



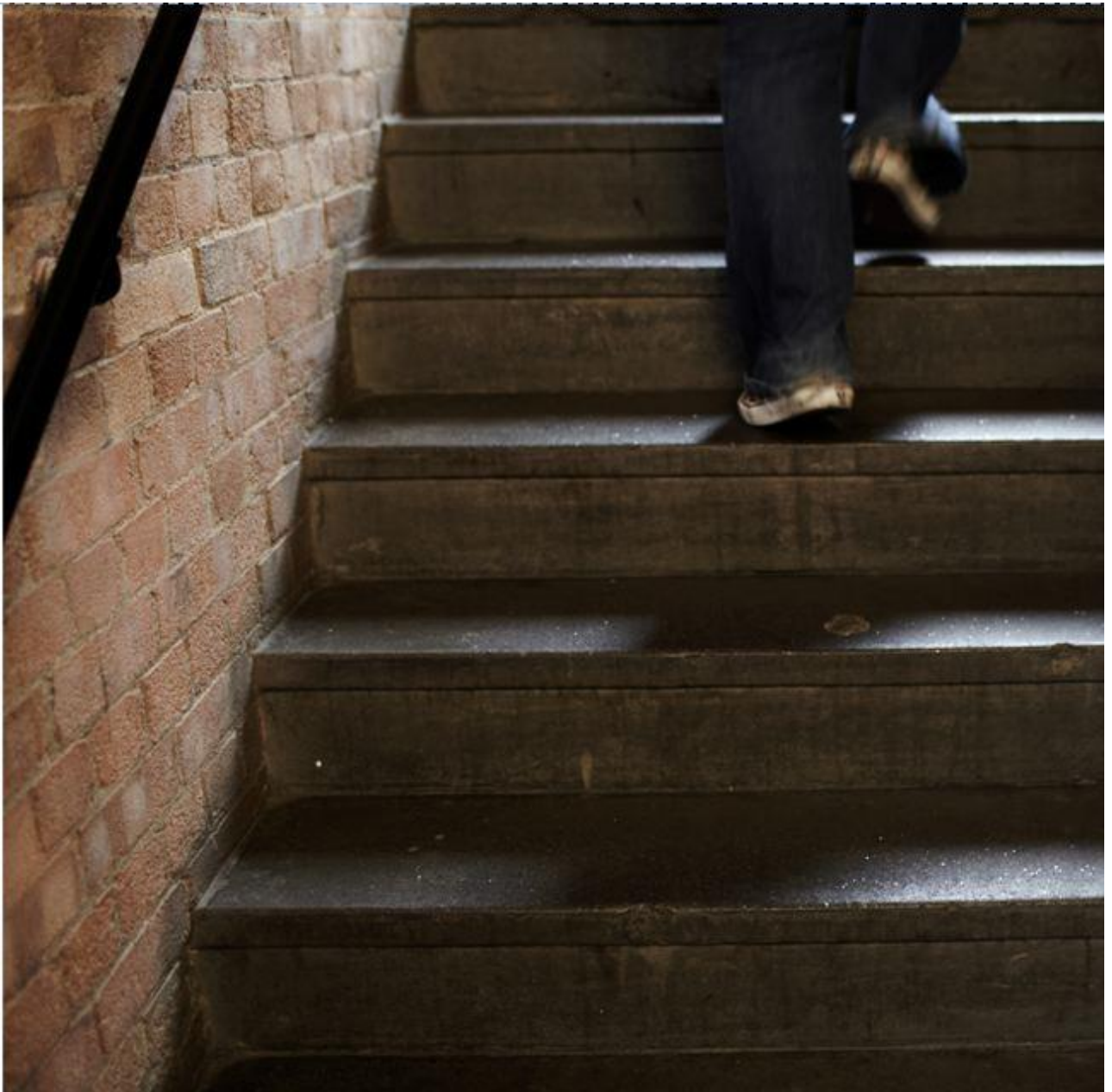
IFF Research

Report

The scope for flexible working in future

Prepared for Department for Transport
By IFF Research

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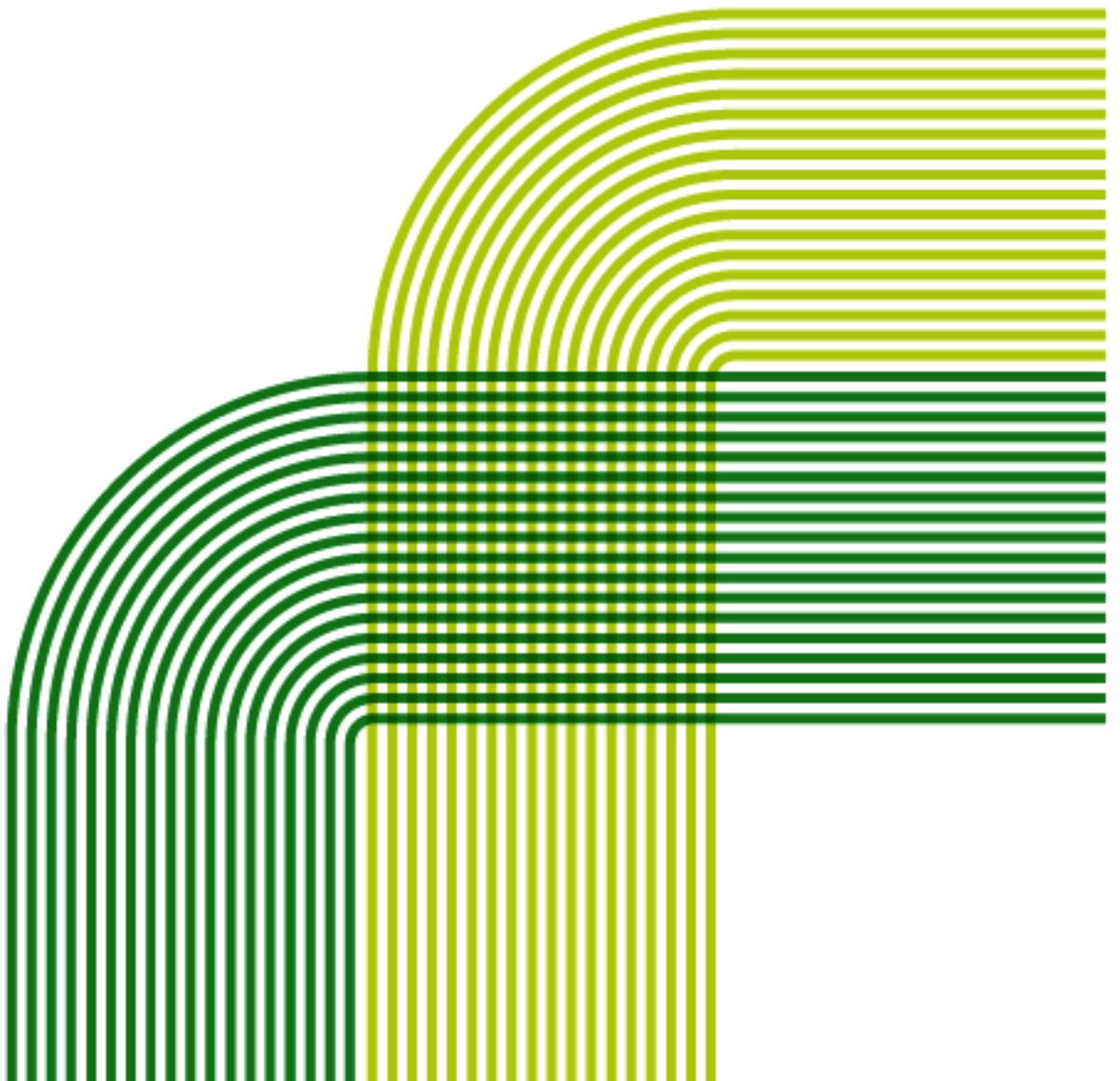
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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) is currently conducting its Rail Fares & Ticketing Review, with the aim of publishing its conclusions in May 2013. One of the stated aims of this review was to seriously consider the potential to maximise usage of existing rail capacity.
- 1.2 The DfT therefore commissioned IFF Research to conduct qualitative research among employers in order to gain a better understanding of the potential scope for flexible working (including part-time working) in the future, and to understand whether any particular group of passengers would be less able to take advantage of new ticketing options, designed to incentivise more travel outside centre-peak hours and to reward those not travelling in to work every day.
- 1.3 Thirty qualitative interviews with employers were conducted via telephone, using a semi-structured approach. The sample was chosen such that all employers interviewed had at least some staff who travelled to work by train.

Use and attitudes to flexible working

- 1.4 The most common types of flexible working taken up by staff were part-time working, home working, flexitime and working away from the site. All employers surveyed had at least some staff working part-time.
- 1.5 Most workplaces stated that their offer on flexible working was available to all employees, rather than just those with a legal right to request it.
- 1.6 Around half of the workplaces interviewed had medium usage of flexible working (between 11-50% of staff), with around a third having low usage (10% or less). Only a minority of workplaces had high levels of flexible working (more than 50%) and this was generally due to high levels of part time or other variations on hours worked (as opposed to high levels of working from home).
- 1.7 About a quarter of employers found flexible working requests easy to accommodate and had a positive ethos in relation to flexible working. They were most likely to come from the public and third sector and to be smaller workplaces (25-99 employees). A small group of employers (about one in ten) found it easy to accommodate flexible working because it provided a good fit with their business model. These were employers in the retail and hotel sectors and were more likely to be small workplaces.
- 1.8 About a third of employers had a neutral attitude to flexible working. They tended to come from the business services sector and be medium sized (100-249 employees). The remaining quarter of employers had a more negative attitude to flexible working, finding requests difficult to accommodate. There was no clear pattern by sector or size of workplace.
- 1.9 Flexible working was mainly seen as being advantageous for employees – essentially to allow them a better work-life balance, including balancing work and looking after children / other caring responsibilities. Benefits to the employer included greater productivity and job commitment from staff and a commercial edge in recruitment and retention, as well as benefits to the bottom-line.
- 1.10 For the employer, the disadvantages and barriers envisaged around increasing flexible working were:
 - Concerns about having sufficient cover at key periods to meet customer needs (a particular concern to smaller workplaces).
 - Concerns about causing workplace dissatisfaction (through adverse effects on those not working flexibly).



- Increased costs associated with IT, recruiting extra staff (if more worked part time) and additional time needed to manage staff if more worked flexibly.
- A cultural expectation of 9-5 working hours – for the employer and also for their customers.
- A feeling that the level of flexible working had reached saturation point already.

1.11 Some employers also felt that there were disadvantages for the staff working flexibly and mentioned the potential for too much home working causing isolation and a lack of team cohesion'

Flexible working in future

1.12 Around two thirds of the workplaces surveyed had high or medium potential to increase flexible working, with part-time working being the easiest to accommodate more of. However, even in these workplaces, employers were rarely actively working to encourage greater take-up. Hence, potential really relates to the potential to accommodate more requests from employees if they were to be made.

1.13 In practice, around half of employers stated that they were anticipating increases in take up of flexible working in the next five years and most of these were anticipating modest increases. A third of workplaces did not think take up would increase while the remainder were unsure.

1.14 Employers who anticipated an increase in take up of flexible working at their workplace in the next five years cited the following factors (note that most of these are employee-related drivers):

- An anticipated change in workforce demographics specific to their workplace, such as younger staff having families
- Trends in workforce demographics more widely, including:
 - an increase in part-time working due to phased retirement. Changes in legislation now enable people to continue to work while drawing a pension.
 - more women returning to work after having children (if childcare becomes more affordable).
 - more women coming into traditionally male-dominated industries.
- Further IT developments making working from home easier.
- A drive to produce cost savings through reducing office space.
- Emphasis on attracting a higher calibre workforce.
- Staff becoming more aware of the right to request flexible working and flexible working becoming more accepted in society in general.
- Legislative change.

1.15 In terms of the impact these trends might have on travel patterns, an increase in phased retirement and the drive to reduce office space are likely to lead to an increase in part-time working and more working from home respectively. This in turn is likely to increase the number of people commuting to work less than five days a week. For the other factors, a range of impacts on travel behaviour can be anticipated.

1.16 Around a third of employers saw a role for Government in encouraging flexible working. The types of roles mentioned were:

- Provision of information and advice for employers and staff on flexible working.
- Promotion of case studies of businesses that have generated tangible business benefits from flexible working.



- Improving internet connections speeds, helping to make working from home a more viable option for employees living in rural areas where connection speeds are slow.
- Introduction/support of policies to make childcare more affordable.

Reaction to possible season ticket scenarios

1.17 Two different train ticket pricing scenarios were put to the employers surveyed:

- **Scenario 1:** This scenario was related to the price of train season tickets. Season tickets would be designed such that it is more expensive to travel on the busiest trains in the commuter rush hour (the centre of the peak) and passengers travelling on quieter trains before or after the busiest commuter trains (the shoulder peak) would be rewarded. The morning centre of the peak was defined as 8 – 9 am, while different definitions were used for the evening for London (5.30 – 6.30 pm) vs. outside London (5 - 6 pm).
- **Scenario 2:** This would offer more flexible ticketing for those commuting part-time (e.g. those who work part-time or work from home part of the week) so that their season ticket or travel card took into account that they were not making as many journeys as those travelling into work five days a week. Currently, commuters who travel less than five days a week typically pay more per journey they make than those who travel five days a week if they purchase a season ticket.

1.18 Around two thirds of workplaces felt that they would be able to accommodate at least some staff travelling to work avoiding the centre of the peak (Scenario 1); in just over a third of cases this would be easy for them to accommodate (either because existing working hours/flexitime arrangements allowed for it or because it would be easy for staff to change their working hours). The remainder caveated this by saying that they could only accommodate a few additional requests from staff looking to change working patterns to avoid the centre peak or that it would only be possible for staff in certain roles or those working certain shifts.

1.19 Around a quarter of employers felt that Scenario 2 could result in more flexible working among their workforces. As with Scenario 1, there were caveats – some employers felt they would only be able to facilitate requests to take advantage of this approach from staff in certain job roles or if only a few people made requests.

1.20 There are definitely some concerns over fairness, in terms of who can work flexibly and benefit from changes in ticket pricing structures, but it is not necessarily always the lowest earners that are least likely to benefit. Among those in lower paid roles, staff in secretarial and other admin/support staff, more junior staff at certain employers and those in lower paid customer facing/service roles were more likely to be disadvantaged.

Conclusions

1.21 The conclusions from this study are as follows:

- There is quite a lot of scope, in theory, to increase flexible working, with around two thirds of the workplaces surveyed having high or medium potential to increase it.
- Employers would find part-time working easiest to accommodate more of in future, although this is of course only likely to be of interest to employees wanting to work (and earn) less in order to gain time for other commitments. Some growth in part-time working is anticipated through phased retirement



and more women returning to work after having children (if plans to tackle the affordability of childcare take effect).

- There is little to suggest that other types of flexible working will increase without changes in external factors. Employers see limited business benefits from flexible working, so are unlikely to actively encourage it. Any increases are therefore more likely to be led by employees.
- The suggested ticketing scenarios could produce the impetus to increase flexible working, particularly in the London area, where the cost of rail commuting is higher.
- The sectors that are most likely to accommodate increases in flexible working (either from this or in response to other factors) are the public/third sector and 'other' sector.
- The largest workplaces (with 250+ staff) are most likely to be able to accommodate the potential ticketing scenarios.
- Scenario 1 has greater scope to shift travel behaviour than Scenario 2. Scenario 2 is seen as being more of a benefit for those already commuting part-time (i.e. mainly those working part time for other reasons). Employers saw fairly modest potential to increase working from home, as there were a number of barriers associated with it.
- If there is potential to cater for commuters who are able to travel outside the centre of the peak / not travel into work sometimes but not always in the formulation of the new ticketing options, this could help to achieve the desired changes in travel behaviour.



2 Background, objectives and research methodology

- 2.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) is currently conducting its Rail Fares & Ticketing Review, with the aim of publishing its conclusions in summer 2013. One of the stated aims of this review was to seriously consider the potential to maximise usage of existing rail capacity.
- 2.2 A key objective of the Review is, therefore, to consider whether new types of rail fares can be introduced to incentivise more travel outside centre-peak hours and to reward those not travelling in to work every day. Currently there is virtually no financial incentive in the rail fares system for commuters to do either of these. A season ticket costs the same whether you travel in the peak, shoulder peak or off-peak, and once a season ticket has been purchased holders tend to feel that not to use it every day would be a waste of money. Conversely, commuters who already work flexibly (including commuting part-time) pay more per trip than their counterparts who commute five times a week in the peak. This is a disincentive to flexible working for those to whom it is available, and may even discourage people (such as those with caring responsibilities) who could only work part-time, from joining the labour force.
- 2.3 On the other hand, the extent of take-up of new types of rail fares will depend on commuters' flexibility to travel at different times and ability to not travel at all, and the extent of other constraints commuters may face that would prevent them from taking advantage of any such new financial incentives.
- 2.4 Pricing policies such as these would be much more likely to succeed in spreading demand evenly if there was a shift in employers' approach to working hours and if flexible working hours became an option for more commuters. While it will always be the case that some types of jobs will have fixed start and finish times forcing commuters to travel during the busiest times, it is expected that for certain other jobs, flexible working has the potential to become the norm. The significant costs associated with additional capacity provision on the railways means that even a small shift in demand away from the centre of the peak could generate significant savings by delaying costly infrastructure spend, as well as strengthening the business case for future investment.
- 2.5 Conversely, for reasons of fairness, the Government would need to be persuaded that no group of passengers would be disproportionately impacted by such a policy.
- 2.6 The DfT therefore commissioned IFF to conduct qualitative research among employers in order to gain a better understanding of the potential scope for flexible working (including part-time working) in the future, and to understand whether any particular group of passengers would be less able to take advantage of new ticketing options.
- 2.7 This will enable the DfT to build evidence on the likely take-up and potential impact of proposed new ticket types that offer financial incentives for commuters to travel on quieter trains.

Methodology and Sample Profile

- 2.8 Thirty qualitative interviews with employers were conducted via telephone, using a semi-structured approach. Each lasted around 30 to 40 minutes. Employers were surveyed at establishment level (as opposed to head office), as at this level, employers tend to have more detailed knowledge of how flexible working works in practice / could work in future. The target respondent was the person with most responsibility for managing human resources issues at each site.
- 2.9 Interviews were conducted with employers within reach of train stations in London (ten interviews), Birmingham (seven interviews), Leeds (eight interviews) and Manchester (five interviews). All employers had at least some staff who travelled to work by train.



- 2.10 In addition to location, the sample was structured by size of workplace. All establishments had at least 25 employees, as other research has shown that the smallest employers tend to have less experience of implementing family-friendly or flexible working practices. Interviews were spread across three size bands, as shown in Table 2.1 below. This approach means that larger employers were over-represented in the sample, but allowed us to compare experiences between different sizes of employer.
- 2.11 By sector, four broad categories were used: Public and Third sector, Business services, Retail and Other. Business services and public sector/voluntary were selected as industry sectors to focus on as they tend to be over-represented among those who travel to work by rail.

Table 2.1: Interviews achieved by size and sector

Sector	Number of staff employed at site			
	25-99	100-249	250+	Total
Public / Third Sector	4	3	3	10
Business services	1	6	2	9
Retail	3	0	1	4
Other	3	3	1	7
Total	12	10	8	30

- 2.12 The 'other' category included a range of types of businesses, including a few hotels and workplaces involved in school transport, property letting and property development.
- 2.13 Note that as the research is qualitative in nature, it is intended to provide an understanding of the types of issues experienced by employers in relation to flexible working and how these might evolve in future, but cannot accurately quantify the prevalence of these issues. This is due to the small number of employers interviewed. Subgroup analysis has been conducted, but should be treated as indicative due to the small base sizes. Where appropriate, the report draws on secondary quantitative sources to provide broader context for the findings.

Definitions of types of flexible working

- 2.14 In the report, a range of types of flexible working are discussed. An explanation of what is meant by each is provided below where relevant.

Type of flexible working	Definition
Part-time working	Working less than 30 hours a week.
Flexitime	The employee chooses when to start and end work (within agreed limits) but works certain 'core hours', eg 10am to 4pm every day.
Compressed hours	Where an employee works full-time hours over a fewer number of days in their working week. For example, working a 40 hour week over four days, or working a nine-day fortnight (also called compressed working week (CWW)).
Job sharing	This is a type of part-time working where a full-time job is divided, usually between two people. The employees sharing the job work at different times, although there may be a changeover period.



Type of flexible working	Definition
On-call working	On call working is when employees have to make themselves available to be called to do work if it is needed. This might mean being at their workplace, staying within a certain distance of their workplace or staying at home.
Term time working	Where an employee works only during school term times.
Annualised hours contract	Where the number of hours an employee has to work is calculated over a full year, e.g. instead of 40 hours a week, employees are contracted to work 1,900 hours per year (after allowing for leave and other entitlements).
Zero hours contract	A zero-hours contract does not guarantee the employee a fixed number of hours per week and the employee is only paid for the hours that they work.



3 Travel to work context

- 3.1 Before considering the findings of the qualitative research, it is helpful to understand how commuting patterns vary by region and the profile of rail commuters, based on the Labour Force Survey 2011. This chapter also discusses travel plans and other travel-related benefits employers taking part in the qualitative research offered to their staff.

Prevalence of rail commuting by region

- 3.2 The Labour Force Survey 2011 showed that rail commuting is much more prevalent in London than elsewhere in the country (21% of employees working in London use national rail, compared with five per cent in England overall)¹. Although people in employment in London account for 17% of all in employment in England, they account for 66% of rail commuters in England.
- 3.3 Outside of London, Merseyside is the area with the highest rail use (7% of employees working there travel to work by national rail), followed by the South East and 'Metropolitan' West Midlands (4% for each), and Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire (3% for each). Although it is likely that rail commuting is more prevalent among employees working in city centres outside London than for the broader area, it can be expected that changes in rail ticketing options would have more impact on employees (and employers) in London than elsewhere.

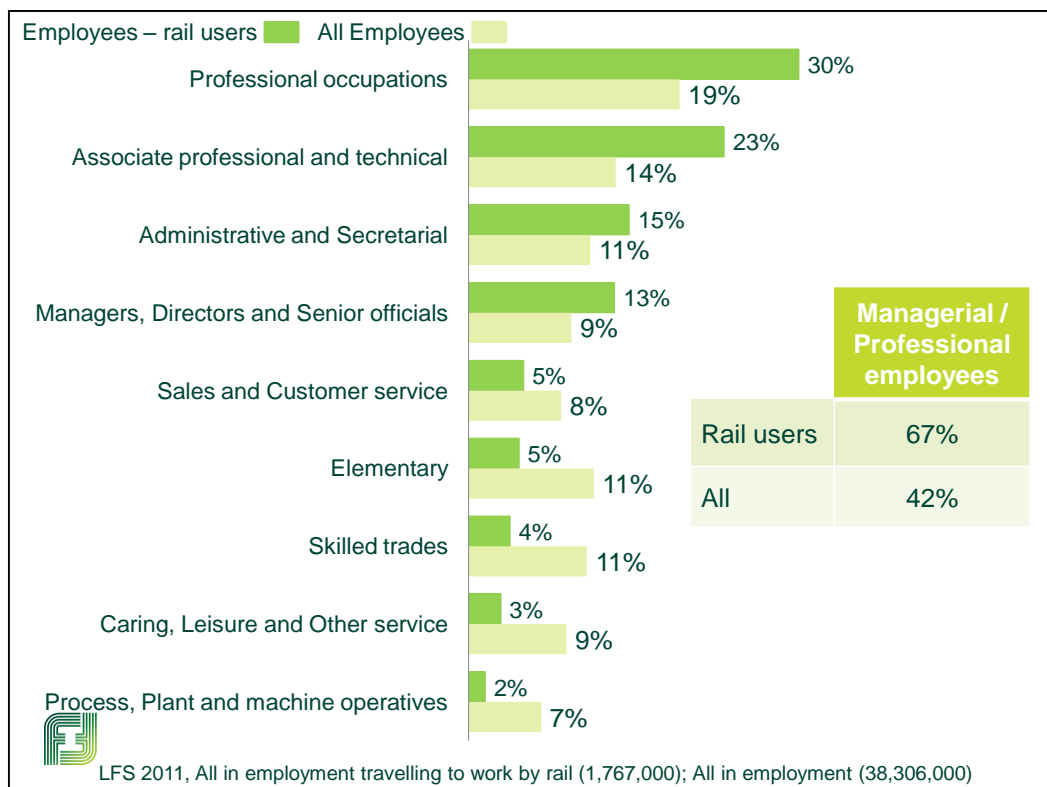
Profile of rail commuters

- 3.4 As shown in Figure 2.1, the Labour Force Survey 2011 identified that rail commuters were more likely to come from managerial and professional occupations, with employees in these occupations accounting for two thirds of rail commuters (67% compared with 42% of the workforce as a whole). More specifically, 30% were from Professional occupations, 23% from associate professional and technical roles and 13% from managers, directors and senior officials. Additionally, staff in administrative and secretarial roles were also slightly more likely to travel by rail (15% of rail commuters compared with 11% of all employees). Staff in caring, leisure and other service occupations, sales and customer service occupations, process operatives and elementary occupations were underrepresented among rail commuters and together accounted for only 15% of rail commuters (compared with 35% of all employees). Thus, there is a skew among rail commuters towards those in middle and higher income jobs.

¹ Source: DfT statistics on Usual method of travel to work by region of workplace, GOR, FMC and Country: October to December 2011



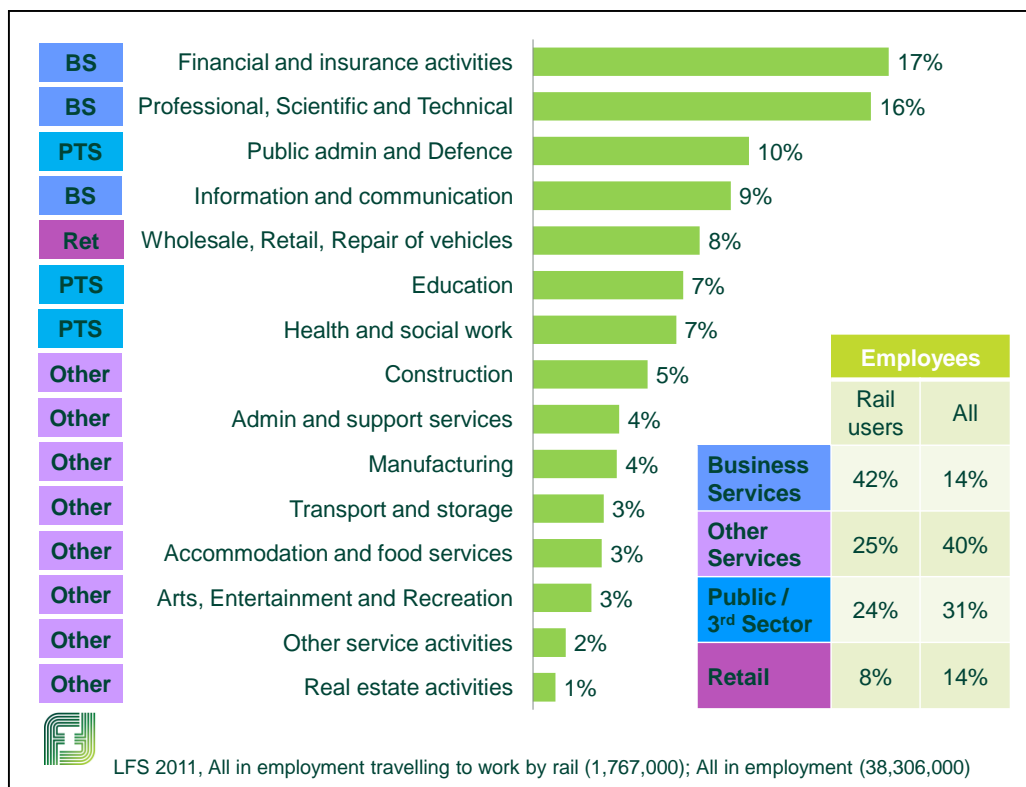
Figure 3.1: Profile by occupation of rail commuters, Labour Force Survey 2011



3.5 Those working in the business services sector were more likely to be rail commuters, accounting for 42% of employees travelling by train (compared with 14% of the workforce overall). Twenty-four per cent of rail users worked in the public/third sector, eight per cent in retail/wholesale and the remaining 25% in other sectors. All of these sectors were under-represented among rail commuters. However, if public administration and defence is considered on its own (without education and health), this group was also over-represented among rail commuters (10% compared with 6% overall). This would include Government departments, local authorities etc.



Figure 3.2: Profile by sector of those travelling to work by rail



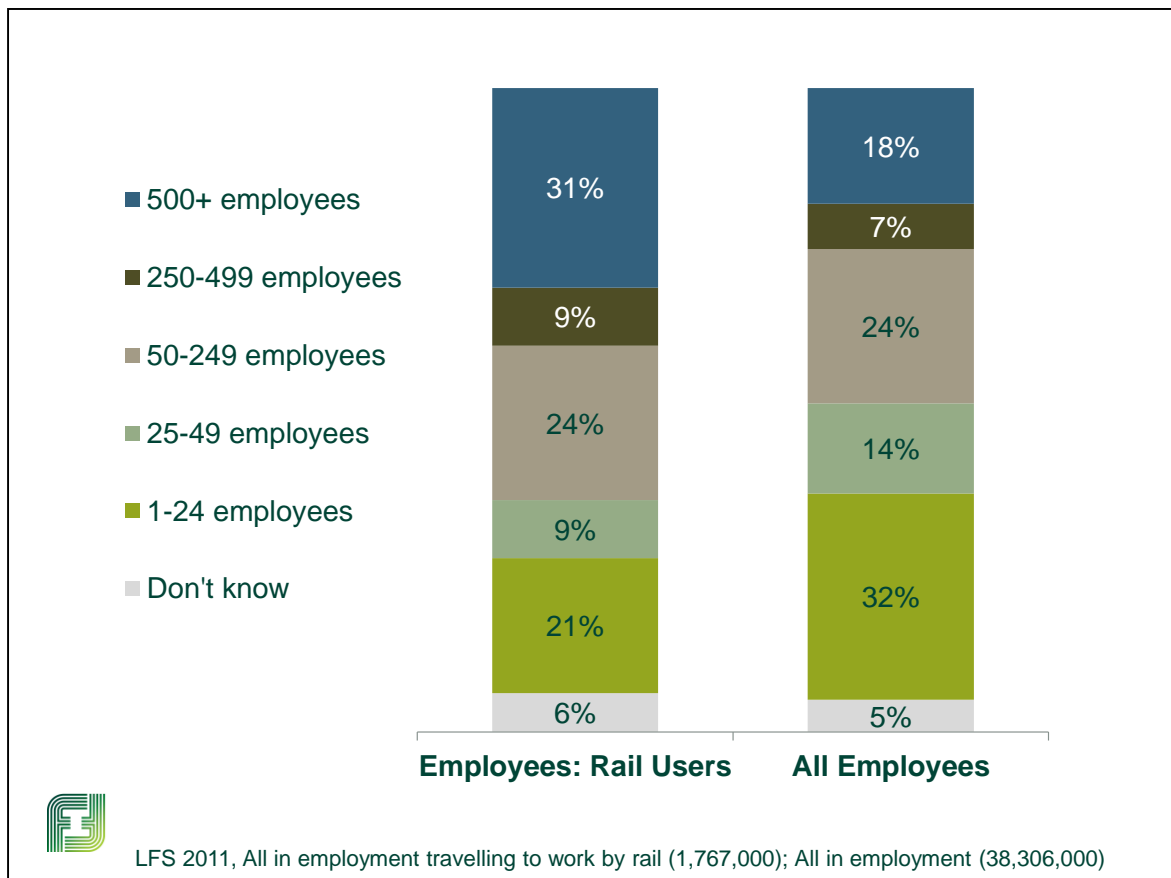
3.6 As mentioned earlier in this section, two thirds of rail commuters in England work in London. Thus, it can be expected that there is a skew among rail commuters towards the types of business found in the capital. Government statistics²(based on all in employment, not just rail commuters) show that employees in London are more likely to work in the business services sector (28%) than in the other regions included in this qualitative research (13% in the North West, 11% in Yorkshire and the Humber and the West Midlands). Conversely, public sector employment (including education, health etc.) is lower in London (23%) than in the other three regions (34% in Yorkshire and the Humber and North West and 32% in the West Midlands). Thus it is likely that the over-representation of business services and under-representation of the public sector among rail commuters are due at least in part to their relative presence in the London economy (note in particular that business services includes financial services, which is dominant in the capital). Having said that, it is worth bearing in mind that business services companies are also more likely to be found in city centres, so a more accurate picture of the situation outside London could be established if further bespoke analysis of the LFS figures comparing London and other areas based on rail commuters could be undertaken.

3.7 Almost three quarters (73%) of rail commuters worked in establishments with more than 25 employees (compared with 63% overall) – the target audience for the qualitative research. Employees working for major employers with 500 employees or more accounted for 31% of rail users (compared with 18% of the workforce overall), highlighting the influence that policies of major employers could have on rail commuting patterns.

² Annual Employment Statistics (BRES) 2010 Table 4 -Regional level employment (thousands) by Broad Industry Group (BIG) (public/private sector split). Link to the data available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/bus-register/business-register-employment-survey/2010-revised--with-working-owners-adjustment-/rft-table-4.xls>



Figure 3.3: Profile by size of organisation worked for of those travelling to work by rail



3.8 Around a third of all workplaces interviewed for the qualitative work had a travel plan. Of these, the majority were larger businesses (250+ employees) and were more likely to be based in London or Leeds.

3.9 The majority of workplaces interviewed currently offer some form of travel benefit to their staff.

- Season ticket loans were the most common, and were offered by around two thirds of the organisations interviewed.
- Cycle to work schemes were offered by half of the workplaces interviewed.
- Free parking was offered by half of workplaces interviewed (although in a few cases free parking was available only to certain groups of staff (senior level and disabled staff were mentioned).
- A quarter of workplaces interviewed offered discounted parking.

3.10 Free parking was much more likely to be offered to staff outside London – there were only a few instances in London. Discounted parking was only offered outside London (by around a third of these workplaces).



4 Overall attitudes to flexible working

- 4.1 This chapter discusses the take up of flexible working among the employers interviewed and also on a national level using figures from the Fourth Employee Work-Life Balance Survey, conducted by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (DBIS) in 2011.
- 4.2 Also included in this chapter is a qualitative segmentation of the employers interviewed as part of the research, which segments employers in terms of attitude towards flexible working (positive, neutral and negative) and also the extent to which flexible working has been taken up in the workplace (low usage, medium usage, high usage).
- 4.3 The impact of the Olympic period on employers in London and whether flexible working policies have changed as a result is also discussed in this chapter.

Current levels of uptake of flexible working

- 4.4 The employers participating in the qualitative study can be grouped by their current use of flexible working into those that demonstrate:
- **High usage:** We have defined this as having more than 50% of staff currently working flexibly (either working part-time, from home or in some other way).
 - **Medium usage:** We have defined this as having between 11 – 50% of staff currently working flexibly.
 - **Low usage:** We have defined this as having 10% or fewer staff currently working flexibly.
- 4.5 Around half of the workplaces interviewed fell into the medium category, with around a third having low usage. Only a minority of workplaces had high levels of flexible working and this was generally due to high levels of part time or other variations on hours worked (as opposed to high levels of working from home).
- 4.6 Workplaces with high levels of flexible working tended to be in the retail sector (typified by high levels of part time working) or public/third sectors (with high levels of other types of flexible working). Those with low usage tended to be in the business services and other sectors. There was no particular sector dominating in the medium category.³
- 4.7 As discussed in Chapter 3, those working in the business services sector were more likely than average to be rail commuters (accounting for 42% of employees travelling by rail). Twenty-four per cent of rail users worked in the public sector, 8% worked in retail/wholesale and 25% worked in other sectors. Thus sectors with high uptake of flexible working (public sector and retail) account for around a third of rail commuters. The business services sector currently has low uptake but accounts for a significant proportion of rail commuters and is therefore an important sector to consider in terms of its impact on travel behaviour.
- 4.8 High and medium usage of flexible working was more common among smaller establishments, (although in these the actual volumes of staff working flexibly could be relatively small). Establishments in the retail sector were also more likely to be smaller.

³ If part time working is excluded, the balance shifts towards low uptake of flexible working. Over half of workplaces had low usage, with less than 10% or fewer staff working from home or working flexibly in some other way. A quarter had medium usage, with the remainder having high usage. By sector, the public/third sector had the highest usage and the 'other' sector had the lowest usage, with the retail and business services sectors falling in the middle. The patterns by size and sector were the same as those discussed at paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9.



- 4.9 Employers in London were more likely to have low uptake of flexible working, while employers outside of London were more likely to have medium uptake. Note that this is likely to be linked to the sample composition by size and sector.

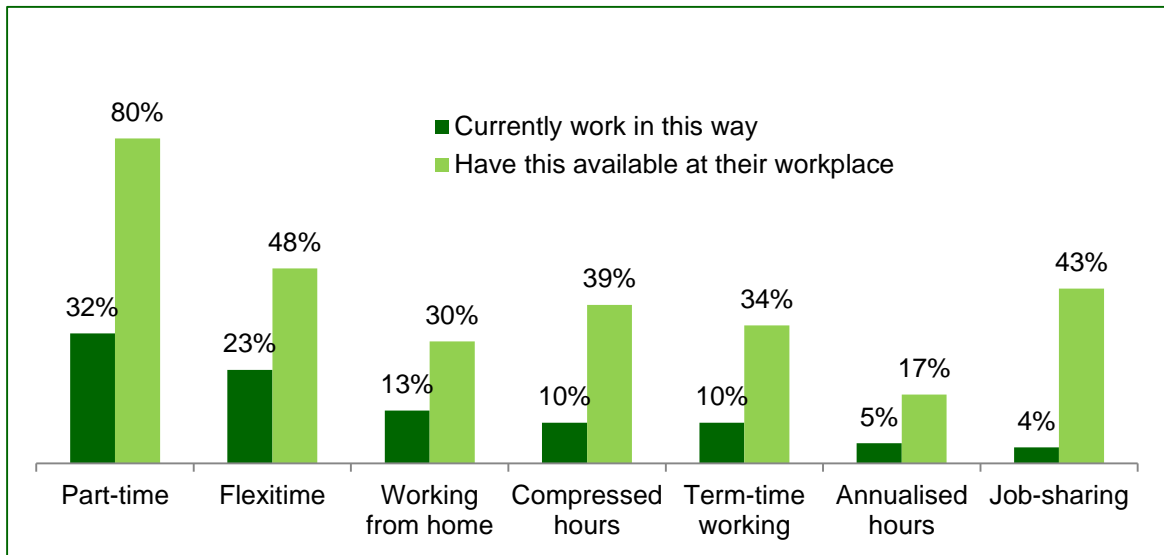
Types of flexible working arrangement used/ available

- 4.10 Employers participating in the qualitative research stated that the most common types of flexible working taken up by staff were part-time working, home working, flexitime and working away from the site.
- 4.11 All employers interviewed had at least some staff working part-time. Four fifths of employers said some staff worked from home on an ad hoc or regular basis. It was more common on an ad hoc basis, but nonetheless, over a third of employers had staff who worked from home regularly. A similar proportion had staff who worked from another site. Around two thirds of employers had some staff working flexitime.
- 4.12 Less common types of flexible working included compressed hours, job-shares, on call, term time hours, zero hours contracts and annualised hours. Staff at around a third of workplaces had some staff working compressed hours and the same proportion had some staff job-sharing. On-call working was used in just under half of workplaces. Zero hours contracts were in place at around a third of workplaces. Annualised hours contracts were in place in around 1 in 5 workplaces and term time working was used in around a quarter of workplaces.
- 4.13 As well as identifying which types of flexible working were being used by employees at their site, employers were also asked which types were available, whether or not they were currently being used. It was reasonably common for workplaces to state that particular types of flexible working were 'available' even if they were not actually used.
- 4.14 Most of those stating that they offered part-time working, working from home, working away from the site and flexitime had at least some staff working in this capacity. However a reasonable proportion of workplaces had compressed hours and job-shares technically 'available' but currently had no staff working in this way, suggesting either that these types of working were less popular with staff or that employers did not actively encourage working in this way. These types of working were said to be available at around two thirds of workplaces (although they were only taken up in around a third).
- 4.15 Sites that stated that they had on-call working and zero hours contracts available generally had at least some staff working in this way perhaps suggesting that these types of flexible working are most likely to be introduced to reflect a particular employer need.
- 4.16 Relatively large proportions of employers stated that they did not offer term-time working and annualised hours. However those that did offer working in this way generally had some staff currently making use of these arrangements.
- 4.17 Most workplaces stated that their offer on flexible working was available to all employees, rather than just those with a legal right to request it.
- 4.18 Figures from the Fourth Work Life Balance Employee Survey conducted in 2011 support this overall picture of use of the different types of flexible working. Findings from this large quantitative survey of employees (rather than employers) showed that 60% of employees were making use of some form of flexible working and that 92% were employed in workplaces where at least one type of flexible working was available to them. Figure 4.1 shows the uptake of the different types of flexible working.
- 4.19 However, although this indicates a relatively high level of overall use of flexible working, much of this is accounted for by individuals working part-time. The WLB4 employee survey indicated that around a third (32%) of employees were currently working part-time (Figure 4.1).



4.20 The next most commonly used type of flexible working was flexitime with 23% of employees working in this way. Thirteen per cent of employees were working from home regularly, and 10% each were working compressed hours and term time only. Working annualised hours and job sharing were relatively unusual (used by five per cent and four per cent of employees respectively).

Figure 4.1: Availability and take-up of different types of flexible working (employees)



Base= All in employment (1,871)

Source: Work Life Balance Employee Survey 2011

4.21 Again there is a notable gap between the proportions of employees knowing that each type of flexible working is available in the workplace and the proportion working in that way. The ratio of availability to take-up is highest for flexitime.

Attitudes towards accommodating flexible working

4.22 Based on the evidence from the qualitative study, employers can also be grouped in terms of their general attitude to flexible working and their perception of how easy it was currently to accommodate requests for flexible working. Employers fell into four broad groups i.e.

- Those who found flexible working easy to accommodate as a result of a general positive ethos in relation to flexible working.
- Those who found it easy to accommodate because it was a good fit with their business model.
- Those who had a fairly neutral attitude to flexible working.
- Those who found flexible working difficult to accommodate.

4.23 About a quarter of employers found flexible working requests easy to accommodate and had a positive ethos in relation to flexible working. They were most likely to come from the public and third sector and to be smaller workplaces (25-99 employees).



“We’re flexible. We’ve got really good committed staff and those that do work from home we give them facilities to be able to work from home. The same for people who want to work part time...we do it to accommodate them and make them better workers. If you can try and be flexible with someone, with their hours or working arrangements you’re going to get a lot back”

Public / third sector, 25-99 staff, Birmingham

- 4.24 A small group of employers found it easy to accommodate flexible working, because it provided a good fit with their business model. These were employers in the retail and hotel sectors and were more likely to be small workplaces. Interestingly however, businesses in these sectors were also found among those finding it difficult to accommodate flexible working, and to some extent they were approaching the issue from a different angle. The retail and hotel sectors lend themselves to flexible working in that they tend to require shift patterns and a high level of part time working, however outside of this, they are fairly rigid. For example, as hotels are busy at weekends, requests for time off at those times from people with children can pose problems.

“[Flexible working] wasn’t anything special done because of the change to the regulations, it was already something that we had in place. It’s our priority to try and have a work/life balance for everyone. We do our schedules four weeks in advance (for hourly paid staff). So they would notify us of any changes that they need two weeks in advance – if they have exams or any times in the week that they need time off. It’s just something that they talk [about] with their line manager and take it from there.”

Retail, 25-99 staff, Birmingham

“The difficulty is that a lot of the people that we’ve had ask for flexible working are mainly looking to take weekends off because they struggle to pay for child care over the weekends to make it worth their while working. They earn a minimum wage themselves and any child care that they would then pay for over the weekend like a babysitter also earns minimum wage, or more than they do so it’s not economical for them to have child care over weekends.... Weekends are our busiest times and we’re looking for people more at weekends, and we’re getting a lot of requests from people wanting to take weekends off, for child care reasons. ”

‘Other’ sector, Hotel, 100-249 staff, Manchester

- 4.25 About a third of employers had a neutral attitude to flexible working. They looked to accommodate requests if asked and if it did not impact on the needs of the business, but they did not see any major advantage from staff working flexibly and hence were not looking to promote it. They tended to come from the business services sector and be medium sized (100-249 employees).

“[It is easy to accommodate]. The people making the application just have to set it out to us, how they see it working and how they are going to ensure it works from a client perspective. “

Business services, 25-99 staff, Manchester



- 4.26 The remaining quarter of employers had a more negative attitude to flexible working, finding requests difficult to accommodate. There was no clear pattern by sector or size of workplace.

“It’s difficult because of the impact it has on staff within the business and also the impact that it has on the workflow within the department which needs to be considered. The other reason why it’s difficult is probably because of our clients. Our clients expect us to be in the office from 7am, or 8am in the morning right through to 6pm, 7pm at night because our clients work those hours. So it’s been difficult for them, but I think it’s about managing their expectations and making sure that there is somebody here even if it’s not the whole team.”

Business services, 100-249 staff, Manchester

- 4.27 Employers in London were less likely to have a positive ethos in relation to flexible working and were more likely to have a neutral attitude and to find requests difficult to accommodate. As with uptake, this may to some extent be linked to sector and size.

- 4.28 Drawing the two dimensions of uptake and attitude together, those with high uptake were most likely to be found among employers who had a positive ethos towards flexible working or found it a good fit with their business model. Those with low uptake were most likely to have a neutral attitude, while there was a spread of attitudes among those with medium uptake.

Overall advantages / factors which would make flexible working easier to accommodate in future and barriers to flexible working

- 4.29 Flexible working was mainly seen as being advantageous for employees – essentially to allow them better work-life balance, including balancing work and looking after children / other caring responsibilities. It also enabled staff to undertake further training (which had benefits for them and their employer) and to get involved in voluntary activities.
- 4.30 Some benefits were identified for the employer – these related both to actual benefits of existing arrangements and also what benefits they might anticipate if additional types of flexible working were introduced. However, generally employers felt that there were fewer benefits for employers than for employees. The key benefits mentioned were:

- **As a result of having happier staff with a better work-life balance, achieving:**
 - Greater productivity and job commitment from staff.
 - A commercial edge in terms of recruiting and retaining staff.

“If someone has the flexibility they’re obviously going to be a lot more committed, loyal and productive, so I suppose it’s in their best interests and that’s why [employer] have recognised it earlier on. If we give people flexibility – a lot of people have stayed here because they said they won’t get this pattern somewhere else. That’s why there’s a very low staff turnover.”

Public / third sector, 25-99 staff, Leeds

“We can use it to our advantage in terms of attracting better people....people who’ve gone off to have kids and maybe haven’t had an opportunity [to return to work] purely because an employer needs them to work certain hours.”

Retail, 25-99 staff, Birmingham



- **Benefits to the 'bottom-line' through:**
 - Making lower salaries more palatable (for example, in the third sector);
 - Facilitating more agile working – through greater capacity to work away from the office leading to less 'dead time' e.g. working from home after meetings.
 - Benefits of a 'shift effect' of some team members starting earlier and others working later, allowing sequential work to be carried out on a project over a longer period.
- 4.31 'Enablers' or factors which had made it easier for employers to accommodate existing arrangements were:
- Staff making reasonable requests which could be accommodated.
 - Staff willingness to keep up with developments on days off (such as responding to emails, phone calls etc.).
 - Nature of work not requiring same members of staff to be in at all times.
 - Good management systems in place to keep track of staff numbers.
- 4.32 Employers were also asked about the disadvantages of flexible working and what barriers there were to increasing it. Most of the disadvantages mentioned were for the employer although some also felt that there were disadvantages for the employee as well.
- 4.33 For the employer, the disadvantages and barriers employers envisaged around increasing flexible working were:
- Concerns about having sufficient cover at key periods to meet customer needs (a particular concern to smaller workplaces).
 - Concerns about causing workplace dissatisfaction. Employers were concerned that those not working flexibly could be adversely affected, through having to cover the workload of others at some times or having to take on more 'antisocial hours' than others (for those on a weekly shift or rota).
 - Increased costs associated with the IT hardware / software licences needed to set more people up to work from home, difficulties / costs associated with recruiting extra staff (if more worked part time) and additional time needed to manage staff if more worked flexibly e.g. rotas, ensuring sufficient cover at key times.
 - A cultural expectation of 9-5 working hours – for the employer and also for their customers.
 - A feeling that the level of flexible working had reached saturation point already (among those who already had a significant proportion of staff working flexibly).
- 4.34 Some employers also felt that there were disadvantages for the staff working flexibly and mentioned the potential for too much home working causing isolation and a lack of team cohesion'.

Impact of the Olympics

- 4.35 Employers in London were also asked whether they had encouraged more flexible working during the period of the London 2012 Olympics. The majority had done so to some degree. At the lesser end of the scale some employers said they had been more tolerant of staff arriving late in the office due to travel disruption. More concrete measures were also taken relating to the hours employees spent in the office. These measures included moving core hours so that employees could start and finish earlier than usual, allowing more home working and encouraging more working at another site. One retail employer had temporarily removed those who lived further away (or on travel routes most effected) from certain early shifts.



4.36 However, despite these measures during the Olympics, the majority of employers that had encouraged more flexible working during the Olympics did not have any plans to make these policies more permanent. The main reason for this was they had been prepared to make changes given the special set of circumstances, but did not want / need to continue with them longer term, because:

- Their usual working arrangements were flexible enough under ordinary circumstances.
- Higher levels of customer service needing to be maintained ordinarily (whereas customers were willing to make allowances for a decrease in service for this for a short period, it would not be acceptable in the long term).
- Unplanned absence / lateness was tolerated during the Olympics, but was not to be encouraged or allowed in general.
- Re-arranging shift rotas to accommodate staff facing travel difficulties had been time consuming.

4.37 However, two employers had changed their policies relating to flexible working since the Olympics.

- The first employer was an international organisation which had previously not allowed much flexible working (e.g. not allowing compressed hours, flexitime or home working). In this instance the Olympics did give rise to plans for more flexible working. The employer reported that staff had appreciated the ability to change their working hours and work from home and that there had not been a negative impact on work produced. This employer said that it was planning to have a six month trial period of more flexible working to assess whether it would be suitable for them in the long term.
- The other was a large public sector employer where implementing a wider capacity for home working (through enabling more access to the system from home) / working at other sites had been planned before the Olympics. In this instance the Olympics was a catalyst to the policy being put into place, not the event that gave rise to the idea in the first place.



5 Part time working and job sharing

5.1 Having looked generally at attitudes towards flexible working, the next few chapters look at use of and attitudes towards specific types of flexible working. This first chapter looks at part-time working and job sharing.

Levels of part-time working/job sharing

5.2 All employers taking part in the qualitative study had at least some staff working part-time. On average 20% of staff worked part-time. The minimum was 3% and the maximum was 75%. Having staff working part-time was most common in the retail sector and least common in the business services sector. Job sharing was less common among the employers interviewed. It was currently used in around a third of employers interviewed, with take up being higher in the public/third sector and 'other' sector.

5.3 Findings from the Work Life Balance employee survey show that around a third of employees work part-time and four per cent work as part of a job-share (Figures 5.1 and 5.2 below).

Figure 5.1: Trends in availability and take-up of part time working, Work-Life Balance Surveys

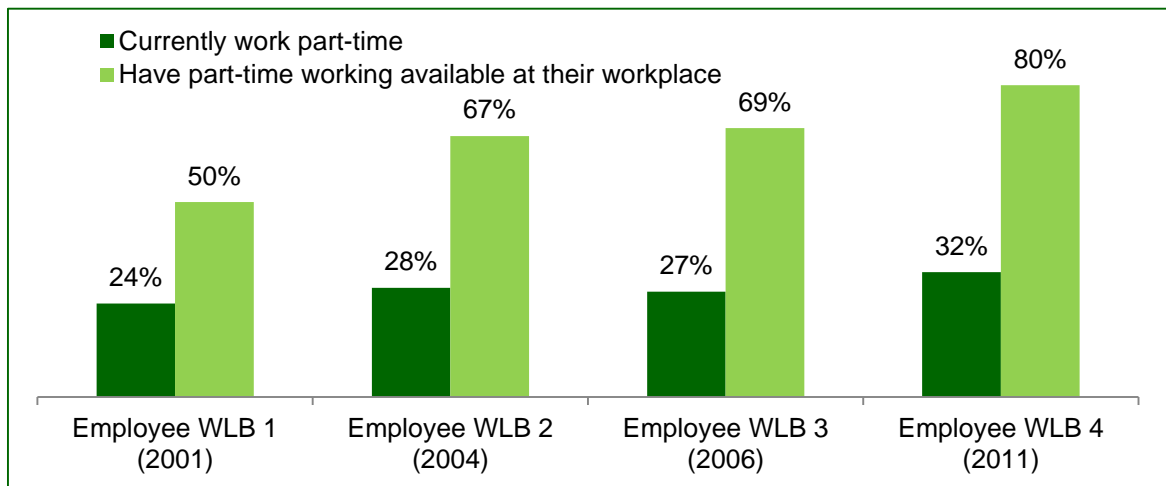
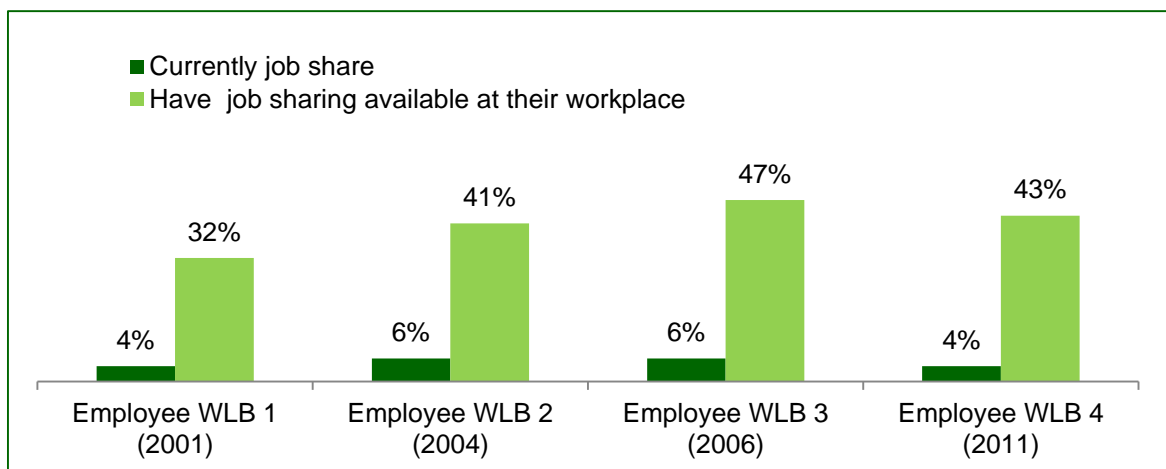


Figure 5.2: Trends in availability and take-up of job sharing, Work-Life Balance Surveys



Base= All in employment WLB1 (7,561), WLB2 (2003), WLB3 (2081), WLB4 (1,871)

Source: Work Life Balance Employee Surveys 2001-2011



- 5.4 As shown in Figure 5.1, the proportion of employees working part-time has risen slightly over the period in which the Employee Work-Life Balance Surveys have been conducted (2001-2011). In 2011, a quarter of employees were working part-time rising to a third (32%) of those surveyed in the 2011 WLB survey.
- 5.5 However the proportion of individuals working as part of a job share has remained stable despite the fact that employees felt that the proportion of employees that felt it was available at their workplace increased quite substantially over the period.
- 5.6 Some of those employers participating in the qualitative research had seen a suggestion of a recent increase in interest in part-time working. They had found that the removal of the default retirement age had led to an increase in part-time working among those 'phasing into' retirement. There were also a small number of mentions of mothers of young children (re)entering the workforce in a part-time capacity due to their partner being negatively impacted by the recession (although at the same time, some employers had found that the recession had also caused some part-time workers to move into full-time work, due to the impact of the recession on their partner's income). Increases in childcare costs were also mentioned by a few employers as a driver for more part-time working, as the high cost of childcare reduced the financial benefit of working full time for those affected.

Attitudes towards increasing part-time working/job sharing

- 5.7 Employers felt that the key benefit of offering part-time working and job-sharing was to enable them to employ a greater range of individuals (particularly those with young children or other caring responsibilities) and therefore allowing them to recruit and retain talented staff who would otherwise not have been available for the job role.
- 5.8 Generally employers found part-time working the easiest form of flexible working to accommodate because the hours worked are fixed and they felt that this made it much easier to plan and manage workloads.
- 5.9 Over half of employers felt it would be easy to accommodate more staff working part-time, while around a third said they would find it easy to accommodate more job-sharing (which in some cases would mean introducing job-sharing). The retail and public sectors and linked to this, those with a positive attitude to flexible working (because of their ethos or because it fitted with their business model) were more likely to be able to accommodate more part-time working in future. The public sector and those with a positive ethos were also most likely to be able to accommodate more job-sharing, although no retail employers or those for whom flexible working generally fitted their business model felt that they could.
- 5.10 Smaller workplaces were generally less likely to think that they could accommodate more part-time working. They tended to feel that more part-time working would place an additional administrative and financial burden on them, in terms of the cost of managing additional staff and supplying IT and other equipment. Although some acknowledged that the use of approaches such as hot desking could reduce the amount of additional cost, there were some cases where employers felt that more staff working part time would result in more equipment costs (ranging from uniforms to laptops used away from the office).



- 5.11 Concerns about implications for office space were raised particularly in relation to increasing job-sharing (and by some larger employers as well as smaller ones). While some envisaged that job-sharing would involve working entirely separate shifts and hence not have implications for office space, others envisaged that there would need to be a 'handover day' to ensure continuity of work between those job sharing and therefore creating additional demand for space which they felt could be difficult to manage if take-up was much higher.
- 5.12 Smaller workplaces were also particularly concerned about the HR management aspects of greater levels of job-sharing. They were concerned about difficulties in recruiting the right 'second candidate' but also of training employees on how to successfully manage a job share (including the communication that would be required between the two employees). There were also concerned about the monitoring that would be required to ensure both employees were doing an equal share of work in the role.

Roles where more part-time working or job-sharing could be accommodated

- 5.13 Even among those employers who felt that they could accommodate more part-time working, there were generally specific roles within their workplace that they felt this would be possible for. The factors which employers felt affected their ability to accommodate more part-time working or job-sharing were:
- Customer expectations (and therefore the extent to which individuals' roles were customer-facing).
 - Workflow patterns.
 - Whether individual's skill sets are seen to be 'niche'.
 - Levels of seniority.
- 5.14 **Customer expectations.** Employers felt there was greater potential to increase part-time working for staff in non-customer facing roles. For job sharing specifically but also to an extent for part time working some employers mentioned that it would be difficult to accommodate this type of flexible working for those in roles they felt required a continuity of staff across the week to respond to client needs. They felt that relationships with clients would suffer if individuals were not available throughout the week. This was less the case for roles that were more task-focussed (such as many of those in retail or hospitality).

"For the technical [staff] that I tend to employ, I want people in the office or working five days a week because we have to respond to short term deadlines often and we need those resources in place.

[Disadvantages:] It's just the lack of flexibility really, and not having people around when you need them. If people are only working three days a week . . . if you need to respond to somebody, you've got to wait till Monday. And with a lot of small projects it's not entirely suitable. On massive, big projects you don't have to respond so promptly or get things out so quickly to clients. It's a bit more flexible."

Business services, 100-249 staff, Birmingham

- 5.15 **Work flow.** Employers felt that it was particularly difficult to accommodate more part-time working in roles where the pattern of work is unpredictable (again more likely to be the case in client servicing roles). They felt it was easier to accommodate where there was a steady flow of work. Employers also felt that it was easier to accommodate more part-time working where individuals worked in relatively large teams.
- 5.16 Employers also felt that shift-based roles (particularly in retail and hospitality) also lent themselves well to part time working as long as those requesting it can be flexible about the shift time worked (job sharing was not felt to be as relevant for this type of work).



- 5.17 **Niche skills.** Some employers stated that it was more difficult to accommodate employees in some positions taking up part-time working and job sharing where roles were of a 'niche' nature. Roles requiring either a specific skill set or knowledge base were felt to be difficult to accommodate part time and / job-sharing because of perceived difficulties in recruiting the second suitable person for the job (if a job share), or just enough staff to be able to cope with workflow (for part time staff).

"Skills gaps are a problem. We have some quite skilled roles that are quite hard to recruit [for] and if we recruited someone for a fulltime position and they wanted to job share then it might be difficult to find that other person."

Public / third sector, 250+ staff, London

"We have highly skilled people so we have different departments. So you can't multiskill them. It's a big cost to the business if you want to multiskill everyone and job share."

Retail, 25-49, Birmingham

- 5.18 **Seniority.** Employers also saw more potential to increase part time working and job-sharing in roles below senior management level, aside from those who – as mentioned above – were in roles where they were expected to manage project work across the course of the week, or those in more 'niche' roles where recruitment for extra staff was difficult.
- 5.19 It was also felt by some employers that part time working and job sharing would be more difficult for senior management to take up. Firstly there were mentions from some employers of a general expectation for senior management to be 'available'. As with comments made about roles with a niche skill set, it was felt by some employers that accommodating senior management working part-time / doing job shares could result in difficulties in recruiting additional staff of a suitable calibre. Senior management staff were also seen as having a lot of different commitments to fit in during the week, meaning that, in practice, it would be difficult to fit these in if working part-time.



6 Flexitime and compressed hours

6.1 This chapter looks at take up of and attitudes towards flexitime and compressed hours. We discuss these together as the issues around the two times of flexible working were seen to be very similar by employers (because both lead to staff being absent from the office for part of the day or week).

Levels of flexitime working / working compressed hours

6.2 Around two thirds of employers participating in the qualitative research had some staff working flexitime, with those in the public/third and business services sectors being more likely to say staff were doing this at the moment. Smaller employers with between 25-99 employees were also more likely to say staff were working flexitime.

6.3 Compressed hours were taken up by staff in around a third of employers, with those in public/third and 'other' sectors being more likely to say staff were doing this at the moment. Large employers with 250 or more staff were the most likely to have staff working compressed hours.

6.4 Findings from the Work Life Balance employee survey show that around a quarter of employees work flexitime and 10% work compressed hours (Figures 6.1 and 6.2 below).

Figure 6.1: Trends in availability and take-up of flexitime, Work-Life Balance Surveys

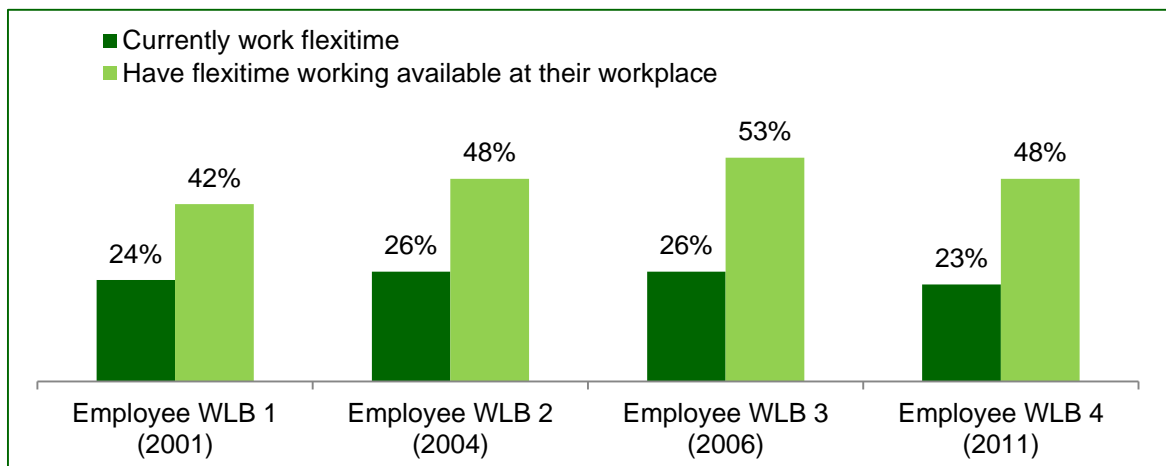
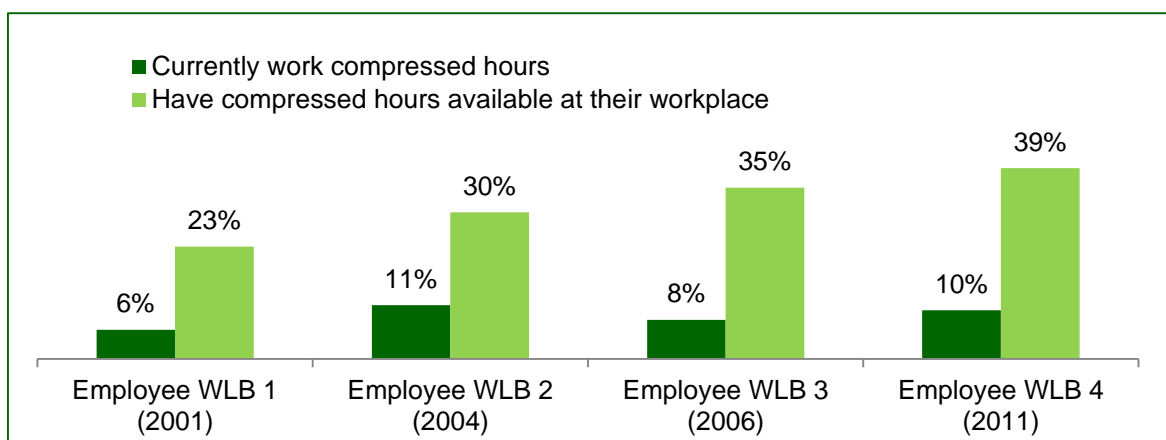


Figure 6.2: Trends in availability and take-up of compressed hours, Work-Life Balance Surveys



Base= All in employment WLB1 (7,561), WLB2 (2,003), WLB3 (2,081), WLB4 (1,871)

Source: Work Life Balance Employee Surveys 2001-2011



- 6.5 As Figure 6.1 shows, take-up of flexitime working has been stable over the decade covered by the Work-Life Balance studies. Take-up of compressed hours has fluctuated slightly but has remained at around the 10% level even though employees felt that the proportion of their workplaces allowing working in this way had increased. This perhaps indicates either a relatively limited appeal of this form of working (or perhaps a reluctance of employees to request working in this way).

Attitudes towards increasing flexitime/compressed hours

- 6.6 The direct advantages of compressed hours and flexitime were, for the most part, seen by employers as being for employees rather than bringing financial business benefits. However, as with part time working these kinds of flexible working were seen as being benefits employers could use to recruit or retain staff with commitments that work needed to be fitted around such as childcare needs. Leading from this, employers could benefit from more productive staff, better retention and a commercial advantage when recruiting.
- 6.7 Although generally most benefits were felt to be for the employee, one operational advantage mentioned in the context of staff starting and finishing at different times of the day was that the overall the working day (and the amount of work that could be done during it by a team of people) could potentially be increased by this approach.

“Better cover because we can maintain cover in the offices for longer hours rather than a traditional 9am to 5pm model. We quite often have staff here in at 8am [when one set of clients call], and you’ll find people here at 6.30pm and a lot of our work calls come at the end of the day.”

Public/third sector, 25-99 staff, Manchester

- 6.8 Generally employers considered the issues to be very similar for flexitime and compressed hours, but for some employers there seemed to be an underlying mistrust of compressed hours working, in terms of whether staff would fulfil all their obligations and whether the employer was getting ‘value for money’.
- 6.9 Around a third of employers felt that they would find it easy to accommodate more flexitime, but this dropped to a fifth for compressed hours. Larger workplaces and those with a positive attitude to flexible working (both through ethos and fit with business model) were more likely to feel they could accommodate both types of flexible working. Public sector workplaces were also more likely to feel they could accommodate increases in both types of working. Some retail employers felt they could accommodate more flexitime but none felt the nature of their work could accommodate compressed hours. The ‘other’ sector was also more able to accommodate compressed hours.
- 6.10 The largest employers were more likely to feel it would be easy to accommodate more flexitime and compressed hours, although there was less variation for medium and small employers. Larger employers were more likely to have more staff to provide cover (although still affected by workloads / nature of particular departments) and a dedicated HR department to manage / monitor it (c.f. mistrust re compressed hours).
- 6.11 Similarly to part-time working, the factors felt to impact on the ease of accommodating requests from employees to work flexitime or compressed hours were principally:
- Customer expectations (and hence whether the role was customer-facing or not).
 - Workflow / work patterns.
 - Nature of internal working relationships.



- 6.12 **Customer expectations:** Workplaces felt it would be easier to accommodate more flexitime and compressed hours working among staff not working in customer service roles (i.e. those where there was less chance of time-sensitive requests being made by clients). They felt that extending these forms of working to client-facing staff would result in either customer needs not being met because the member of the team responsible for servicing the customer was not in the office or it would result in an increased burden on the rest of the team to pick up the work. The issue of burden on other team members was particularly raised by smaller employers or workplaces where some staff operated in small teams where there would be fewer team members available to pick up the work (or no one if one person only was responsible for a particular project or client).

"[Flexitime is] difficult. Staff need to be available when clients call – 9am to 5pm. If a client phoned at 5 o'clock and somebody had gone home at 4pm, someone else would have to pick up the query and the client wouldn't be happy."

Business services, 25-49, Manchester

"We have to be here when the students are here. It's difficult to get someone to start at say 10am and finish at 6pm because the students aren't there for the last couple of hours and the employee isn't there for the first couple of hours."

Public/third sector, 250+ staff, Leeds

- 6.13 **Work flow:** Flexitime and compressed hours were felt to be less easy to accommodate for job roles where work was not seen to be 'planable'. Employers felt that roles where workloads were less predictable did not lend themselves well to accommodating absences for particularly times of the day or week. They felt those in job roles where fast turnaround work might need to be done at short notice could also find it difficult to make a compressed hours approach work in practice if work could not be passed on to someone else in the team (or there was no one else in the team). Hence again this was felt to be slightly less of an issue if the individual concerned worked for a large team.

"I think we'd discourage [compressed hours] just because of the pressures it would place on them just to compress everything in. We've had one person (ask for it) but when we explained the implications of what she'd have to do she took it back."

Business services, 100-249, Leeds

- 6.14 In addition, employers felt that roles based on shift-work (such as many of those in retail and hospitality) could not accommodate flexitime and compressed hours working. Employers felt that it would be difficult to operate shifts with flexible start and finish times as they are allocated on the basis of the number of staff needed at a particular time in the day so late arrival or early departure would have a negative impact on service levels. Workplaces with a high level of shift work felt that they already attempted to accommodate staff with childcare needs through adjusting the timings of the shifts rather than making them 'flexible' (e.g. having some shifts based on school start and finish times). However, these employers mentioned that they would struggle to accommodate much increase in demand for some of these shifts and were concerned about disadvantaging other staff by requiring them to work more antisocial hours or more on weekends.

"We can't change our customer times, when it's busiest. That's when we need our people really. It's not like an office based team where people can work from home. It's all based in store in front of the public."

Retail, 25-99 staff, London



- 6.15 **Internal working relationships:** Internal clients were cited as well as external clients as being reasons for employees needing to be in the office during throughout the day. Often it was felt that staff providing secretarial and other administrative support to colleagues needed to be on hand to provide support as and when needed. A law firm gave the example that if a solicitor's secretary was not in the office towards the end of the day when the business post was sent out then important documentation might not be sent out on time, with a detrimental impact for the client.

"The solicitors need the secretaries to be in the office to organise their diary for them...The post works from 7am to 5.30pm so we need staff to be there at the time."

Business services, 100-249 staff, Leeds

- 6.16 A more minor issue raised was potential difficulties in co-ordinating meetings among those working as part of a team if many staff were starting and finishing at different times.



7 Working from home / away from the office

7.1 This chapter looks at issues relating to working from home / away from the office covering both regular home working and more ad hoc arrangements.

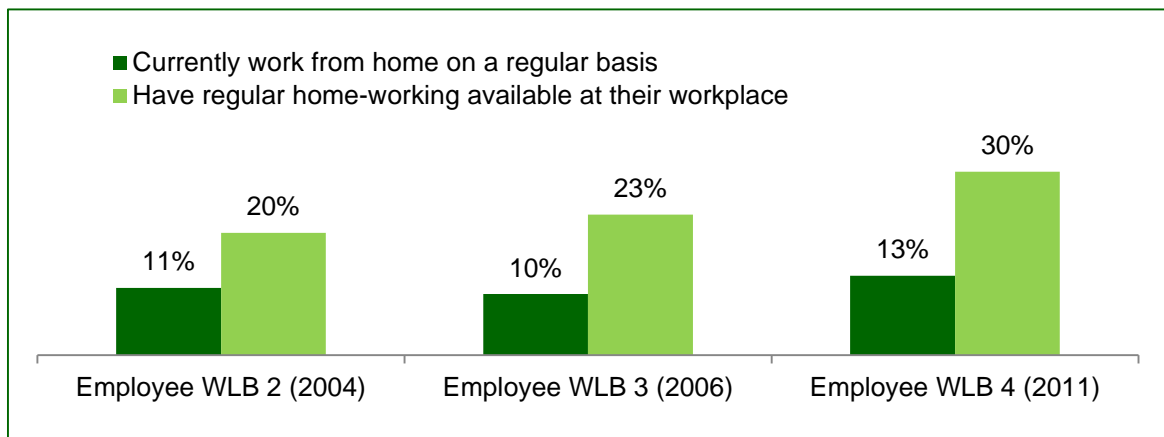
Levels of working from home

7.2 Four fifths of employers interviewed for the qualitative exercise stated that they had staff working from home on an ad hoc or regular basis. It was more common for arrangements for working at home to be ad hoc, but nonetheless, over a third of employers had staff who worked from home regularly. Although incidence of any working from home was relatively commonplace, on average only eight per cent of staff worked from home across the workplaces interviewed. (minimum 0; maximum 30%).

7.3 Working from home (either regularly or on an ad hoc basis) was more common in the public/third and business services sectors. It was uncommon in the retail and hospitality sectors, where employers stated that the nature of the work required presence on site.

7.4 Figures from the Work Life Balance employee surveys indicate that across the workforce as a whole, 13% of employees worked from home on a regular basis (Figure 7.1)

Figure 7.1: Trends in availability and take-up of regular home working, Work-Life Balance Surveys



Base= All in employment WLB2 (2,003), WLB3 (2,081), WLB4 (1,871)

Source: Work Life Balance Employee Surveys 2004-2011

7.5 As shown in Figure 7.1 the uptake of regular home working has remained relatively stable over the period covered by the Second to Fourth Work-Life Balance Surveys⁴. At the same time, the proportion of employees who feel that regular home working is available at their workplace has increased steadily since 2004.

⁴ It should be noted, that the questions regarding home working were asked in a different way in WLB 1 hence these figures are not shown. Secondly the WLB surveys only track regular (more 'formal') home working rather than ad-hoc home working.



Attitudes towards increasing working from home

- 7.6 Working from home / away from the office was seen as having advantages for both the employee and the employer.
- 7.7 The capacity to work away from the site was felt by some employers to lead to more agile working where less working time is lost e.g. if employees work from home after an offsite afternoon meeting (rather than ending the working day earlier if it was too far to go back to the office after the meeting) or making it possible to work while travelling (through the provision of laptops or smart phones).
- 7.8 Enabling working from home on an ad hoc basis was also mentioned as being a benefit to the employer in the event of travel to work becoming impossible or journey time being greatly increased by events such as the Olympics or bad weather such as snow or flooding.
- 7.9 Working from home / away from the office was also seen to be beneficial for productivity in relation to some specific elements of individuals' roles. Some employers felt that home working on an ad hoc basis (away from the distractions of the office) could make it easier for staff to focus on completing discrete tasks such as writing a report.

"It's very ad hoc, [home working] is only done for a particular purpose, producing a piece of work at home in peace and quiet."

Business services, 25-99 staff, Leeds

- 7.10 However, some employers felt that they still had technological barriers to allowing staff to work from home. Some employers stated that the software used by some or all employees was not accessible offsite. Others used systems or software that was paid for on a per licence basis (i.e. per computer / per user) and felt that the cost of increasing the number of licences to allow more employees offsite access was a barrier.

"Working from home is difficult because of our IT systems. You have limitations on the type of work you can do from home. It's usually only senior managers who can do it because of the systems that they use."

Public / third sector, 25-99 staff, Leeds

- 7.11 In some cases, these technological barriers could be addressed for ad hoc home working if not for regular home working. For example, this could involve the use of pool laptops for home working with the necessary software installed allowing staff to work on a discrete task.
- 7.12 Although not a widespread problem, employees having poor internet connectivity was also mentioned as a barrier to home working. One employer in Leeds said employees who lived in the more rural part of Yorkshire had a poor internet connection. This could pose a problem if they were required to log into their emails or access job files throughout the day.



- 7.13 Of the workplaces interviewed for the qualitative research, around a quarter felt it would be easy for them to accommodate more working from home. As with current take up, this was more common in the business services sector. Views were polarised in the public/third sector: while they were more likely than average to find it easy, they were also more likely to say it would be difficult (as opposed to being unsure). Those with a positive ethos towards flexible working and a neutral attitude were most likely to feel it would be easy for them to accommodate more home working. Those who found flexible working generally difficult to accommodate mostly felt increasing working from home would also be difficult.
- 7.14 Within employers open to increasing home working, factors felt to impact on the ease of accommodating requests from employees were principally related to::
- Whether the role demanded providing a face-to-face service to external or internal customers.
 - Whether the role required access to equipment/paper-based records.
 - Seniority.
- 7.15 **Customer/client facing roles.** Employers stated that there are some job roles that are not suited to home working because they rely on providing a face-to-face service to external customers (this accounted for a lot of roles in retail and hospitality workplaces). However some employers also felt that home working was not feasible for support staff whose roles are determined day-to-day by the needs of internal clients. Staff whose role it was to provide support to colleagues – for instance providing producing copies of documents, posting out documents, taking minutes of meetings, reception cover-were employed on the basis of being available to do various tasks throughout the day. For staff dealing with the post it was further mentioned that they needed to be available to deal with the post received in the morning and then to ensure outgoing mail was posted out at the end of the day,
- 7.16 **Access to equipment / paper-based records:** There were also mentions of staff, such as accounts staff, largely using paper-based records, and that taking these offsite would not be possible due to data security reasons (and sheer unwieldiness). Although not specifically mentioned by employers, this would also apply to staff needing to use equipment at the workplace (including photocopiers etc.).
- 7.17 **Seniority:** Some employers felt that home working was not always beneficial to more junior staff. It was felt that junior employees were more likely to need access to support and assistance in the course of doing their work, and communication via email or even telephone from home would be less effective than face to face communication at delivering this support. Although some of these employers might allow home working occasionally they would not be inclined to do it on a more permanent basis for staff development reasons. To some extent there seemed to be an issue of some employers being less likely to trust junior staff to work effectively at home.

“It’s probably easier with the more senior people because it’s a higher level of trust that they’ll undertake the work and can be left to their own devices”.

Business services, 25-99 staff, Leeds



8 Fairness in managing requests for flexible working

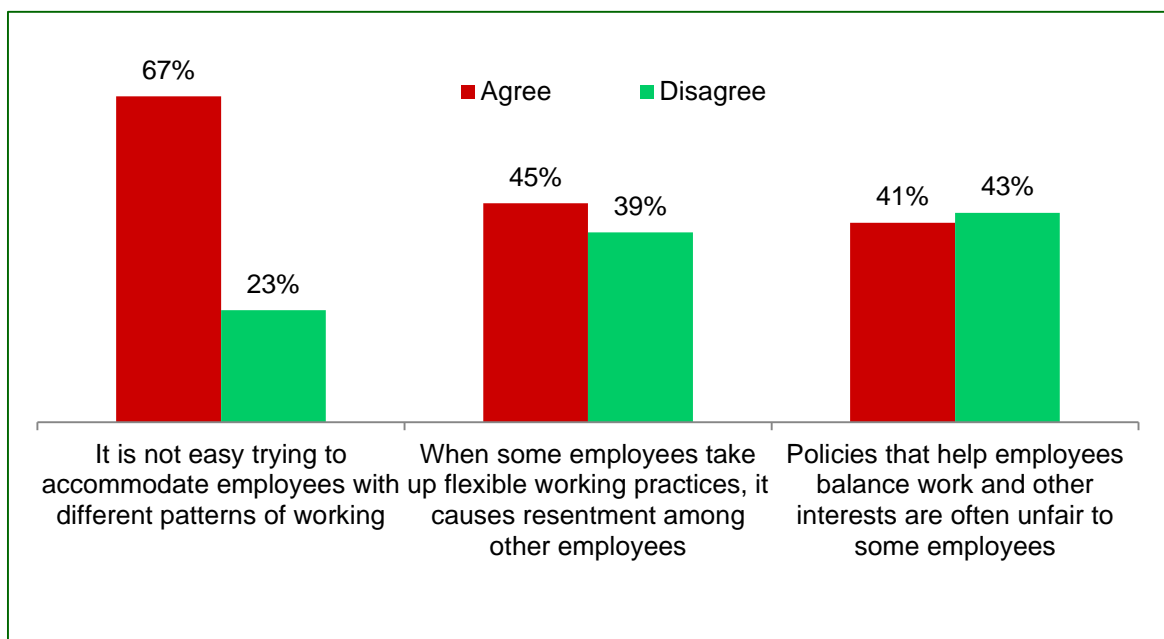
8.1 This chapter considers issues relating to fairness in managing flexible working. Firstly it looks at the evidence from the Work Life Balance Employer survey about concerns employers have about this issue. It then looks at the procedures that employers have in place to assess requests for flexible working and the role that line managers play in authorising them. The final section of the chapter brings together some of the findings discussed earlier in this report about which types of employees are able to take up flexible working, in particular focusing on staff on lower incomes.

Employer concerns about ensuring fairness in flexible working

8.2 Throughout the qualitative discussions with employers there were mentions of concerns about the impact of more flexible working on fairness in the workplace. A number of employers were concerned that accommodating flexible working might negatively impact on those not working in this way leaving them to cover a disproportionate share of work or to cover less popular / more antisocial hours.

8.3 Some of these concerns are also echoed in responses to the Work-Life Balance Employer Survey that was last conducted in 2007. Figure 8.1 below shows responses to several statements relating to ensuring fairness in the administration of flexible working.

Figure 8.1: Trends in availability and take-up of regular home working, Work-Life Balance Surveys



Base= All employers with 5+ staff (1,455)

Source: Third Work Life Balance Employer Survey 2007

8.4 As Figure 8.1 shows, the majority of employers responding to the WLB survey agreed that it was difficult to balance employees with different patterns of working. Employers were relatively evenly divided between those who agreed and disagreed that take up of flexible working could lead to resentment among others. Similarly opinions were split on the extent to which flexible working policies were unfair to some staff.



The role of managers in facilitating flexible working

8.5 Line managers were felt to play an important role in facilitating flexible working and ensuring fairness by all workplaces interviewed for the qualitative study. However, none of the line managers in the workplaces interviewed had been given specific training on managing flexible working, though in a minority of cases workplaces said flexible working was mentioned in management training courses. Instead line managers tended to rely on discussions with HR on how to handle flexible working requests on case by case basis.

8.6 Line managers were felt to have a key role in facilitating flexible working in three areas.

- *Case by case assessment of feasibility.* In many cases line managers were cited as the first point of contact for staff before requests were formally put in. Line managers, often together with HR, were then responsible for deciding whether flexible working could be accommodated within the scope of the needs of the business.
- *Responsibility to flexible workers.* Where flexible working requests were agreed line managers had a responsibility to the employee working flexibly for trying to ensure flexible working arrangements were happening in practice, rather than in name only. Line managers were generally to do this through organising of shift rotas and arranging allocating of project work across the team.
- *Responsibility to the organisation / customers.* Ultimately line managers were also felt to have a responsibility to the organisation and its clients for ensuring work was completed (whilst allowing staff to work flexibly). For instance, if a member of staff had been approved to work compressed hours it would be their responsibility to ensure work that needed to be done in their absence was completed. Good communication skills with staff were felt to be important to line managers achieving this.

“Where they are managers of people who are taking part in flexible working they ensure that all of their client needs are being met. And if they’re not they will speak to the person concerned.”

Business services, 25-99 staff, Leeds

“I haven’t had any formal training on flexible working but if there was a new directive, we would be made aware of it. If you’ve got to this position where you are a manager, you should know about managing staff and good staff relations and having good judgement and how to deal with these issues.”

Business services, 100-249 staff, Birmingham

“I think they need to shift their focus a little bit. I think it’s not to judge what people do based on the input it’s more the outcomes that they need to look at, so they need to be a little more relaxed about letting people get on with their jobs.”

Public/third sector, 25-49, Manchester

8.7 Employers were asked what sort of knowledge line managers required in order to facilitate flexible working fairly and effectively. As well as a practical knowledge of different types of flexible working it was also felt that line managers needed to know what sort of flexible working could be accommodated at their particular workplace. The general view was also that line managers needed to have a certain amount of ‘open-mindedness’ about flexible working and to be ‘on-board’ with the idea that there is more than one way of getting work done.



- 8.8 All in all, it appeared that a lot of the responsibility for the fair and effective administration of flexible working fell to line managers operating with limited formal training or guidelines on how to manage employees working flexibly. In some cases, the burden of responsibility may be quite slight if only a small proportion of their team are working flexibly, however this would be likely to increase if there was a drive for more flexible working.

Factors which influence an individual's ability to take up flexible working

- 8.9 The introduction of new types of rail tickets is predicated on staff being able to work flexibly in order to benefit from them (either by travelling outside the centre of the peak or not travelling into work every day). It is therefore important to identify whether certain groups of employees would be less able to work flexibly and therefore be disadvantaged (particularly if those groups of staff tend to be on lower incomes). Reactions to ticketing scenarios are covered in more detail in the next chapter, but this section explores more generally which groups of employees may be better able to take up flexible working arrangements than others.
- 8.10 Both job role and level of seniority within the workplace impact on the ability of employees to take up certain types of flexible working. The two job roles least able to take up flexible working are client-facing / customer service roles and staff support roles.
- 8.11 Those in **client-facing and customer service roles** can face certain restrictions in terms of ability to take up flexible working, depending on how much of their time is directly involved with interacting with customers. For example, employees in roles where a service to customers is being provided face to face or over the phone (in a workplace where it is not possible to redirect phones offsite) cannot typically work from home. Shift workers (e.g. in retail and hospitality) will have a great deal of flexibility in some ways (e.g. ability to choose shifts which fit in with their needs), but less flexibility to work offsite or to vary the start / end times of the shift. The need to interact with clients cuts across all levels of seniority in workplaces – it can apply to senior members of staff responsible for winning business / account handling, as well as senior professionals, such as lawyers and surveyors, as well as more junior staff members.
- 8.12 Those in **staff support roles** can also be less able to work flexibly. As mentioned in the chapter on Flexitime and Compressed hours (Chapter 6), roles involving secretarial, administrative support to other members of staff were often seen as being required on site during the whole working day, preventing them from taking up flexitime, compressed hours and home-working. The need to be on site was also mentioned by some workplaces in relation to their Accounts Department. Where this was mentioned it was partly related to the need to provide assistance to other members of staff but it was also due records being paper-based or having no offsite access to electronic documents.
- 8.13 **Level of seniority** also influenced employees' ability to take up flexible working.
- 8.14 Those in **more junior roles** were less able to work from home than other staff members. More senior staff might be prioritised for remote access to systems, because of the cost of licences, equipment or data security concerns. Some workplaces also felt home-working was less suitable for junior employees due to the need to give guidance and training to these employees on an on-going basis. It was felt this was often more easily and efficiently done face to face. For other types of flexible working, junior staff did not stand out particularly, suggesting that they would not be at a particular advantage or disadvantage. As discussed above, lower paid jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors would lend themselves well to part-time working, allowing these staff some flexibility.



- 8.15 Arguably, those in more junior job roles tend to be younger and therefore are less likely to have children or other caring responsibilities. This means that under current legislation employers are not required to offer flexible working to these employees, although this is likely to change in future (see further discussion in the next chapter).
- 8.16 Those in **middle management** generally have the greatest ability to take up flexible working than those in more junior roles. They were more likely to be prioritised for access to systems to allow them to work from home. Employers were also more likely to feel that middle ranking staff had the necessary skills to be able to work independently from home, without their work suffering through lack of the opportunity to ask for guidance. However, those with line management responsibilities could be restricted in their ability to be absent from the workplace part of the week (either through working from home or part-time working), since this role would involve supervision of more junior staff.
- 8.17 In theory, **senior management** could have the greatest potential to work flexibly. They tend to be most highly prioritised for system access and may not have a direct supervision or day-to-day client facing role that could potentially limit some middle managers from working more flexibly. However in reality senior management could be less able to work flexibly than middle managers due to both time demands and the 'niche' dimension to their role.
- 8.18 Senior management may face difficulties in working part-time and also to an extent flexitime and compressed hours due to the number of different time commitments they need to be able to meet. As well as project work and related meetings they will also have the added layer of departmental and/or Board level work and related meetings to fit in during the week, meaning they may have less control over their time and that flexible working is therefore more difficult to do in reality.
- 8.19 Aside from the time commitment needed, employers in some sectors may also be less willing or able to consider part time work or job shares for senior management if the skill set needed for the role means it is more difficult to recruit extra staff needed to share the workload.
- 8.20 In summary, there are a range of factors which affect an individual's ability to work flexibly and it is not necessarily the case that across the board those on lower incomes have less scope to work flexibly than others. However, the research does suggest that the following employees in lower paid roles are disadvantaged in their ability to work flexibly (and hence to benefit from ticket pricing that rewards travel outside of peak times): secretarial and other admin/support staff, more junior staff (at certain employers) and those in lower paid customer facing/service roles.**



9 Flexible working in the future

- 9.1 This chapter firstly looks holistically at the potential for workplaces to increase the proportion of staff working flexibly in the future bringing together the overall impact of the ability to accommodate different types of flexible working that have been discussed in early chapters. As well as potential to accommodate more flexible working, this chapter also looks at what employers believe will happen to demand in practice.

Potential to increase take up of flexible working

- 9.2 Taking a holistic view across all types of flexible working, about two thirds of the workplaces interviewed for the qualitative study had high or medium potential to increase flexible working, with around a quarter having high potential.
- 9.3 Potential was greatest in employers with medium uptake currently (between 11 and 50% of staff taking up part time working, working from home or another type of flexible working.) A third of these employers had high potential. There was also considerable potential to increase flexible working among those with low uptake currently – typically moving more into ‘medium’ than ‘high’ potential category, given that there were a number of perceived barriers to flexible working in these employers. Understandably, those with high uptake currently were less likely to have scope to do more.
- 9.4 Unsurprisingly, an employer’s overall attitude to flexible working also influenced their views on the potential they had to increase it. Those with a positive ethos towards flexible working were most likely to have high or medium potential to increase it. This was less the case with those who found it easy because it fitted with their business model. This is likely to be because the employers most commonly in this group (such as in the retail sector) could be very flexible in some ways and were already doing a lot e.g. part time, shift working, but were less flexible in terms of the timing of those shifts or the ability to work off site, leaving less scope to do more. There was still potential among those with a neutral attitude and those who currently found it difficult (around half had at least moderate potential). They may need more of a ‘push’ for this to happen however and for those finding it difficult, it might only be possible for individuals in specific roles / departments or for a certain proportion of staff to do this.
- 9.5 There were also some variations by sector. The public/third sector (who tended to have a positive ethos) and ‘other’ sector offered the greatest potential, with over two thirds having at least moderate potential to increase levels of flexible working. They were also most likely to anticipate an increase in flexible working in the future. Retail employers had the lowest potential – as already mentioned, they had high levels of part time working, but little scope to introduce other types of flexible working. The business services sector fell in the middle – they have low current uptake and some scope to increase, but a number of barriers relating to client servicing needs and the nature of particular job roles will restrict uptake to some extent.
- 9.6 Medium and large employers were a little more likely to have medium or high potential to increase flexible working. However, location did not have much bearing on potential to increase flexible working.
- 9.7 These assessments of potential are based on workplaces’ own views of their ability to accommodate greater levels of flexible working. It is possible to speculate that greater levels of flexible working could be achieved if some of the key barriers that have been discussed in previous chapters could be addressed. The key barriers that have been discussed in relation to flexible working are shown in the table below along with some observations about the likelihood of these being addressed to result in higher levels of flexible working.



Barrier	Whether / how it could be moved
Staff needed to cover at key periods / need to be available for face-to-face meetings with clients in office hours	Employers recognise some flexibility 'around the edges', but this is seen to be quite a fundamental barrier for staff in certain roles. Depending on the extent of client-facing contact needed, employers could perhaps be persuaded to consider options involving core hours e.g. between 10 and 4 during which the majority of meetings would take place but with flexibility around this.
Cultural expectation of 9 – 5 hours	This is of most concern for employers in relation to client expectations, in particular being available to meet / respond to client needs at certain times of day, although it also relates to support staff providing a service to 'internal clients'. Again, persuading employers to consider a 'core hours' approach might act as a more palatable alternative to a full flexitime approach.
Increased costs in IT hardware / software to facilitate home working	Costs may come down in future (in line with a general trend).
More time / resource needed to manage staff if working at different times / on different days	In a tighter labour market, this may be something businesses are willing to bear, in order to attract and retain the right staff. Potentially only an issue if a large proportion of staff were working flexibly.
Concerns about workplace dissatisfaction (adverse effect on those not working flexibly)	To some extent this can be dealt with through effective management, although it could become more of an issue if flexible working became more prevalent.

Anticipated trends in flexible working in future

- 9.8 As discussed, a reasonable proportion of employers stated that they would have capacity to accommodate higher levels of flexible working among their staff. However, as demonstrated in previous chapters, for the most part employers view flexible working to have greater benefits for the employee working flexibly than for the employer that they work for. This means that, even in workplaces with scope to accommodate more flexible working, employers were rarely actively working to encourage greater take-up. Hence, the potential discussed in the previous section really relates to the potential to accommodate more requests from employees if they were to be made.
- 9.9 In practice, around half of employers stated that they were anticipating increases in take up of flexible working in the next five years and most of these were anticipating modest increases. A third of workplaces did not think take up would increase while the remainder were unsure. As might be expected, workplaces with high or medium potential to accommodate more flexible working were more likely to anticipate an increase in take up of flexible working in the next five years. Most employers with low potential did not envisage an increase in take up. Linked to the findings by potential, the public/third and 'other' sectors were more likely to anticipate an increase. Medium sized employers (with 100-249 employees) and employers based outside London were also more likely to do so.
- 9.10 Employers who anticipated an increase in take up of flexible working at their workplace in the next five years cited the following factors:



- An anticipated change in workforce demographics specific to their workplace, such as younger staff having families
 - Trends in workforce demographics more widely, including:
 - an increase in part-time working due to phased retirement. Changes in legislation now enable people to continue to work while drawing a pension.
 - more women returning to work after having children, if childcare becomes more affordable (at the time of the survey, a range of measures to tackle this barrier to workforce participation were being discussed in the media, such as tax incentives and allowing nurseries and childminders to increase the ratio of children to staff members).
 - more women coming into traditionally male-dominated industries (leading to a greater uptake in flexible working, since women tend to be more likely to want to do this).
 - Technology - there have been improvements in broadband connectivity and IT developments such as VPN (virtual private networks) have become more commonplace, meaning that working from home, at least on an occasional basis, has become more of a viable option. This trend could continue in future.
 - A drive to produce cost savings through reducing office space. This would be facilitated through the introduction of hot desking, with staff being encouraged to work from home more.
 - Emphasis on attracting a higher calibre workforce – offering flexibility could attract women returners looking for work to fit round caring responsibilities. This was only mentioned by one or two employers, but could become more of a driver in a more buoyant economic climate, where employers would need to work harder to attract staff (not just women, but staff more generally).
 - Staff becoming more aware of the right to request flexible working and flexible working becoming more accepted in society in general.
 - Legislative change – although, as mentioned earlier, most employers already offered flexible working to all employees, a third felt that plans to give all staff the right to request flexible working could increase the proportion of staff working flexibly (since more staff might be encouraged to consider it).
- 9.11 While there are a few factors here that are employer-driven, e.g. a need to reduce office, changes in technology, for the most part these are employee-related drivers further emphasising that employers generally anticipate that they will continue to take a relatively reactive approach to flexible working over the next five years. Focusing just on employer-related drivers, IT developments to facilitate working from home and reducing office space are trends which are likely to affect 'office-based' workplaces, for example in the business services, public and third sectors. The drive to reduce office space may be more attractive to businesses in London as well, given the high cost of office space in the capital (although it was mentioned by a small number of employers in London and elsewhere).



9.12 In terms of the impact these trends might have on travel patterns, an increase in phased retirement and reducing office space are likely to lead to an increase in part-time working and more working from home respectively. This in turn is likely to increase the number of people commuting to work less than five days a week. For the other factors, a range of impacts on travel behaviour can be anticipated. For example, if more women with children stayed in/rejoined the workforce, this could lead to an increase in 'part-time commuting', through a range of types of flexible working, such as working part-time, job-sharing or working compressed hours or working from home on a regular basis. The needs of workers with young children could also fit in, to some extent, with travelling outside peak times, for example, coming into work early and leaving early, in order to be back in time to collect children from childcare (or coming in late and leaving late if dropping off the children). The need to stagger working hours, in coordination with their partner, is likely to be more of a factor for rail commuters, particularly in the London area, where employees are likely to have a longer journey to work. Having children or other caring responsibilities is the main 'push' factor for employees at present, but with flexible working becoming more accepted generally, more staff might consider requesting it.

The role of Government

9.13 Around a third of employers saw a role for Government in encouraging flexible working. The types of roles mentioned were:

- Provision of information and advice for employers and staff on flexible working. Employers felt that this could highlight the benefits for businesses and provide advice on how to manage it, for example, how to prioritise requests (for example, where only a certain number could be accommodated in a team). It was also suggested that Government needed to demonstrate understanding of the constraints for small businesses and certain sectors.
- Promotion of case studies of businesses who have generated tangible business benefits from flexible working.
- Improving internet connections speeds helping to make working from home a more viable option for employees living in rural areas where connection speeds are slow.
- Introduction/support of policies to make childcare more affordable – this was only mentioned by respondents in relation to childcare providers, but as discussed earlier, tax incentives and allowing nurseries and childminders to increase the ratio of children to staff members have been discussed recently.



10 Reaction to possible season ticket scenarios

- 10.1 The chapter presents the reactions of employers to two possible future rail travel scenarios. In order to gauge reaction and initial thoughts from employers about take up of new ticketing options under consideration, two different train ticket pricing scenarios were put to the employers surveyed:
- **Scenario 1:** This scenario was related to the price of train season tickets. Season tickets would be designed such that it is more expensive to travel on the busiest trains in the commuter rush hour (the centre of the peak) and passengers travelling on quieter trains before or after the busiest commuter trains (the shoulder peak) would be rewarded. The morning centre of the peak was defined as 8 – 9 am, while different definitions were used for the evening for London (5.30 – 6.30 pm) vs. outside London (5 - 6 pm).⁵
 - **Scenario 2:** This would offer more flexible ticketing for those commuting part-time (e.g. those who work part-time or work from home part of the week) so that their season ticket or travel card took into account that they were not making as many journeys as those travelling into work five days a week. Currently, commuters who travel less than five days a week typically pay more per journey they make than those who travel five days a week if they purchase a season ticket.
- 10.2 In each case, respondents were asked what impact they felt the introduction of each scenario would have on requests for flexible working, how easy they would find to accommodate it and whether any groups of employees would be better able to take up this sort of ticketing than others. Based on these responses, the likely impact on travel behaviour has been derived.

Impact of scenario 1

- 10.3 This scenario was felt to offer some possible benefits for staff, but few positive impacts for employers were identified. Employers would be unlikely to actively look to make adjustments to enable staff to take advantage of the new rail prices and hence the impact of the pricing approach would be determined by the extent to which it provoked employees to request flexible working arrangements and then the likelihood of employers to accommodate these requests.
- 10.4 Around two thirds of workplaces felt that they would be able to accommodate at least some staff travelling to work avoiding the centre of the peak; in just over a third of cases this would be easy for them to accommodate (either because existing working hours/flexitime arrangements allowed for it or because it would be easy for staff to change their working hours). The remainder caveated this by saying that they could only accommodate a few additional requests from staff looking to change working patterns to avoid the centre peak or that it would only be possible for staff in certain roles or those working certain shifts. The main factor underlying this was a need to have staff available during certain hours to meet customer needs.
- 10.5 Most of these workplaces felt that requests for flexible working would increase if Scenario 1 was introduced – for those not anticipating an increase (but able to accommodate work patterns avoiding the centre of the peak), this was because their current work patterns already allowed staff to travel at these times.

⁵ Additionally, it was explained to respondents that they would qualify for a cheaper ticket if they arrived at the city centre outside of the centre of the peak in the morning (but they could start the journey within the centre of the peak). In the evening, they would qualify if they started their journey in the city centre outside the centre of the peak (but they could travel through the centre of the peak).



“We start at 9.30 so a lot of people could finish their journey just after 9am and take advantage of that. A lot of people don’t finish until 6.30pm anyway, so it wouldn’t have a huge impact.”

Business services, 250+ staff, London

I think we could accommodate that anyway in the existing flexitime working. A lot of people do that anyway. Lots of people get here very early and leave at four and as long as you get your work done, that’s fine .It depends on the price. Travelling by train – especially if you’re local – is still a lot cheaper than parking, if you don’t have a parking space and the cost of running a car. So I think most people would just accept it if they had to or you could start at half seven or arrive a ten, so most people are with less than an hour’s commuting. So if you were to catch a train at 9:00 you’d still get here in time. Pricing: in the West Midlands it’s not as costly as London and percentage price increases on a relatively low base are still very good value compared to the cost of owning, running and paying for parking for a car.

Business services, 250+ staff, Birmingham

I think our current flexitime policy would cover it... Potentially people who have to be in during set hours would be disadvantaged– there is a team that has to be on an on-call rota so occasionally they would need to be in the office for 8am – or be in later and stay till 6pm. The communications team and we have people who are on the contact line to our supporters (i.e. outside the organisation) so they need to be in during the normal 9 to 5 to ensure a presence within the team.

Public/third sector, 250+ staff, London

- 10.6 For most of the remaining employers, the need to work at peak times / during the hours when customers needed them was the main reason why they felt that they would not be able to accommodate more requests for flexible working under this scenario. Some of these employers anticipated that more staff would request to work flexibly to avoid fare increases, but stated they would find these requests difficult to accommodate. Only one employer specifically said they anticipated staff would use other modes of transport.

“It would not be possible. We are contracted to provide a service between certain times”

Retail, 25-49, London

I think it would be very difficult, but off the top of my head I couldn’t say why. But obviously due to the customer service element of our role, not only here but at Head Office too. Our sites are our customers so we need to be there for them at the times that they’re in as well.

‘Other’ sector, 100-249 staff, Manchester

- 10.7 By sector, the clearest pattern was that retail workplaces were least likely to envisage accommodating requests from staff wanting to avoid the centre of the peak, to benefit from this ticketing scenario. The public/third sector and ‘other’ sector were most likely to feel they would be able to accommodate requests easily, while the business services sector had more reservations.
- 10.8 The largest workplaces (those with 250+ employees) were most likely to envisage being able to accommodate desires to change working patterns under this scenario easily. There were no strong differences by region.



- 10.9 Those with a positive ethos towards flexible working (many of whom came from the public/third sector) would find this scenario easiest to accommodate. Linked to the point about the retail sector, those who were positive about flexible working because it fitted with their business model would find it hardest to accommodate staff travelling at different times. .
- 10.10 The majority of those with medium potential to increase flexible working would be able to accommodate more staff travelling outside the centre of the peak, indicating that there is likely to be some scope to shift travel behaviour through the introduction of this ticketing scenario. Over half of high and low potential employers could also accommodate more requests to travel outside of the centre peak. For the two high potential employers, who would not be able to accommodate this scenario, the need to start work at 9am was the main issue for one (although their core hours were only until 3 or 4pm, meaning the evening would not be a problem). For the other, a retail employer, its own peak hours coincided with peak travel times so staff would be needed at those times.
- 10.11 As well as the concerns already mentioned, a few employers felt the new ticketing could be divisive, if certain staff were able to benefit, but not others.

“Yes, I think we’d see an increase because people want to benefit from the cheaper rates. If rates were to go up and it became a lot more expensive I think those in the lower bands would request it a lot more. I think it would be something that, if we started to get a lot of requests through we would have to sit down and form a plan. If it was something that we could accommodate – we don’t want to disadvantage some staff and not other staff. I think it would be really difficult as we are a traditional law firm in that we do work 9-5, so solicitors expect their secretary to be here between those hours. I think it would cause a bit of friction between some staff.”

Business services, 100-249 staff, Leeds

“We could accommodate some people doing it but I think we’d have a problem if there were a lot of people wanting to request it. And I do think there probably would be. I think we’d probably find it difficult to formulate some kind of consistent approach to ensure that there was fairness. I think we could only accommodate less than 5%. There’d be concern about core hours being covered. We’d have to look at changing the commitments we make to customers about the hours we cover or the level of responsiveness we do. I think we could accommodate it to a certain extent but I think it would be difficult.

Public/third sector, 250+ staff, London

- 10.12 Reflecting the influence of job role on ability to work flexibly, around two thirds mentioned that staff in certain roles would be more able to take advantages of this approach to ticketing. They included office staff, non-customer facing staff and shift workers. Most also identified groups of staff who would be disadvantaged. In most cases, the client/customer-facing nature of their role determined this, and depending on the sector this could apply at all levels of seniority. Among better paid staff, this could include lawyers, surveyors and others in senior client-facing roles. Middle income staff could include accounts and IT helpdesk staff. Among lower paid staff, this could include waiters and kitchen staff, shop assistants, call centre staff, receptionists and secretaries who were needed at set times of the day.
- 10.13 As discussed in Chapter 3, the Labour Force Survey 2011 identified that rail commuters were more likely to come from managerial and professional occupations, with employees in these occupations accounting for two thirds of rail commuters (67% compared with 42% of the workforce as a whole). Additionally, however, staff in administrative and secretarial roles were also more likely to travel by rail (15% of rail commuters compared with 11% of the workforce as a whole). Staff in caring, leisure and other service occupations and sales and customer service occupations (including shop assistants) were



underrepresented among rail commuters and together accounted for only eight per cent of rail commuters. Thus, it might be expected that administrative and secretarial staff would be the group on lower incomes who would be most likely to be disadvantaged by the introduction of this type of ticketing. As these figures suggest, given the high cost of a rail season ticket, particularly in the London area, it is unlikely it would be cost effective for workers on the very lowest incomes to take a job requiring them to travel to their workplace by train, so they would be less likely to be affected by this scenario. Nevertheless, certain groups of middle and lower income staff could be affected, such as support staff and junior and middle ranking staff in professional and associate professional occupations.

Impact of scenario 2

- 10.14 Again, the benefits of this scenario were felt to accrue only to the employee. Employers mainly saw disadvantages for themselves (if a lot of staff wanted to change working patterns), such as increased recruitment and management costs, cost of equipment to enable working from home and isolation of home workers.
- 10.15 Around a quarter of employers felt that this scenario could result in more flexible working among their workforces. As with Scenario 1, there were caveats – some employers felt they would only be able to facilitate requests to take advantage of this approach from staff in certain job roles or if only a few people made requests. Employers were most likely to anticipate an increase in working from home in response to this scenario, but compressed hours, working at other sites and part time working were also mentioned.

“I think that would be good so if you just had something that takes off an amount, a bit like an Oyster card where it only takes off for whatever journey you’re doing. So, if you’ve only done 3 journeys in a week it only takes account of that. I think we probably would (have an increase in requests). I think we’d probably get more requests to do things like compressed hours so that they’re working less, or where they do 3 days from the office and 2 from home.”

Public/third sector, 25-99 staff, Leeds

Yes, I do. I think they would [request to work flexibly]. I personally would do that. You’d get more requests for home working and compressed hours (but not part time). More requests for those flexible working arrangements which require [staff] to come in maybe three days a week instead of five. I can see more take up of that especially in the environment in this building where there’s 3,000 staff at the moment – definitely. [Because] we don’t have the public walking in to this building. So they’re either contacting us by phone or we’re more policy/intranet/IT based in terms of being able to respond if you’re working from home. I can work from home quite easily.

Public/third sector, 250+ staff, Birmingham

I’m not sure about people working from home but compressed hours and the other things I think it would be that category. I think it would benefit them because they’re able to be flexible in their hours with start times and finish times, whereas the others are more restricted.

‘Other’ sector, 100-249 staff, London

- 10.16 The remaining three quarters of employers did not anticipate any changes to the working patterns of staff in response to this scenario. The main reason for this was that they felt that it would benefit those already working part time or from home, but would not be a sufficient driver in itself to encourage staff to work differently (particularly for part time working). However around a quarter of employers



anticipated that this scenario might prompt more requests for flexible working but they felt they would be unable to accommodate staff wanting to commute part time – meeting customer needs, having sufficient cover and increased recruitment / management of staff were the reasons mentioned.

“I think if [staff choose to] go part time it’s due to work life balance, care issues, or it might be that they’re doing a course, or they’re [volunteering]. It wouldn’t normally be to get around a cost [or travel] issue.”

Public/third sector, 25-99 staff, Manchester

“It would be good for the people working part time already but it would not be the deciding factor in working part time (part time staff tend to be the lawyers, mainly women, with new children). If people wanted to work from home on certain days to be able to take this up, it would be difficult as we only have a certain number of licences to get into the online system (and it’s expensive to get a lot more). Also it might be difficult for lawyers to be able to do this in practice as some weeks they might be needed in the office every day.”

Business services, 100-249 staff, London

- 10.17 Given the relative cost of a rail season ticket for employees travelling into London versus the rest of the country, it comes as no surprise that London employers were more likely to anticipate an increase in requests for flexible working to benefit from this ticketing scenario. This meant that they were slightly more likely to feel that this scenario could result in more flexible working. It also meant that there were more instances of employers who would not be able to accommodate requests. Concerns were related for the most part to the impact on their business of more flexible working (as outlined at the start of this section), but in one case, this was because they anticipated there would be too much demand, which could be seen as a ‘London-specific’ issue. The cost of train tickets was less likely to be seen as an issue by employers outside London, with some employers saying that staff could get day tickets or that the number of days travelled made little difference to the price.
- 10.18 Ability to accommodate staff wanting to take up this ticketing scenario by commuting part-time also increased markedly by size of workplace, with nearly half of the largest workplaces able to accommodate it, as opposed to only a minority of smaller workplaces.
- 10.19 Sector also had some bearing, with the public/third sector and, to a lesser extent, the ‘other’ sector most likely to be able to allow staff to benefit from this scenario. Employers in the business services sector were most likely to feel that it would be a benefit for staff already commuting part time but the introduction of these tickets would not drive change in itself. Since part-time working is quite common in the retail sector, these staff would already be able to benefit from it. As already discussed, working from home is less relevant to the retail sector.
- 10.20 Those with a neutral attitude and those with a positive ethos towards flexible working were most able to accommodate this scenario. Those who found it difficult to accommodate flexible working generally were most likely to find it difficult to accommodate this scenario.
- 10.21 Nearly half of those with medium potential to increase flexible working would be able to accommodate this scenario, compared with around a fifth of those with low potential.
- 10.22 The main groups of staff employers felt would benefit were those who already worked part time or from home. This would include staff balancing work with looking after children / other caring responsibilities, who are more likely to work part-time.



“Part time staff would benefit because they’re only paying for what they use, rather than paying for five days when they’re only using three days out of it, for instance.”

Public/third sector, 25-99 staff, Leeds

10.23 The groups staff identified as being disadvantaged were those whose job required them to work on site (e.g. administrative and customer service staff, waiters and kitchen staff in hotels, operational staff such as cleaners, refuse collectors). It is likely that staff in some of these roles would be less likely to be rail commuters, although as with Scenario 1, administrative and secretarial staff might be particularly disadvantaged. More junior / lower paid staff in customer facing roles could also be disadvantaged.



11 Conclusions

- 11.1 There is quite a lot of scope to increase flexible working, with around two thirds of the workplaces surveyed having high or medium potential to increase it.
- 11.2 Employers would find part-time working easiest to accommodate more of in future, although this is of course only likely to be of interest to employees wanting to work (and earn) less in order to gain time for other commitments. Some growth in part-time working is anticipated through phased retirement and more women returning to work after having children (if plans to tackle the affordability of childcare take effect).
- 11.3 There is little to suggest that other types of flexible working will increase without changes in “environmental” factors. Employers see limited business benefits from flexible working, so are unlikely to actively encourage it. Any increases are therefore more likely to be led by employees.
- 11.4 The suggested ticketing scenarios could produce the impetus to increase flexible working.
- 11.5 The sectors that are most likely to accommodate increases in flexible working (either from this or in response to other factors) are the public/third sector and ‘other’ sector. A quarter of rail commuters work in the public sector.
- 11.6 The retail sector has the lowest potential to increase: they have high levels of part time working already, but little scope to introduce other types of flexible working. Existing part-time workers would be able to benefit from part time season tickets, but the retail employers surveyed were least likely to be able to accommodate changes in working hours to avoid the centre of the peak, as they needed staff to be at work to cover their busiest periods, which tended to coincide with needing to travel at peak times (although those working shifts outside these times would benefit in any case). The retail sector accounts for only eight per cent of rail commuters and therefore working practices in this sector are less likely to influence rail travel behaviour overall.
- 11.7 The business services sector falls in the middle – they have low current uptake of flexible working and some scope to increase, but a number of barriers relating to client servicing needs and the nature of particular job roles will restrict uptake (and ability to benefit from the ticketing scenarios) to some extent. This sector is important in that it employs two fifths of rail commuters.
- 11.8 High and medium usage of flexible working was more common among smaller establishments, (although in these the actual volumes of staff working flexibly could be relatively small). However, the potential to increase flexible working is higher in medium and large establishments (those with 100+ employees) and the largest workplaces (with 250+ staff) are most likely to be able to accommodate the potential ticketing scenarios.
- 11.9 Where a business is located did not emerge as a strong driver for flexible working, since a business’s activity and capacity to manage flexible working were key factors affecting existing and potential take up, and these are related more to a business’s sector and size. Employers based in London had lower take up and less positive attitudes towards flexible working, but there was no difference in potential to increase flexible working by region, suggesting this may not be a generalised pattern. Although region did not affect views of Scenario 1, there are indications that Scenario 2 may have more impact in London. It is likely, given that the cost of rail commuting is higher in London, that London commuters will be more likely to respond to opportunities to save money on travel (through either scenario), than elsewhere in the country (assuming their work enables them to do so).



- 11.10 Scenario 1 (incentives to travel outside the centre of the peak) has greater scope to shift travel behaviour than Scenario 2 (part time commuters to pay same per journey as full time commuters). Scenario 2 is seen as being more of a benefit for those already commuting part-time (i.e. mainly those working part time for other reasons). Employers saw fairly modest potential to increase working from home, as there were a number of barriers associated with it.
- 11.11 There are definitely some concerns over fairness, in terms of who can benefit from changes in ticket pricing structures, but it is not necessarily always the lowest earners that are least likely to benefit. Among those in lower paid roles, staff in secretarial and other admin/support staff, more junior staff at certain employers and those in lower paid customer facing/service roles are more likely to be disadvantaged.
- 11.12 If there is potential to cater for commuters who are able to travel outside the centre of the peak / not travel into work sometimes but not always in the formulation of the new ticketing options, this could help to achieve the desired changes in travel behaviour (bearing in mind that even small changes could help). This could include those who are able to work from home occasionally, but not on a regular basis, those who could avoid the centre of the peak some days, but would need to be available for client meetings, if they happened to be scheduled for 9am or 5pm or those who had to be in the office for 9am, but quite often worked late, leaving work after 6pm.
- 11.13 Clearly, work obligations play a key role in employees' travel patterns, but there may also be scope to explore employees' interest in and ability to do other things before or after work to relieve pressure on the transport system, particularly for those with less flexibility in relation to their work. This could include going to the gym before or after work and other leisure activities after work (providing opportunities for partnerships between train companies and leisure providers).

