your dreams a reality: entering higher education as a mature student'. Call ☎ 0845 015 0010 to order your copy.

### **Courses relating to your caring role**

You may want to do a course that either helps you in your caring role (for example learning correct lifting and handling techniques) or enables you to further develop your skills and experience as a carer. Formal qualifications are sometimes essential, particularly if you intend working in the field of health or social care. For many carers, however, such qualifications are simply recognition of the skilled and dedicated care that they provide on a daily basis.

If you have acquired skills at home or in a previous job (not necessarily linked to your caring role), but have no nationally recognised qualifications, it may be possible to have these validated by APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) or APEL (Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning). APL is for anyone who has gained skills, knowledge or experience and wants these to be acknowledged and certified without necessarily having to regularly attend a college course. As a first step you will usually be asked to attend an informal interview at the educational institute of your choice. The purpose of this is to find out what your requirements are and identify a suitable qualification to aim for. The next stage is to collect evidence of achievement and build up a portfolio. Finally your portfolio will be assessed by an expert in your chosen job area. If you would like to know more contact Wigan and Leigh College ☎ 01942 761607.

Wigan Council's Learning and Development Team produces a training prospectus every year. The courses in the prospectus are primarily intended for health and professionals but some of them are suitable for volunteers and informal carers. Most of the courses are for one day only. For more information contact the Learning and Development team ☎ 01942 703713 / 704152.

Some local charities and voluntary organisations also run courses of interest to carers. Crossroads Wigan and Leigh is a Big Lottery funded project which was launched in 2007 and aims to give unpaid carers of all ages access to appropriate free training opportunities. To find out more about the wide range of vocational and non-vocational training on offer visit the website [www.crossroadswiganandleigh.org.uk](http://www.crossroadswiganandleigh.org.uk) or call ☎ 01744 612929.

Whatever type of learning or training you are interested in Wigan and Leigh Carers Centre is an excellent point of contact. Centre staff can not only give you information about existing programmes, they also work closely with providers like Crossroads Wigan and Leigh to develop new ones that are more closely tailored to the requirements of individual carers. So, if you have a training need that is not covered by the courses currently on offer the Carers Centre may be able to help.

Charitable and professional bodies sometimes run conferences, workshops or courses that may be of interest to you. Costs are often waived or reduced for carers or there may be bursaries available. Details of forthcoming events are often advertised in carer's magazines and newsletters. Carers UK run their own programme of one-day courses on topics relating to carers. For example, Benefits for Carers, Advocacy, Community Carer Law, Understanding Dementia. The training courses are aimed at professionals rather than individual carers, but if there is a course that you feel may benefit a group that you belong to, you can apply to attend. There are special concessionary rates for voluntary organisations and for bookings of three or more people.

Carers UK also run 'Carers Voices Workshops' which are designed to facilitate the role of carers in planning and decision making. The workshops take place at convenient local venues and bring together a broad range of carers and health and social care professionals .

For more information about the courses and workshops offered by Carers UK visit the website: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) or call! 0845 241 2537.

### **Courses for pleasure and relaxation**

Lancashire Adult Learning provides two-day residential courses for carers at Lancashire College in Chorley. Called 'Taking Care of the Carer: a recharge for mind and body', these specially designed courses offer unpaid carers a complete break from their normal responsibilities as well as the chance to learn new skills and meet other people in similar situations. Each course includes a challenging mix of activities such as stress management, confidence building, complementary therapies, arts and crafts and gardening to rejuvenate mind and body. The current cost (for carers living outside of the Lancashire local authority area) is £150 which includes all tuition / activities, meals and accommodation. In the past some carers living in the Wigan area have managed to find funding or sponsorship, from a carers group that they belong to. There is also help available through Wigan Council's 'Time for Carers' grant.

For more information about Taking Care of the Carer residential courses contact the Carers Project Worker ☎ 01257 276719.

### **Other learning opportunities**

If you would find it difficult to attend a course regularly, you may want to consider some form of home-based or "distance learning". Social contact is an important reason for many carers undertaking training or study and so learning from home does not really appeal. For some people, however, home-based study offers exactly the right amount of flexibility, allowing them to learn in their own time and at their own pace. With many courses now available on-line this can be a particularly attractive option for anyone who has a computer with internet access at home. Even if you don't have access to the internet there may be other ways to learn using written materials, DVDs, television or radio programmes.

The Open University has been delivering home study courses for a number of years at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It has also produced a short booklet, entitled 'Studying While You Care', which outlines the ways in which it can support students with caring responsibilities. If you have no previous experience of studying for a higher qualification, the OU offers an 'Openings' programme of short introductory courses that allow you to see how distance learning fits into your lifestyle before committing yourself. In some circumstances – for example if you are on a low income or have a disability - you may also be able to get financial assistance with course fees and the cost of study. For further information contact the Open University's Student Registration and Enquiry Service 0845 300 60 90 or visit the website at [www.open.ac.uk/study](http://www.open.ac.uk/study) Another important provider of home-study courses is the National Extension College (NEC). The NEC offers a range of over 150 distance learning courses including GCSEs, A-levels and vocational qualifications. A full prospectus can be found on the website [www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk) or call 0800 389 2839.

For those seeking a gentler and more informal introduction to the world of distance learning the BBC has also developed a number of online courses for adults covering topics such as basic skills, languages, first aid and gardening. Visit the website: [www.bbc.co.uk/learning](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning) for more details.

### **Where to go for further information and advice**

Whatever reasons you have for wanting to undertake some form of learning or training, it is important to have a clear idea about what options are available and how to access them. The following are organisations you can contact for more detailed advice in relation to training provision and/or courses of learning within the borough.

## **Learning and Employment Service (LES)**

Wigan Council's Learning and Employment Service has set up a number of 'skills shops' which are designed to help people get back into work or change their chosen career. These centres offer personal, one-to-one support and a wide range of training opportunities including: interview skills, IT for work, numeracy, literacy, first aid and food safety.

Skills Shops:

Wigan Skills Shop  
Unit 30  
Grand Arcade Shopping Centre  
Millgate  
Wigan  
WN1 1BH  
☎ 01942 827826

Leigh Skills Shop  
8 Market Street  
Leigh  
WN7 1DS  
☎ 01942 404456

Marsh Green Skills Shop  
Marsh Green Library  
Harrow Road  
Marsh Green  
Wigan  
WN5 0QL  
☎ 01942 705067 / 705066

Family Employment Initiative  
1-3 Westwell Street  
Leigh  
WN7 5ND  
☎ 01942 487343

The LES also offers a range of flexible, non-accredited learning activities that you can take part in for personal enjoyment or interest or perhaps as a stepping stone to further study. Groups tend to be small and informal and the venues (which include schools, libraries and Sure Start centres) conveniently located. For more information ☎ 01942 827826.

## **Wigan and Leigh College**

PO Box 53  
Parson's Walk  
Wigan

WN1 1RS

☎ 01942 761111

Website: [www.wigan-leigh.ac.uk](http://www.wigan-leigh.ac.uk)

Wigan and Leigh College has a wide selection of vocational and non-vocational courses that you can apply to join. There is even an adult guidance and careers service for those looking to progress into further or higher education, training or employment. This service is offered on an appointment basis, mainly at Parson's Walk, Wigan and the Sixth Form Centre on Sale Way, Leigh, although interviews at other College sites can be arranged.

Wigan Adult Guidance

☎ 01942 761607

Leigh Adult Guidance

☎ 01942 761438

If your time is limited and you don't want to undertake a formal course of study, the College runs a number of short (5 – 10 week) leisure courses. These take place at various centres within the borough, including:

Abraham Guest High School

Orrell Road

Orrell

Wigan WN5 8HN

☎ 01942 776191

Bedford High School (Community Learning Centre)

Manchester Road

Leigh

WN7 2LU

☎ 01942 486386

Byrchall High School

Warrington Road

Ashton-in-Makerfield

Wigan

WN4 9PQ

☎ 01942 728221

Clifton Street Community Centre

Clifton Street

Worsley Mesnes

Wigan

WN3 5HN

☎ 01942 515146

Hesketh Fletcher C of E High School  
Hamilton Street  
Atherton  
M46 0AY  
☎ 01942 882425

Hindley Community High school  
Morningson Road  
Hindley  
Wigan  
WN2 4LG  
☎ 01942 767704

Hindley Sure Start  
Morningson Road  
Hindley  
Wigan  
WN2 4LG  
☎ 01942 515146

Lowton High School  
Newton Road  
Lowton  
Warrington  
WA3 1DU  
☎ 01942 767040

Marsh Green Centre  
Hunter Road  
Marsh Green  
Wigan  
☎ 01942 515146

Meadowbank  
Formby Avenue  
Atherton  
M46 0HX  
☎ 01942 515146

Norley Hall Community Centre  
Norley Hall Avenue  
Pemberton  
Wigan  
WN5 9LP  
☎ 01942 515146

Platt Bridge Community Zone  
Ribble Road  
Platt Bridge  
Wigan  
WN2 5EG  
☎ 01942 515146

Rose Bridge High School  
Holt Street  
Ince  
Wigan  
WN1 3HD  
☎ 01942 510712

Standish Community High School  
Kenyon Road  
Standish  
Wigan  
WN6 0NX  
☎ 01257 422265

Tyldesley Community Education Centre  
Upper George Street  
Tyldesley  
M29 8HQ  
☎ 01942 797951

Westleigh High School  
Westleigh Lane  
Leigh  
WN7 5NL  
☎ 01942 767693

Westhoughton High School  
Bolton Road  
Westhoughton  
Bolton  
BL5 3BZ  
☎ 01942 840575

You can find out more about the activities offered at these centres by contacting them directly or by calling ☎ 01942 515146.

### **Crossroads Wigan and Leigh**

Tudor House Community Centre  
8 Liverpool Road  
Hindley  
Wigan

WN2 3HU

☎ 07973257332

Website: [www.crossroadswiganandleigh.org.uk](http://www.crossroadswiganandleigh.org.uk)

Crossroads Wigan and Leigh provides free training for carers of all ages. There is a wide selection of accredited, and non-accredited courses, to choose from, including: stress management, confidence building, first aid, basic IT, card and jewellery making.

### **Careers Advice Service**

☎ 0800 100 900

Website: [www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk](http://www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk)

The national Careers Advice Service provides free, confidential advice on jobs and training. It can also tell you about any financial help that you may be entitled to and where you can access childcare.

A lot of information is available on the CAS website but if you don't have access to the internet, or can't find what you're looking for, just call the freephone helpline and speak to an adviser. You could be entitled to up to three telephone sessions. These will help identify your goals, track your progress, and help you with CVs, interviews and action plans.