

Flexible Working Employers Survey

Results from the Employers Survey

2003



CENTRAL SURVEY UNIT

The methodology and structure of the survey referred to in this document are derived from work carried out in Great Britain by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

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Executive summary

General information about the business

- ? The majority of businesses in the survey were private sector establishments (76%).
- ? Just over half of the businesses in the survey were single independent establishments (52%).
- ? Nearly three in ten businesses were in the wholesale and retail sector (28%).
- ? The majority of businesses were small businesses with 37% having between 5-9 employees and 38% having 10-24 employees.
- ? Relatively few businesses had no female employees (4%).

Open for business – hours of work

- ? The most common form of working arrangement was for a business to open standard hours from Monday to Friday (40%).
- ? Only 8% of workplaces worked 24 hours, seven days a week.
- ? The majority of businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector (85%) were open seven days a week. The majority of businesses in the manufacturing sector (65%) were open standard hours from Monday to Friday
- ? Businesses that provided no flexible working practices (58%) were more likely to be open standard hours from Monday to Friday than businesses that had 1-3 flexible working practices (36%).

Provision, eligibility and take-up of flexible working practices

- ? 87% of employers said that they provided one or more flexible working practices to their employees.
- ? Smaller businesses with 5-9 employees (17%) were more likely than businesses with 50 or more employees (6%) to have no flexible working practices in the workplace.
- ? Part-time working was the most common type of flexible working practice with approximately a quarter of employers (83%).
- ? The next most common flexible working practice was working flexitime (26%).
- ? The least common flexible working practices were working a compressed working week and working from home (7% and 7% respectively).
- ? Nearly seven in ten employers said the main reason for not providing flexible working practices was that it was not feasible or compatible with the nature of their work (68%).
- ? Nearly two in five employers who provided working reduced hours for a limited period (37%) had a written policy, while employers who provided job sharing were more likely to have a written policy (48%).
- ? Working school term-times was different from the other practices in that employers were more likely to say that the practice was restricted to some employees only (56%) than that all staff were eligible (44%).

- ? Approximately six in ten businesses who said part-time work was restricted to some employees, identified managers (60%) and/or full-time employees (55%) as employees who were not eligible.

Changes in work status

- ? A quarter of employers said requests from employees to change from part-time to full-time employment would be acceptable in all or nearly all cases (25%) while nearly two-thirds said that acceptability would depend upon the circumstances under which the request was made (63%).
- ? Just under a third of businesses with 25-49 employees (32%) were likely to accept in all cases a request for a member to move from part-time to full-time employment compared to 20% of businesses with 5-9 employees.
- ? Businesses in the health and social work and other community services sectors (67%) were likely to say that they would accept a request from a female worker returning from maternity leave to change from full-time to part-time employment in all or nearly all cases. Just over a third of employers in the manufacturing sector (35%) said the same.
- ? Nearly three-quarters of employers (72%) said that female staff would keep their existing job and its level of seniority in all cases if they changed from full-time to part-time employment.
- ? Just under than six in ten employers (57%) said that other employees could keep their existing job and its level of seniority if they changed from full-time to part-time employment.
- ? One in five employers (20%) had received a request from at least one employee to change from full-time to part-time working in the last 12 months.
- ? Nearly a quarter of businesses said that the impact on the business would be taken into consideration when deciding whether an employee could change from full-time to part-time employment (23%).
- ? Fewer than three-quarters of employers (73%) were aware of their legal duty to give consideration to requests to work flexibly from parents of children under 6 or of disabled children under 18.

Promoting flexible working practices in the workplace

- ? Just over two-fifths of employers (43%) reported that managers promoted the flexible working practices that were available to employees in the workplace.
- ? Businesses that were part of a larger organisation (50%) were more likely to promote flexible working practices compared to single independent establishments (37%).
- ? The most common method of informing staff about flexible working practices was by word of mouth with two-thirds of all employers (66%) reporting this method.
- ? Nearly three-quarters of employers reported that senior managers consulted employees or their representatives about the introduction of flexible working practices effecting their establishment (72%).

Managerial discretion

- ? Just less than half of employers reported that managers generally had to follow a set procedure (46%) while just over half were allowed to apply their own judgement (53%).
- ? It was line managers and supervisors in businesses that recognised unions (79%), in the public sector (76%), with 50 or more employees (75%) and that were part of a larger organisation (59%) who generally had to follow a set procedure.
- ? If the policy was set at head office or regionally, managers were less likely to be allowed to apply their own judgement (25%).
- ? The majority of line managers had the authority to make decisions on whether an employee they supervise can leave at short-notice to deal with a family emergency (94%) and on the start and finishing times of their employees (68%).
- ? Fewer managers had the authority to make decisions on whether employees they supervise can work at home (37%) or if they can have some other alternative work patterns (54%).

Attitudes, advantages, disadvantages

- ? The majority of businesses said they thought that people work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives (92%).
- ? Two-thirds of employers (66%) thought employees should not expect to be able to change their working pattern if to do so would disrupt the business.
- ? The most common advantage mentioned by employers was that employees would be happier (27%). Just over a fifth of employers (21%) said that there were no benefits to flexible working practices.
- ? A quarter of employers identified sections being left short staffed as a disadvantage to flexible working practices (25%). Nearly three in ten employers said there were no disadvantages (29%).
- ? Nearly seven in ten employers (68%) said that flexible working arrangements had a positive effect on employee relations.
- ? Just under a quarter of employers (24%) had set up flexible working practices in the last three years. Of these employers, 23% said there were direct costs incurred in setting them up.
- ? Almost two-thirds of employers (64%) thought the practices had been of benefit to their organisation.

Background

The Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (and associated regulations) supports the Department's commitment to create highly productive, modern and successful workplaces through fairness and partnership at work. It delivers a balanced package of support for working parents whilst at the same time reducing red tape for employers by simplifying rules governing maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay.

The Order provides for enhanced and new provisions for employees including:

- ? six months' paid and a further six months' unpaid maternity leave for working mothers;
- ? two weeks' paid paternity leave for working fathers;
- ? six months' paid and a further six months' unpaid leave for working adoptive parents;
- ? the legal right to apply to work flexibly for parents with children under 6 years; and
- ? the legal right to apply to work flexibly for parents with disabled children up to the age of 18 years.

In order to examine current provision for employees, the Department for Employment and Learning commissioned Central Survey Unit (CSU) to carry out a survey of employers. The employer's survey was designed with the following objectives in mind:

1. To establish employers' provision of work-life balance practices, including provision beyond the statutory requirement, and reasons for non-provision.
2. To establish the extent to which access to work-life balance practices are restricted
3. To assess take-up of work-life balance practices
4. To ascertain employers' views on the impact of work-life balance practices, including the costs and benefits for businesses, such as impact on productivity.
5. To establish a baseline for future evaluation, particularly with regards to the provisions to be brought in under the Employment (Northern Ireland) Order, 2002.

The questionnaire was developed as a computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) questionnaire. CSU's task was to contact and interview a sample of 1900 businesses selected from the BT Business Database throughout Northern Ireland. A panel of 55 interviewers throughout Northern Ireland were involved in the survey, with all interviews conducted by telephone.

Interviewing began on the 23 June and finished on the 24 August. In total, productive interviews were obtained at 1009 businesses.

The current report details the main findings of the survey. The terms employer and business are used interchangeably throughout the report. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the industry sectors of the employers in the survey. Some of the sectors such as fishing and agriculture have relatively few businesses that participated in the survey.

Table 1 Breakdown of industries

Industrial Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	4	0%
Fishing	3	0%
Mining & Quarrying	5	0%
Manufacturing	133	13%
Utilities	3	0%
Construction	43	4%
Wholesale & Retail	271	28%
Hotels & Restaurants	94	10%
Transport, Storage & Communication	39	4%
Financial Intermediation	21	2%
Real Estate, Renting & Business	104	10%
Public Administration & Defence	30	2%
Education	82	8%
Health & Social Work	105	10%
Other Community Services	72	7%
TOTAL	1009	100%

Percentages are weighted and based on the unweighted responses from 1009 managers

As a result, some of the industry sectors have been combined together to carry out the analysis and the breakdown of the combined industries can be seen in Table 2. The hotels and restaurants sector and the agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport sectors both have less than one hundred businesses (94 and 97 respectively) and percentages quoted in this report in relation to them should be treated with a degree of caution.

Table 2 Breakdown of combined industries

Combined industry	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport	97	9%
Manufacturing	133	13%
Wholesale and retail	271	28%
Hotels and restaurants	94	10%
Financial and real estate	125	13%
Public administration and defence and education	112	10%
Health and social work and other community services	177	18%
Total	1009	100%

Percentages are weighted and based on the unweighted responses from 1009 managers

Just over half of the businesses in the survey were single independent establishments (52%) with a lower proportion reporting that they were one of a number of different workplaces in the UK (46%). Only 1% of responding employers said they were the sole UK establishment of a foreign organisation. For the purpose of this report, the categories 'one of a number of different workplaces in the UK' and 'sole UK establishment of a foreign organisation' have been grouped together in another category - 'part of a larger organisation', comprising 48% of the businesses in the survey.

A detailed account of the method of the survey, along with a breakdown of the tables, is available in the technical report that accompanies this report.

General information about the business

Introduction

All employers who took part in the survey were asked a number of questions about the make-up of their business. They were asked about the size of the business, size of the organisation and the composition of the workforce, as well as questions about the nature of relationships between staff and management. Other characteristics, such as industry sector, were obtained from the BT database. The aim of this section is to describe the key characteristics of the businesses that took part in the survey.

Respondent

The respondents who completed the survey were asked what their job title was. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were the general manager (32%). A lower proportion of respondents were the owner (15%). Nearly one in ten respondents were the human resources manager (9%).

Status of business

The majority of businesses were private sector establishments (76%) with just less than one in five businesses in the survey (19%) describing themselves as public sector establishments. Of the businesses that described themselves as private sector establishments, 35% were owned by a sole proprietor, 35% were a private limited company and 22% were a partnership.

Just over half of the businesses in the survey were single independent establishments (52%) with a lower proportion reporting that they were one of a number of different workplaces in the UK (46%). Only 1% of responding employers said they were the sole UK establishment of a foreign organisation.

Nearly three in ten businesses were in the wholesale and retail sector (28%), which was the largest industry sector in the survey. The next most common industry sectors in the survey were health and social work and other community services (18%), manufacturing (13%) and financial and real estate (13%) (Table 2).

Size of business

The majority of businesses were small businesses with 37% having between 5-9 employees and 38% having 10-24 employees. A lower proportion of businesses had 24-49 employees (15%) or 50 or more employees (11%). Businesses who were one of a number of different workplaces in the UK were also asked about the size of the organisation as a whole. Just over a third (34%) reported that the organisation had 1000 or more employees.

Composition of the businesses

Relatively few businesses had no female employees (4%). Just over a third of employers (38%) reported that up to half of the workforce at their business was female. However, nearly three-fifths of employers (57%) said that female employees made up more than half of their workforce.

In relation to part-time employees, nearly a quarter of employers surveyed said they do not employ any part-time workers (22%). At a third of business surveyed (33%), 50% or more of the employees work part-time.

Table 3 shows the occupations of employees at the establishment of the business in the survey. The majority of businesses (98%) had managers and senior administrators at the establishment. The next most common occupations of employees at an establishment were clerical and secretarial employees (64%), sales employees (39%) and routine unskilled employees (35%).

Table 3 Occupations of employees at the business

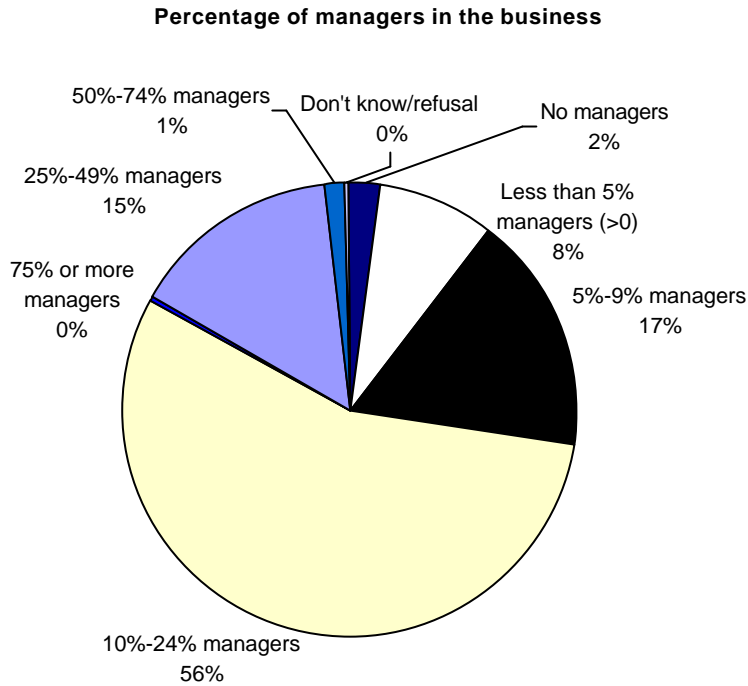
Occupations	Percentage
Managers and senior administrators	98%
Professional employees	32%
Associate professional and technical employees	17%
Clerical and secretarial employees	64%
Craft and skilled service employees	33%
Personal and protective employees	7%
Sales employees	39%
Operative and assembly employees	17%
Routine unskilled occupations	35%
Total	1009

Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

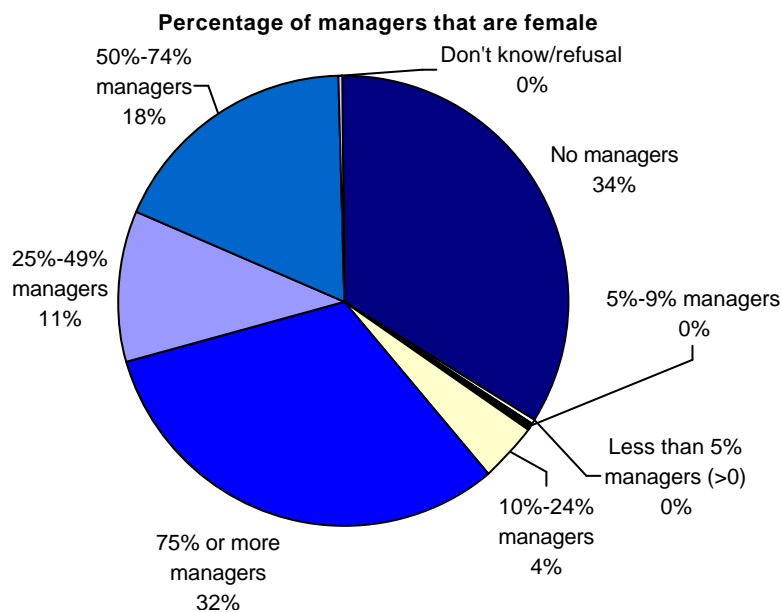
Figures more than 100% due to multiple responses

Businesses who had managers or senior administrators were asked what percentage of their employees were managers and what percentage of their managers were female. Figure 1 shows that over half of businesses (56%) said that 10-24% of their workforce were managers. After excluding businesses with no female employees and no managers, over a third of these businesses (34%) had no female managers.

Figure 1 *Percentage of managers and percentage of managers that were female*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 950 managers

Performance of businesses

Respondents were asked how their business was currently performing compared with other establishments in the same industry. Two-fifths of respondents said they were performing about average for the industry (40%) and just over a third (36%) said they were performing better than the average.

Respondents were also asked about the establishment's turnover of employees compared to other businesses in the same industry. Just under a third said that their establishment's turnover was about the same as other businesses in the same industry (31%). Only 5% reported that turnover was below average while 51% reported that it was higher than average.

In relation to the number of days lost through employee sickness or absence, just over half of employees (54%) said that they had lost less than 5% of working days in the last 12 months. The majority of businesses reported that the relationship between management and employees was good at their establishment (96%).

A quarter of businesses (25%) in the survey said that there were unions at their establishment and that these were recognised by management for negotiating pay and conditions of employment. Nearly three-quarters of businesses (73%) had no unions present.

Open for business – hours of work

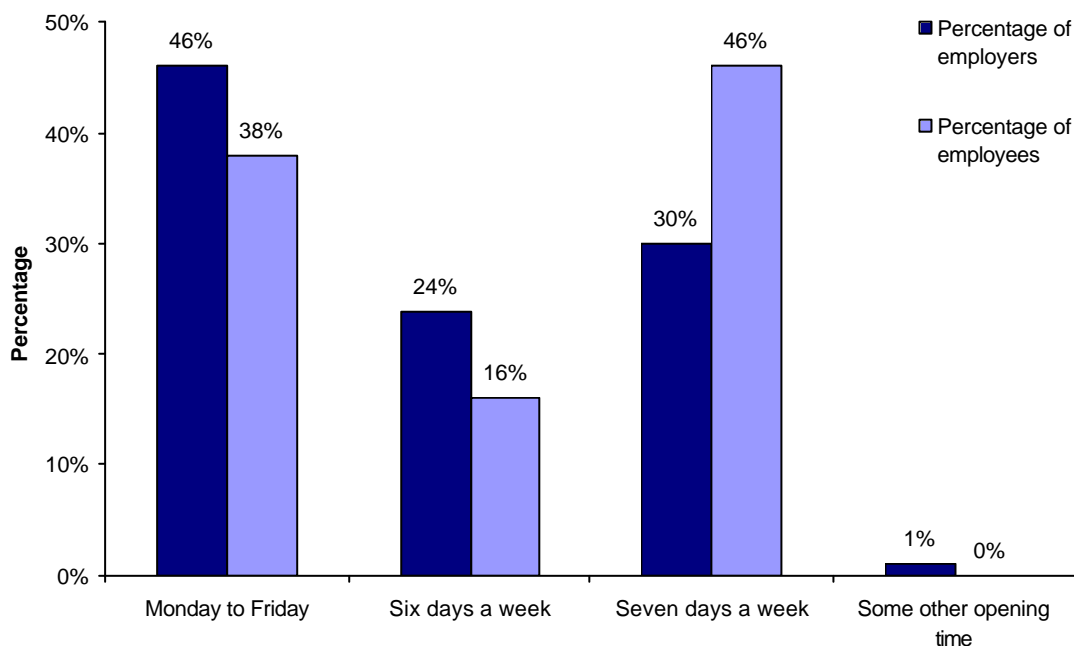
Introduction

The survey examined the working hours of the businesses interviewed. Employers were asked about the days on which they were open for business and the hours of opening. These were first analysed separately and then combined to give an overall picture of the spread/pattern of opening times and delays across a typical week.

Days ‘open for business’

Just under half of businesses in Northern Ireland were open for business Monday to Friday (45%). Nearly a quarter of businesses (24%) were open six days a week while three in ten employers (30%) were open seven days a week (Figure 2). In examining the number of employees covered by these arrangements (Figure 2), businesses that were open for seven days a week covered nearly half of employees (46%), suggesting that this arrangement was more commonly found in larger workplaces.

Figure 2 Distribution of days open for business for employers and employees



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

The distribution of the days open for business varied considerably between businesses. Businesses in the public sector (67%) were more likely to be open Monday to Friday compared to businesses in the private sector (39%). Businesses in the public administration and defence and education sector (93%), the manufacturing sector (75%) and the financial and real estate sectors (73%) were more likely to be open Monday to Friday.

Businesses in the wholesale and retail sector (42%) were more likely than other industry sectors to be open six days a week. Smaller businesses (30%) with five to nine employees were more likely to be open six days a week than businesses with more than fifty employees (13%).

Businesses that were part of a larger organisation (35%) were more likely to be open seven days a week than businesses that were a single independent establishment (25%). Most businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector (86%) were open seven days a week. Just over two-fifths of businesses in the health and social work and other community services sectors (42%) were open seven days a week.

Hours of working

For the purpose of analysing the hours of working data, they have been split into three groups:

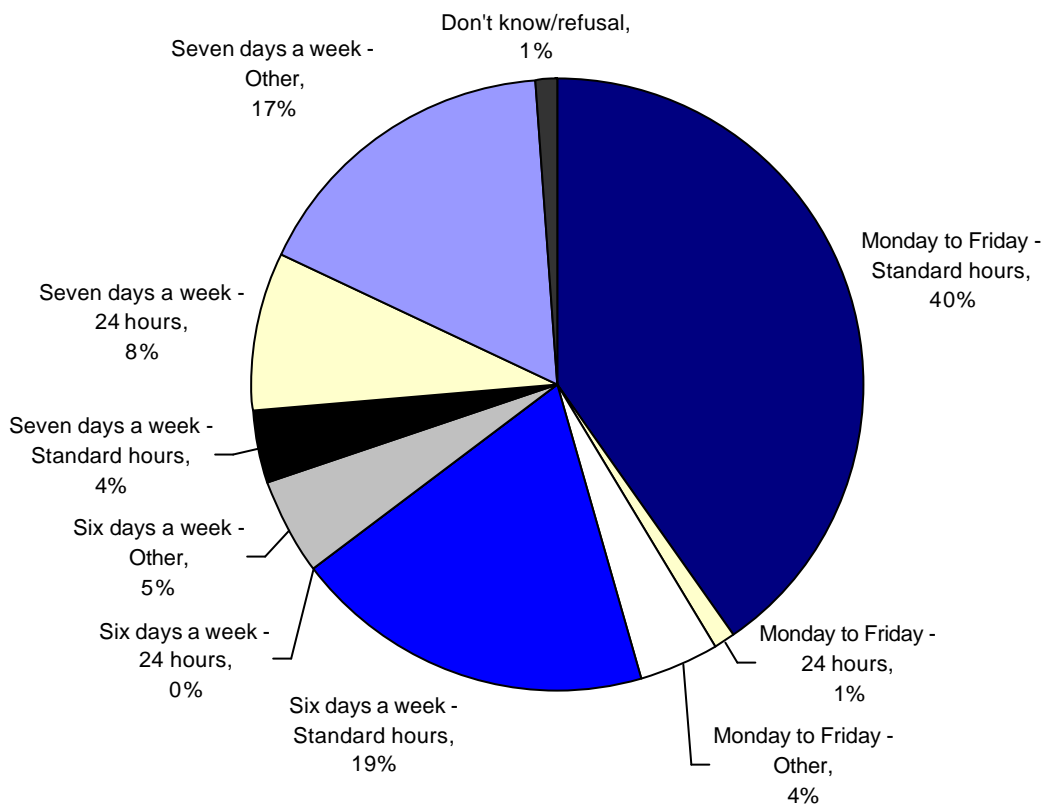
- ? Standard hours, opening between 8am and 10am and closing between 4.30pm and 6.30pm
- ? 24 hour opening
- ? Some other opening hours.

Nearly three in ten businesses opened for some other opening hours (27%). Other opening hours were made up of a number of different combinations of hours including opening until 9pm on a Thursday or other days during the week, pub opening hours, seasonal work and night work.

Opening hours were also analysed in conjunction with opening days, as opening hours alone do not necessarily convey a complete picture.

Figure 3 shows that the most common form of working arrangement was for a business to open Monday to Friday for standard hours (40%). The next most common working arrangement was working standard hours for six days a week (19%). Only 8% of workplaces worked 24 hours, seven days a week. Operating for 24 hours was rare among businesses that opened for five or six days a week.

Figure 3 Arrangements of opening hours of businesses



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

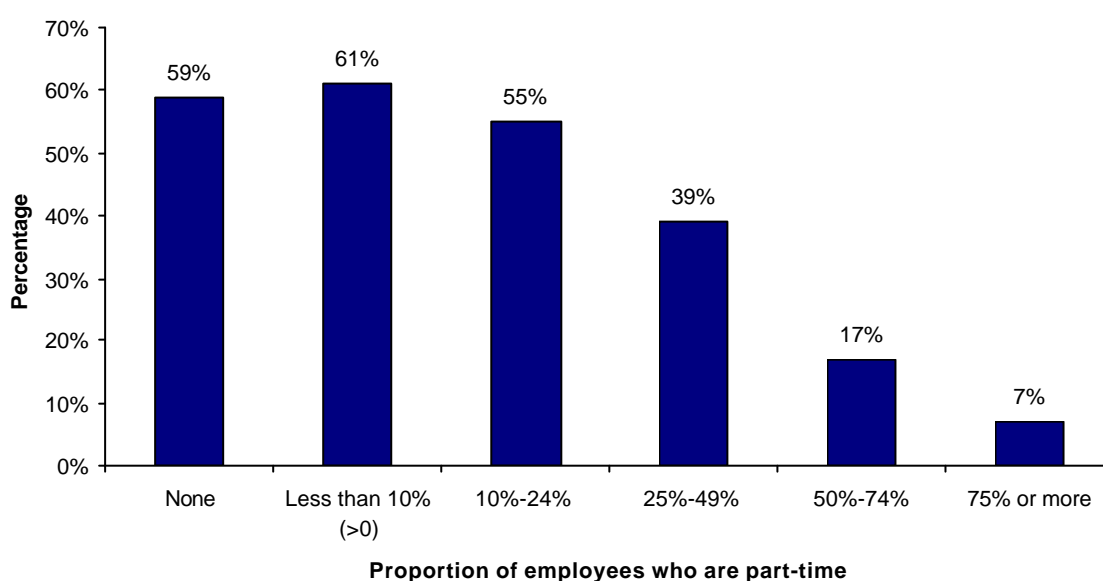
There were a number of variations across industry sector. The majority of businesses in the manufacturing sector (65%) were open standard hours from Monday to Friday. Only 5% of businesses in manufacturing were open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Nearly a quarter of businesses in the wholesale and retail sector (24%) were open other opening hours seven days a week. Few businesses (1%) in this sector were open 24 hours, seven days a week. The majority of businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector (85%) were open seven days a week, with 85% of these opening other hours. The majority of businesses in the financial and real estate sector (68%) and the public administration and defence and education sector (83%) were open standard hours from Monday to Friday. Businesses in health and social work and other community services were more likely than any other sector to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week (29%).

Approximately two in ten small businesses were open for standard hours six days a week (25% with 5-9 employees, 18% with 10-24 employees and 16% with 25-49 employees). However, less than one in ten businesses with over 50 employees (7%) were open for the same hours. Businesses with 50 or more employees (20%) were more likely than businesses with 5-9 employees (4%) to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There were some differences between the status of the business and the type of working arrangements they had. The private sector (35%) was less likely than the public sector (59%) to be open standard hours from Monday to Friday. One in five businesses in the private sector (20%) were open other opening hours, seven days a week, compared to 6% of

businesses in the public sector. One in five businesses with no unions present (20%) also were open other opening hours seven days a week compared to 9% of businesses where unions were present and recognised.

Working outside standard days and hours was analysed by the number of part-time employees in the business (Figure 4). The majority of employers with 75% or more of their employees working part-time have opening hours that are non-standard (93%). Approximately six in ten businesses with no part-time employees (59%) or with less than 10% but more than 0% part-time employees (61%) were open for standard hours.

Figure 4 *Proportion of businesses open standard days and hours by percentage of part-time employees in total employment*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Over two-thirds of business where 75% or more employees were part-time were open seven days a week (68%) with 68% of these opening other opening hours. Fewer businesses where there are less than 10% but more than 0% part-time employees (12%) were open seven days a week.

In relation to the number of flexible working practices present in a business, businesses that provided no practices (58%) were more likely to be open standard hours from Monday to Friday than businesses that had 1-3 flexible working practices (36%). However, nearly half of businesses with four or more flexible working practices (48%) were open standard hours from Monday to Friday. Nearly one in five businesses with 1-3 flexible working practices (19%) opened other opening hours seven days a week. Few businesses with no flexible working practices (4%) were open the same hours. Over one in ten businesses with four or more flexible working practices (13%) were open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Provision, eligibility and take-up of flexible working practices

Introduction

The previous section showed that three in five employers in Northern Ireland no longer work the 'standard' nine-to-five, Monday to Friday working week. The survey examined the provision of flexible working practices in the workplace and the eligibility of employees to use and take up these practices. The practices that were covered by the survey were:

- ? Part-time working
- ? Term-time contracts
- ? Job shares
- ? Flexi-time
- ? Compressed working week
- ? Annualised hours
- ? Reduced hours
- ? Working from home

The number of employers who reported the ability to work a compressed working week, annualised hours or work from home was less than one hundred. Percentages quoted in relation to these practices should be taken with some degree of caution. Because of the small numbers, in the parts of this section where flexible working practices have been examined in more detail, figures have not been included for these practices. In relation to the other practices, where the figures have been examined in more detail in the sections on formalisation of flexible working practices, the eligibility to take up flexible working time practices and the take up of flexible working practices, care should also be taken when examining the results as in some cases the figures are less than one hundred. The only exception to this is working part-time where 834 businesses reported the presence of part-time workers in their workplace.

Provision of flexible working time arrangements

In relation to the eight flexible working practices listed above, 82% of employers said that employees in their business currently or in the past 12 months had made use of one or more of these flexible working arrangements. A further 5% of employers said that although these working practices were not used in the last 12 months, they were available to employees. Therefore, 87% of businesses had some type of flexible working practice available for their employees to use. However, 13% of businesses did not offer any flexible working practices to their employees.

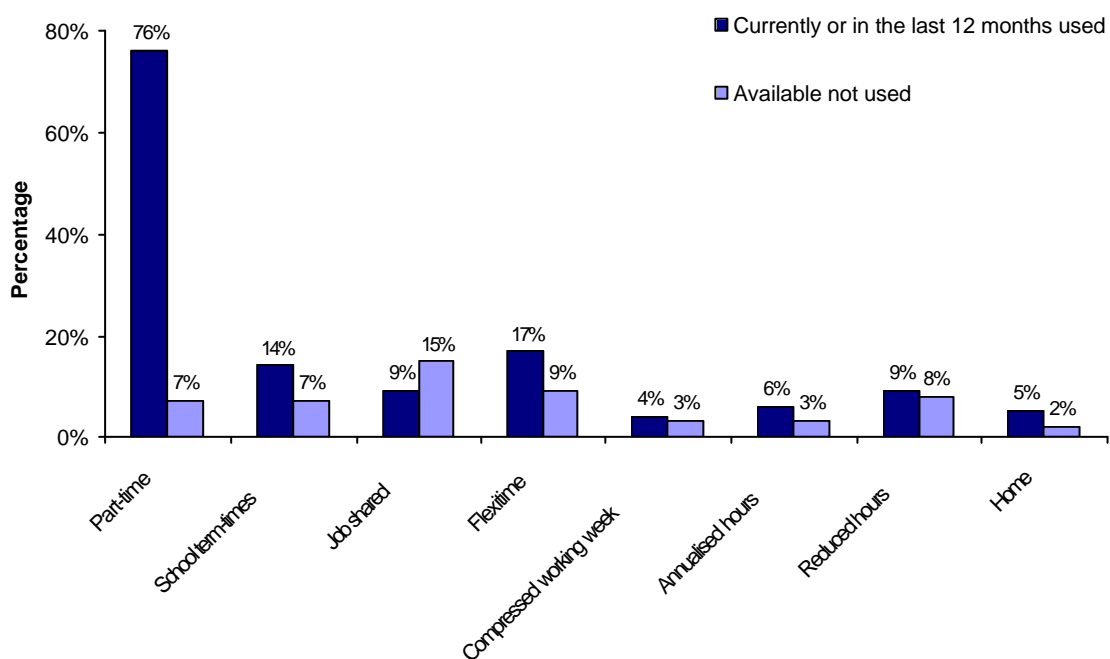
The provision of flexible working practices varied across different businesses. Smaller businesses with 5-9 employees (17%) were more likely than businesses with 50 or more employees (6%) to have no flexible working practices in the workplace. The majority of businesses with 50 or more employees (92%) provided at least one flexible working practice that was currently used or had been used in the

last 12 months. Businesses that were part of a larger organisation (87%) were also more likely to say that an employee in their business currently used or had in the last 12 months used flexible working practices than a single independent establishment (77%). In relation to union recognition, 7% of businesses with union recognition had no flexible working practices compared to 15% of businesses with no unions present.

There were also differences between industry sectors in relation to the presence of flexible working practices in a business. Nearly all businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector (98%), the public administration and defence and education sector (96%) and health and social work and other community services (91%) currently or in the last 12 months had employees who were using flexible working practices compared to businesses in the agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport (61%) and manufacturing sector (71%).

Figure 5 shows the provision for flexible working practices in businesses. Part-time working was the most common type of flexible working practice with approximately a quarter of employers (76%) saying that an employee currently or in the last 12 months used this arrangement and a further 7% of employers saying that there was a provision to work part-time but no one had used it in the past 12 months. The next most common flexible working practice was working flexitime with 17% of employers saying that an employee currently or in the last 12 months used for it and a further 9% saying it was available but no one had used it. The least common flexible working practices were working a compressed working week and working from home, with fewer than one in ten businesses saying they operate either of these practices (7% and 7% respectively).

Figure 5 Provision of flexible working practices



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Job sharing was unusual in that it was more likely for an employer to say that the practice had not been used by employees in the last 12 months. Nearly a quarter of businesses (24%) said that job sharing was available to employees but only 36% of these businesses had employees currently or in the last 12 months who had job shared. Other practices were more likely to be available and currently used than available but not used.

Table 4 details the breakdown of the three most common types of flexible working practices by some business characteristics. Businesses with 5-9 employees (68%) were less likely to say that an employee was currently working part-time (or had in the last 12 months) than businesses with 25-49 employees (81%) and businesses with 50 or more employees (88%). The manufacturing sector was less likely to have part-time workers currently or in the last 12 months (63%) than the hotels and restaurants sector (98%).

The manufacturing sector (5%) and the financial and real estate sector (5%) were the least likely business sectors to say that employees were currently or in the last 12 months working school term-time hours compared to the hotels and restaurants sector (19%) and the public administration and defence and education sectors (53%). Businesses where a union is recognised (29%) were more likely to provide for school term-time working than business with no union present (9%).

In relation to flexitime, three in ten employers (30%) in the public sector provided it to their employees. Fewer employers in the private sector did the same (13%). Businesses with 5-9 employees were the least likely to say an employee had worked flexitime in the last 12 months (10%).

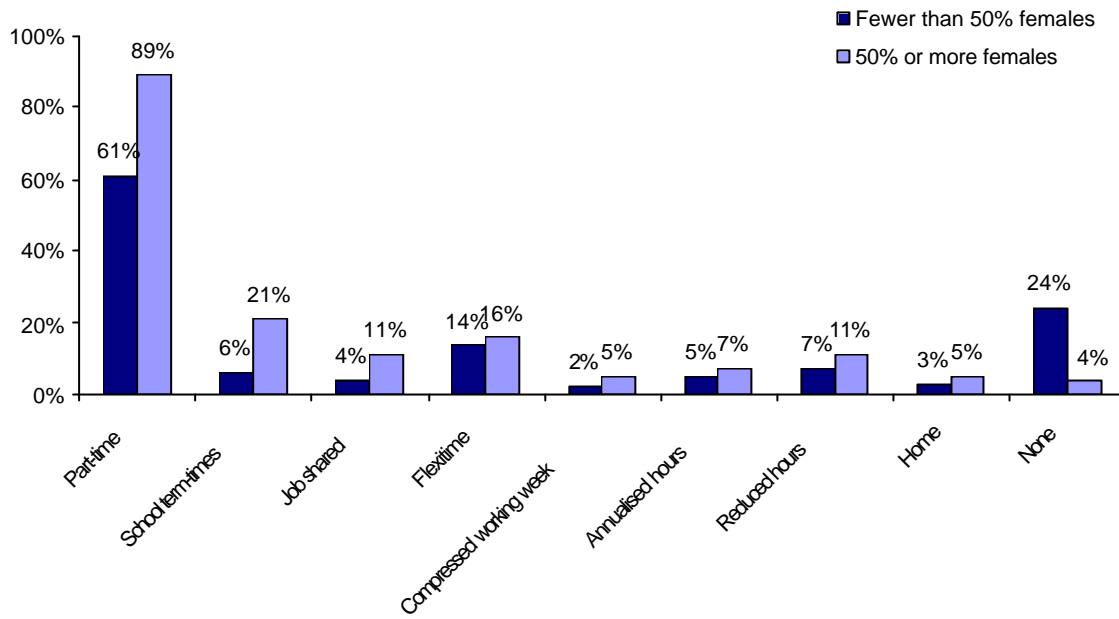
Table 4 Percentages of businesses that said they have an employee who currently or in the last 12 months worked one of these flexible working practices

	Part-time	School term-time	Flexitime	Unweighted total
Industry sector				
Agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport	52%	7%	9%	97
Manufacturing	63%	5%	15%	133
Wholesale and retail	77%	8%	10%	271
Hotels and restaurants	98%	19%	13%	94
Financial and real estate	66%	5%	22%	125
Public administration and defence and education	87%	53%	33%	112
Health and social work and other community services	85%	16%	20%	177
Union recognition				
No union present	73%	9%	13%	703
Recognised unions	84%	29%	29%	278
Status				
Private sector	74%	9%	13%	756
Public sector	81%	37%	30%	199
Single or multi				
Part of a larger organisation	81%	22%	23%	495
Single independent establishment	71%	7%	11%	514
Size of business				
5-9 employees	68%	7%	10%	327
10-24 employees	77%	13%	16%	352
25-49 employees	81%	24%	22%	155
50 plus employees	88%	30%	32%	175

Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

The presence of female workers was also analysed in relation to flexible working practices in a business. Nearly seven in ten employers where female workers made up less than 50% of the workforce (68%) reported that employees currently or in the last 12 months used flexible working practices compared to businesses with 50% or more female employees (93%). Figure 6 shows that this is true for all types of flexible working practices.

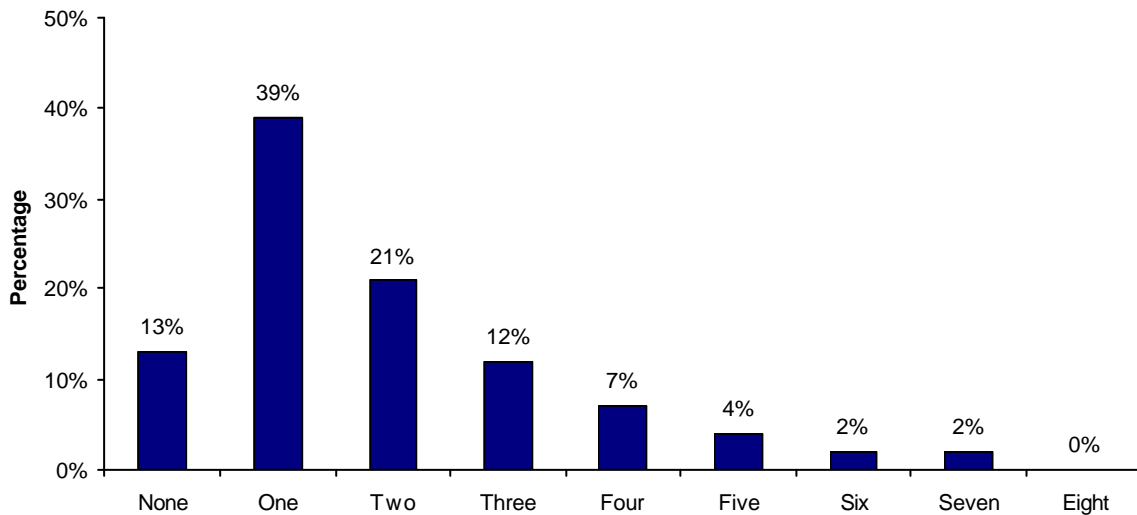
Figure 6 Provision of flexible working practices by the proportion of female employees



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Flexible working practices were often provided in combination (Figure 7). Almost half of businesses (48%) had at least two flexible working practices available to their employees and nearly one in five businesses (15%) provided four or more flexible working practices to their employees.

Figure 7 Provision of multiple flexible working practices



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Larger businesses with 50 or more employees were more likely not only to have flexible working practices present in the workplace (94%) but also to provide more than one practice (73%). The

number of flexible working practices also seems to vary by the presence of a recognised union and the status of the business. Businesses in the public sector (77%) and businesses with recognised unions (74%) were more likely to have two or more flexible working practices compared to businesses in the private sector (40%) and businesses that had no unions present (39%).

Interestingly, although businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector (98%) and the public administration and defence and education sector (96%) currently or in the last 12 months had employees who are using at least one of the flexible working practices, only 41% of employers in the hotels and restaurants sector have two or more flexible working practices present compared to 83% of employers in the public administration and defence and education sector.

On closer examination, the two most popular flexible working practices for businesses in the public administration and defence and education sector were working part time (87%) and working school term times (53%), both of which are closely associated with the type of work. The most popular flexible working practice for businesses in the hotels and restaurants sectors was part-time work (98%).

Businesses that opened outside the standard hours from Monday to Friday were more likely to provide flexible working practices to their employees (86%) than businesses that were open standard working hours from Monday to Friday (76%).

Reasons for not providing flexible working practices

In businesses where there were no flexible working practices, managers were asked to describe what were the main reasons that flexible working practices were not available for employees. Nearly seven in ten employers said the main reason was that it was not feasible or compatible with the nature of their work (68%). Just over half of employers said that there was no demand from employees (52%). A further breakdown of these responses was not possible given the small number of respondents (126) who answered this question.

Formalisation of flexible working arrangements

Respondents were asked whether the provision of each of the flexible working practices at their business was covered by a written policy. The incidence of written policies did not show much variation across the five flexible working practices. Nearly two in five employers who provided working reduced hours for a limited period (37%) had a written policy, while employers who provided job sharing were more likely to have a written policy (48%). No more than half of employers had policies for any of the practices.

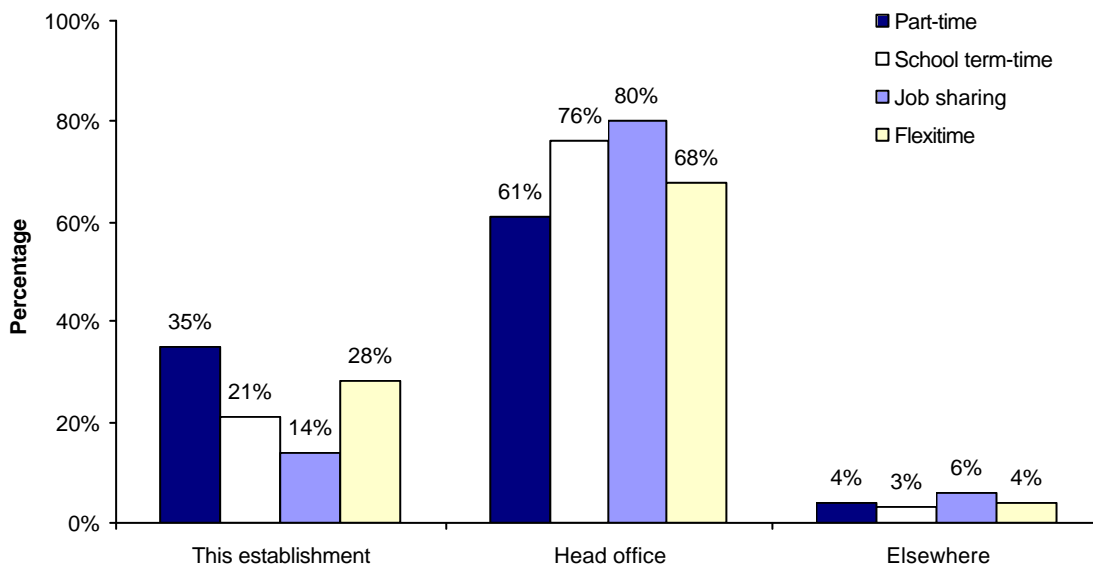
Less than a third of employers who allowed employees to work a compressed working week or work from home had a written policy while more than two-thirds of employers who allowed employees to work annualised hours did have a written policy.

Although some of the figures are based on a relatively small number of responses, the presence of written policies has some relation to characteristics of the business. A written policy covering part-time working was more likely to be present in businesses with 50 or more employees (62%) or 25-49 employees (60%) than employers with 5-9 employees (41%) or employers with 10-24 employees (44%). Businesses that had recognised unions were more likely to have policies for job sharing (83%), working part-time (77%), working school term-time (73%) and working flexitime (71%) than those with no unions present. In relation to industry sector, less than three in ten businesses (27%) in the hotels and restaurants sectors had a written policy for working part-time while in the public administration and defence and education sectors, the figure was 68%. Businesses that were part of a larger organisation were more likely to have a written policy for flexible working practices although they were more likely to provide for working part-time (65%) and job sharing (65%) than working reduced hours for a limited period (48%).

Where flexible working practices were available but not in use, businesses were less likely in all cases to have a written policy. For example, 59% of businesses where job sharing was available but not in use did not have a written policy. This compared to just over a third of businesses (36%) that currently have job sharing in the workplace and do not have a written policy.

The majority of policies providing for flexible working practices were set by head office with four out of five businesses (80%) with a policy for job sharing saying the policy was set at head office (Figure 8). However, a lower number of businesses who had a written policy for part-time work (61%) said their policy was set by head office.

Figure 8 Formulation of written policy for flexible working practices



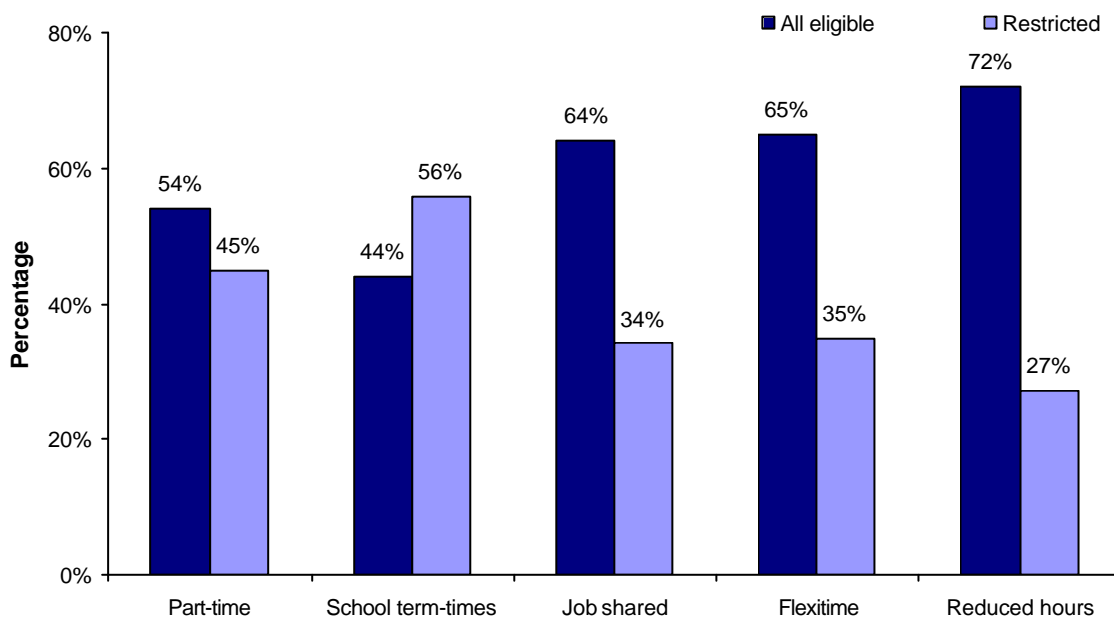
Figures are weighted and based on responses from 406, 102, 127 and 119 managers who had written policies for working part-time, school term-time, job sharing and flexitime respectively

Eligibility to take up flexible working practices

There was variation across the different working practices as to whether all staff were eligible or restricted to certain staff. The majority of employers who provided for working reduced hours (72%) said all staff were eligible (Figure 9). Working school term-times was different from the other practices in that employers were more likely to say that the practice was restricted to some employees only (56%) than that all staff were eligible (44%).

Business characteristics such as size of businesses, union recognition or status of businesses did not have a major impact on whether staff were eligible to take up a flexible working practice. There were some differences between businesses in different industry sectors. Two-thirds of businesses in the hotels and restaurants sectors (66%) said all staff were eligible to work part-time compared to 38% of businesses in the manufacturing sector.

Figure 9 Whether there are any restrictions on who is eligible to use flexible working practices



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 834, 218, 253, 272 and 181 managers who provided working part-time, school term-time, job sharing, flexitime and reduced hours respectively to their employees

Employers who allowed employees to work from home were more likely to say that some staff were not eligible to work from home than to say that all staff were eligible. However, the opposite was true for employers who offered working annualised hours and working a compressed week to their employees.

Employers who had restrictions on eligibility for flexible working practices were asked to specify the type of employee who was not eligible to take up a particular practice. Managerial employees and

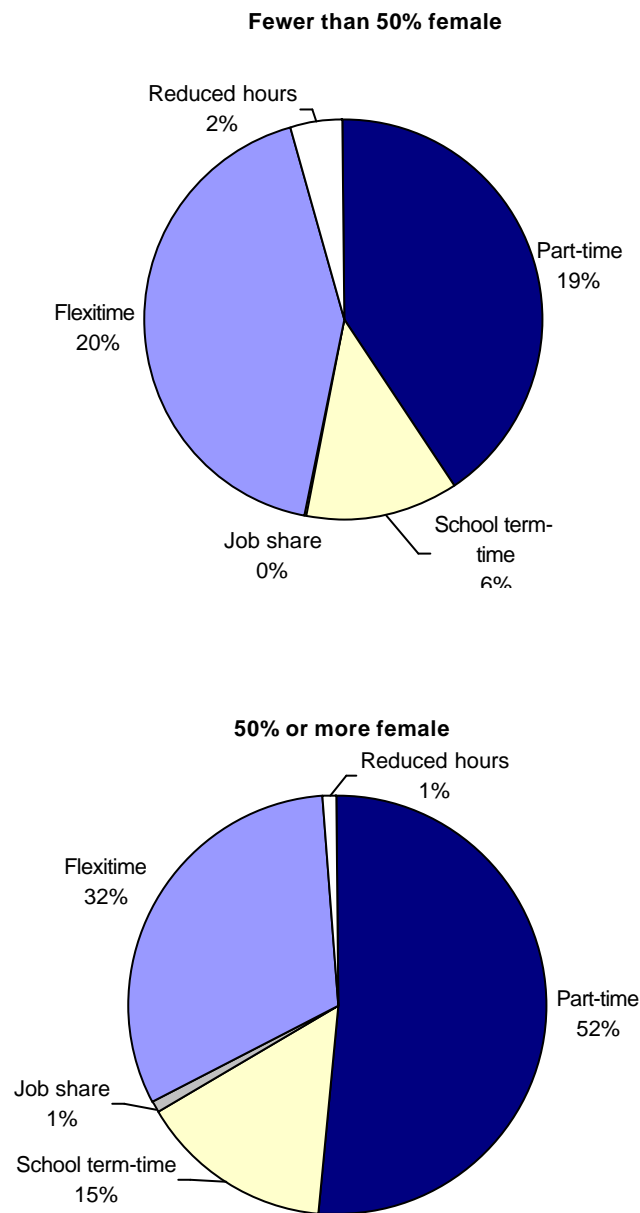
full-time employees were most likely not to be eligible. For example, approximately six in ten businesses who said part-time work was restricted to some employees identified managers (60%) and/or full-time employees (55%) as employees who were not eligible. Employers were unlikely to limit the provision of flexible working practices to women only, with less than one in twenty businesses saying that men were not eligible for flexible working (3%). Similarly, flexible working practices were unlikely to be limited to employees with dependent children.

Take-up of flexible working practices

Employers were asked how many of their employees had made use of each flexible working practice in the last 12 months. The different practices had different take-up rates. Nearly two-fifths of businesses where working part-time was available (37%) had 50% or more of their staff making use of this practice. This compares to 2% of business where working reduced hours is available and 1% of businesses where job sharing was available.

The presence of female employees was analysed in relation to the percentage of employees making use of a flexible working practice (Figure 10). Businesses where 50% or more employees were female were more likely to have more than 50% of their workforce working part-time (52%) than businesses where females made up less than 50% of the workforce (19%).

Figure 10 The percentage of businesses where more than 50% of the workforce made use of flexible working practices



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 834, 218, 253, 272 and 181 managers who provided working part-time, school term-time, job sharing, flexitime and reduced hours respectively to their employees

Changes in work status

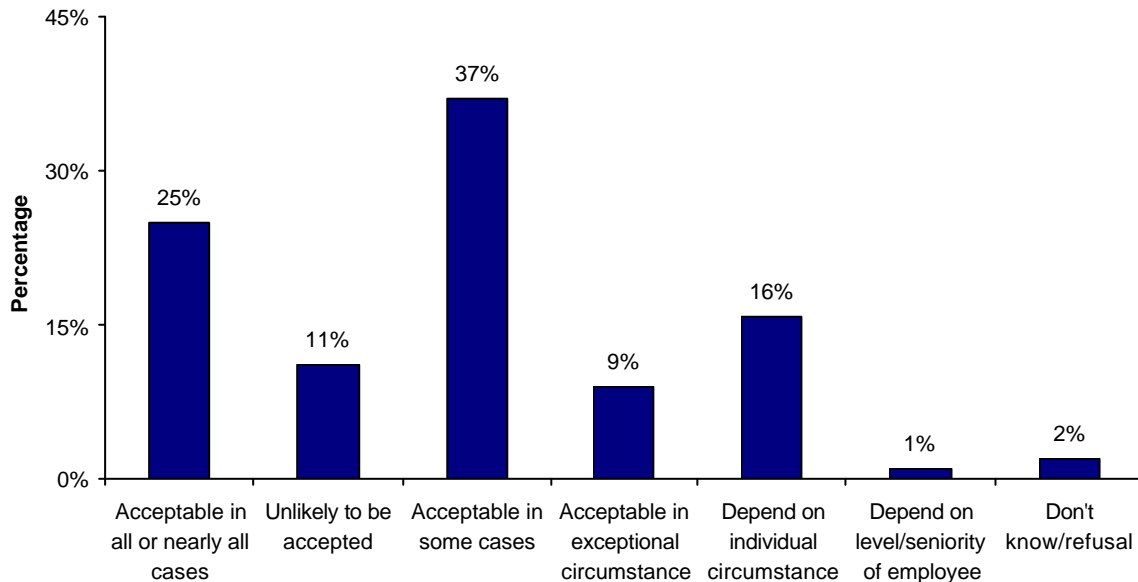
Introduction

The survey explored how employers regarded and responded to requests made by employees to permanently change their current working pattern.

Requests to change from part-time to full time working

Employers were asked how they have dealt or would deal with requests from employees who wanted to change from working part-time to full-time hours. A quarter of employers to whom this question was applicable said such requests would be acceptable in all or nearly all cases (25%) while nearly two-thirds said that acceptability would depend upon the circumstances under which the request was made (63%). Factors listed by employers as those they would take into account when considering such a request included “acceptable in some cases” (37%), “individual circumstance” (16%), “exceptional circumstance” (9%) and “the seniority of employee” (1%). Just over one in ten employees (11%) said that such a request was unlikely to be accepted (Figure 11).

Figure 11 *Whether an employee can change from part-time to full-time working*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 892 managers

In relation to the size of the business, just under a third of businesses with 25-49 employees (32%) were likely to accept in all cases a request for a member to move from part-time to full-time work compared to 20% of businesses with 5-9 employees. Employers where 75% or more of employees were working part-time (20%) were more likely to refuse a request for a member of staff to change from working part-time to work full-time than employers where between 25%-49% of employees were

part-time workers (7%). Businesses in the Public administration and defence and education sectors were also likely to refuse such a request (16%).

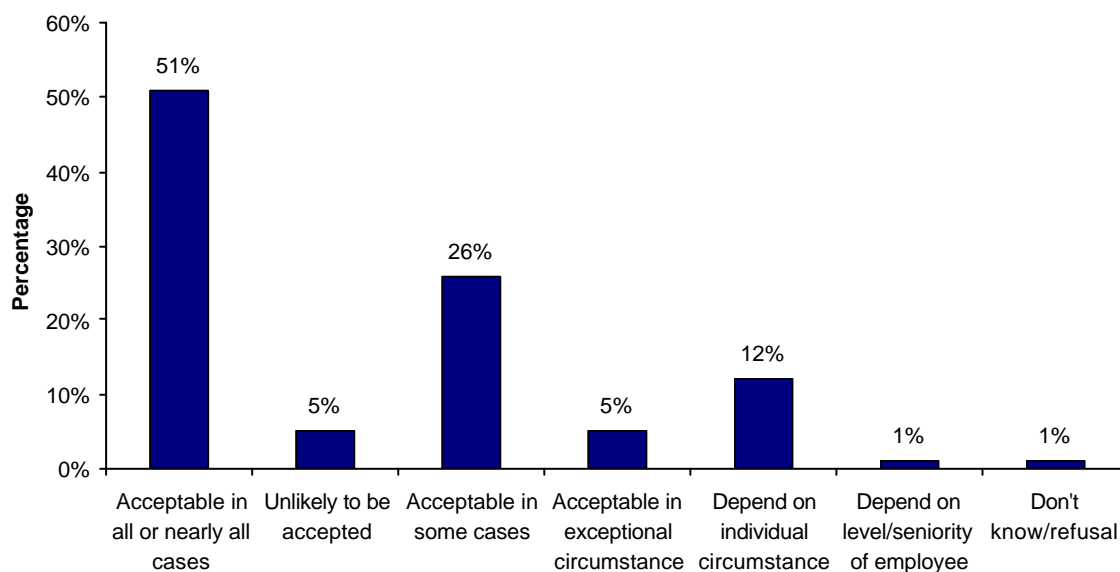
Requests to change from full-time to part-time working

The survey examined employers attitudes towards maternity returnees who worked full-time prior to the birth of their child but wanted to work part-time on their return to work and also towards other employees' requests to make the transition from full-time to part-time working.

Women returning from maternity leave

Very few employers said that a request to part-time from female employees returning from maternity leave would be unlikely to be accepted (5%). Just over half of employers (51%) to whom the question applied said it would be acceptable in all or nearly all cases while 43% said that acceptability would depend upon the circumstances under which the request was made (Figure 12). The circumstances under which such a request would be considered included "acceptable in some cases" (26%), "individual circumstance" (12%), "exceptional circumstance" (5%) and "the seniority of employee" (1%). Businesses with no female employees were excluded from the analysis.

Figure 12 *Whether female employees can change from full-time to part-time working*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 971 managers with female employees

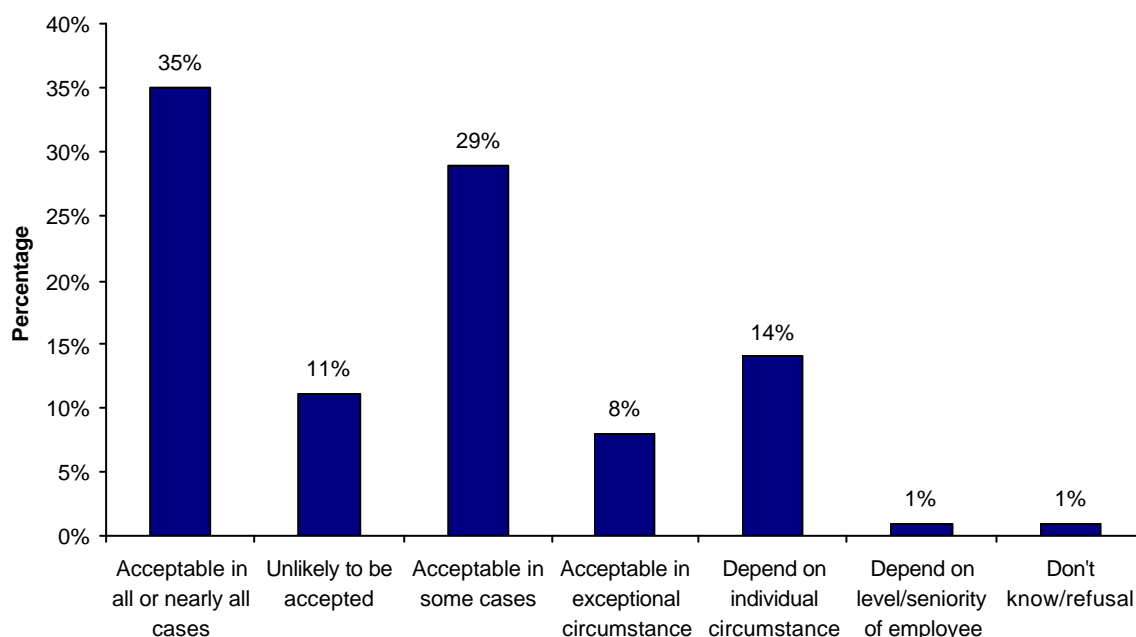
Businesses in the health and social work and other community services sectors (67%) were most likely to say that they would accept a request from a female worker returning from maternity leave in all or nearly all cases. Just over a third of employers in the manufacturing sector (35%) said the same. In total, 56% of businesses where more than half the staff was female said they would accept such a request in all or nearly all cases compared to 46% of employers where less than half the employees were female.

Employers were asked whether a woman would be able to keep her existing job and the level of seniority she held prior to being on maternity if she went back to work part-time. Nearly three-quarters of employers (72%) said that female staff would keep their existing job and its level of seniority in all cases. Only 1% of businesses said female staff would not keep their job or their level of seniority in all cases, while a further 17% said it would depend on the job.

Other employees requesting to change from full-time to part-time working

Employers were less likely to unconditionally accept requests to change from full-time to part-time hours made by employees who were not returning from maternity leave, with just over one in ten employers saying they were unlikely to accept such a change in work practices (11%). Just over a third of businesses said that it would be acceptable in all or nearly all cases (35%). Employers reported that they would accept this type of request in exceptional circumstances (8%) or depending on the individual circumstance of the employee (14%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13 *Whether employees can change from full-time to part-time working (apart from females returning from maternity leave)*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Few businesses who employed more than 50 employees said that a request from an employee to reduce their hours from full-time to part-time was unlikely to be accepted (2%). Over two-fifths of larger businesses (44%) said that nearly all such requests were likely to be accepted and a further 53% of these employers saying that they would be accepted in some circumstances. Although 23% of businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector would agree in nearly all cases to an employee

changing from part-time to full-time work, 52% of them would agree to an employee changing from full-time to part-time hours.

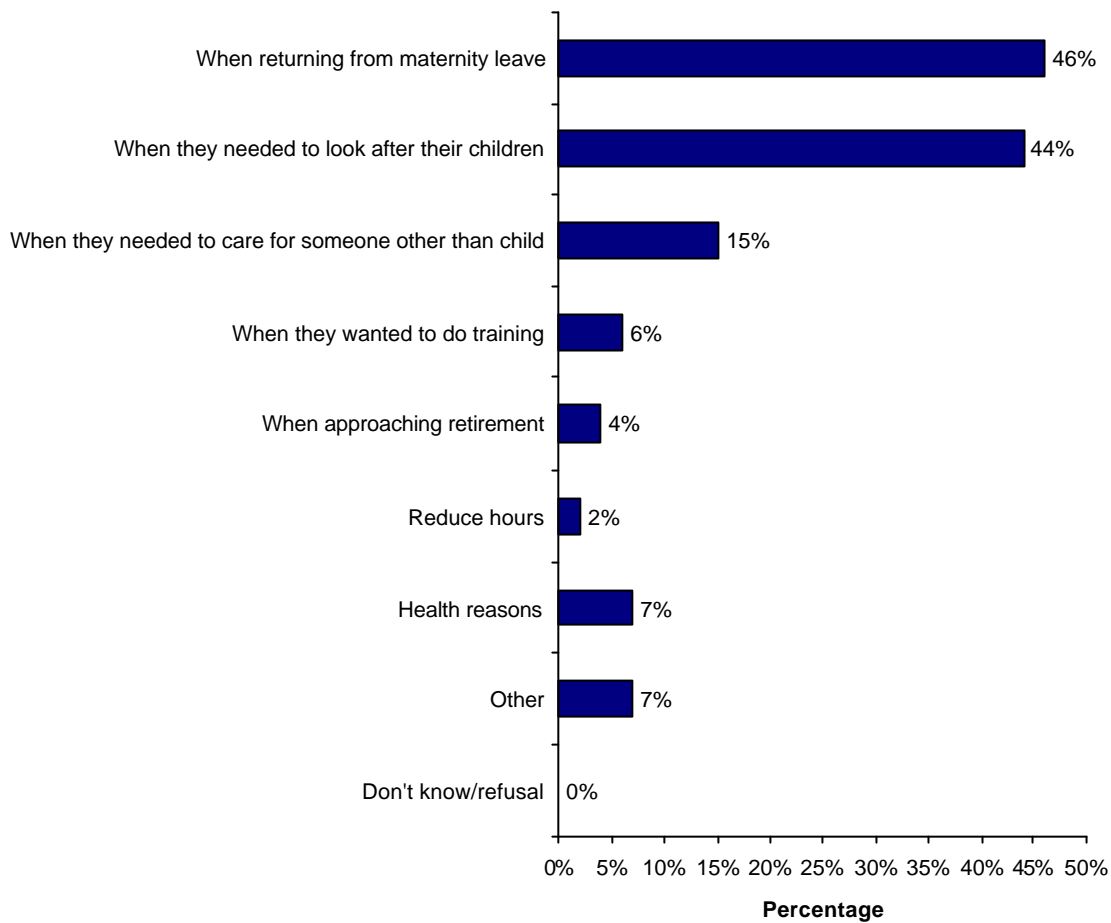
Again, employers were asked if the employee could keep their existing job and level of seniority if they changed their hours. Just under than six in ten employers (57%) said that the employee could keep their existing job and its level of seniority. Just over a quarter said it would depend on the job (26%).

Incidence of requests to change from full-time for part-time working

One in five employers (20%) had received a request from at least one employee to change from full-time to part-time working in the last 12 months. Just over half of businesses with 50 or more employees (51%) had a request from an employee to change their hours compared to 8% of smaller businesses of 5-9 employees.

The most common circumstance under which a request was made was when a female worker was returning from maternity leave (46%). Other commonly reported reasons for such requests included employees needing to look after their children (44%), or to look after someone other than their children (15%) (Figure 14).

Figure 14 *Circumstances under which requests were made to change from full-time to part-time working*

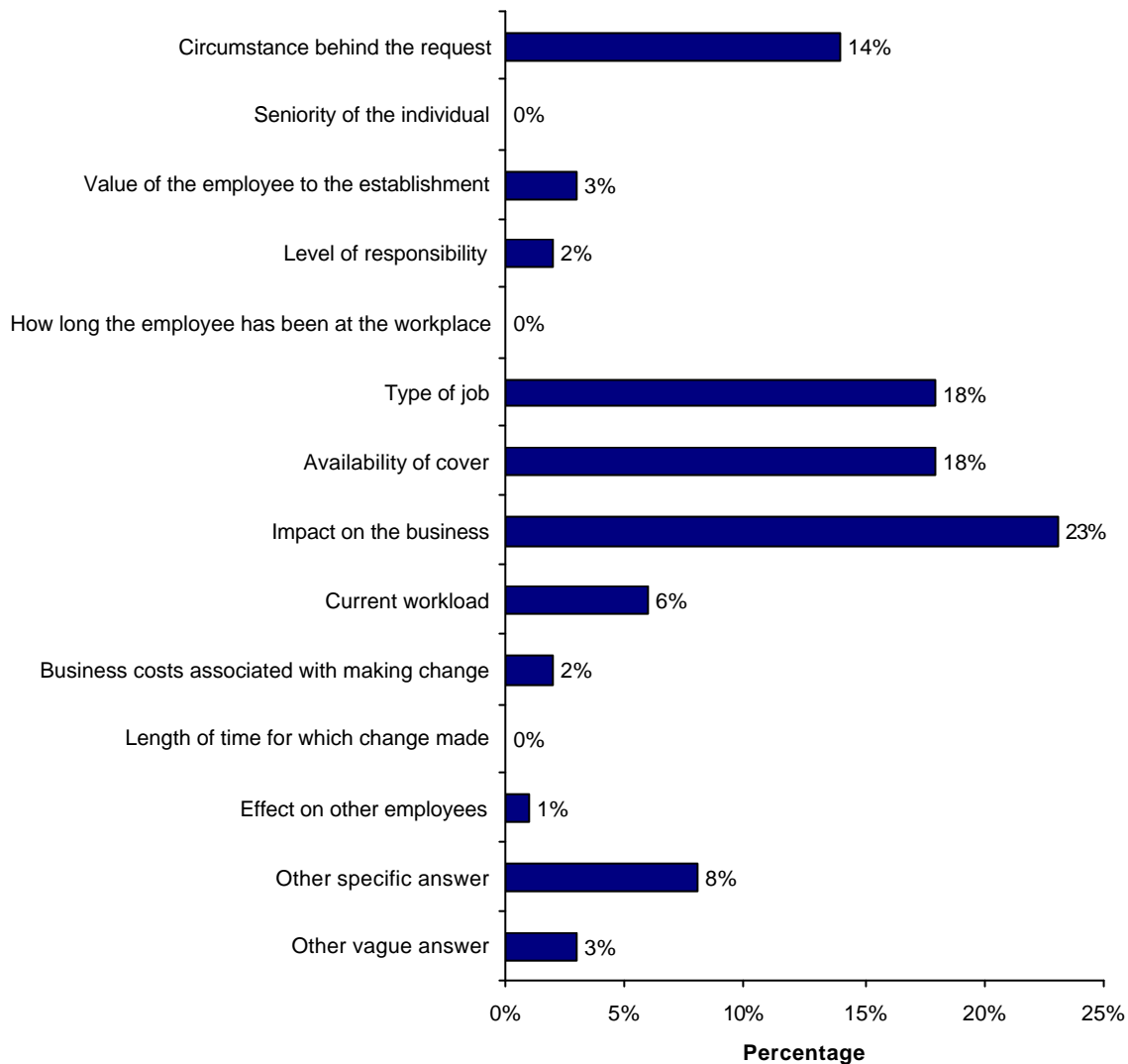


Figures are weighted and based on responses from 229 managers

Nearly all employers who had received a request (99%) said that managers would generally be expected to give consideration to a request from an employee to change from full-time to part-time working. In relation to the employers who had not received a request in the last 12 months to change from full-time to part-time working, 16% said they would never get such a request. Taking the rest of the employers in this group, a high proportion would have considered it, if such a request had been made (95%). There was little variation across different types of workplaces as to whether a request to change from full-time to part-time working would be considered.

Employers were asked what factors were taken into consideration when deciding whether an employee could change from full-time to part-time employment. Nearly a quarter of businesses said that the impact on the business would be taken into consideration (23%) followed by the type of job (18%) and the availability of cover (18%). Other factors that employers said would be taken into account were the circumstances behind the request (14%) and current workload (6%) (Figure 15).

Figure 15 Factors taken into consideration when deciding whether an employee can change from full-time to part-time employment



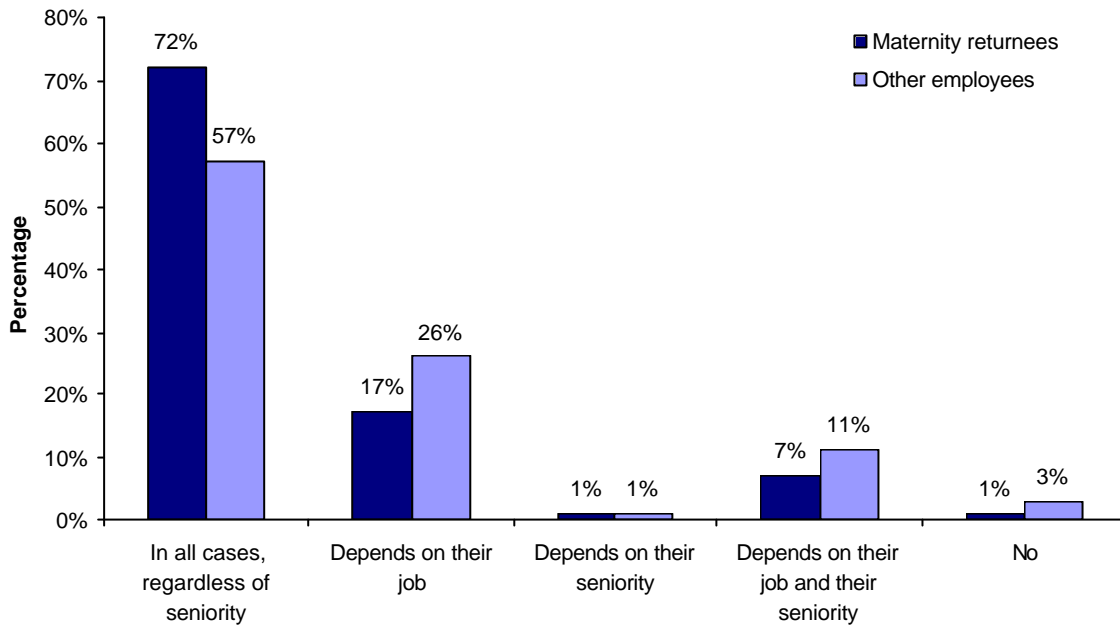
Figures are weighted and based on responses from 847 managers

Employers were also asked to report reasons why they would not accept a request to change from full-time to part-time hours. As only 29 employers answered this question, the numbers are too small for statistical analysis. However, commonly reported reasons were that it would not suit the needs of the business and that the business needed full-time staff.

Comparable treatment of maternity returnees and other employees

Employers are more likely to accept in all or nearly all cases a request from maternity returnees (51%) wanting to change from full-time to part-time employment than those made by other employees (35%). Figure 16 shows also that employers are not only more likely to unconditionally accept such a request for maternity returnees but they are also more likely to be able to keep their existing job and level of seniority of their employment.

Figure 16 Whether employees can keep their existing job and level of seniority on changing from full-time to part-time employment



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 752 and 659 managers with female or other employees

Requests to work flexibility

Less than a fifth of employers had received a request from an employee to change how they regularly work for a sustained period of time (15%). It was greater the larger the workplace with one in ten employers with 5-9 employees (10%) receiving a request compared to almost a third (32%) of employers with 50 or more employees.

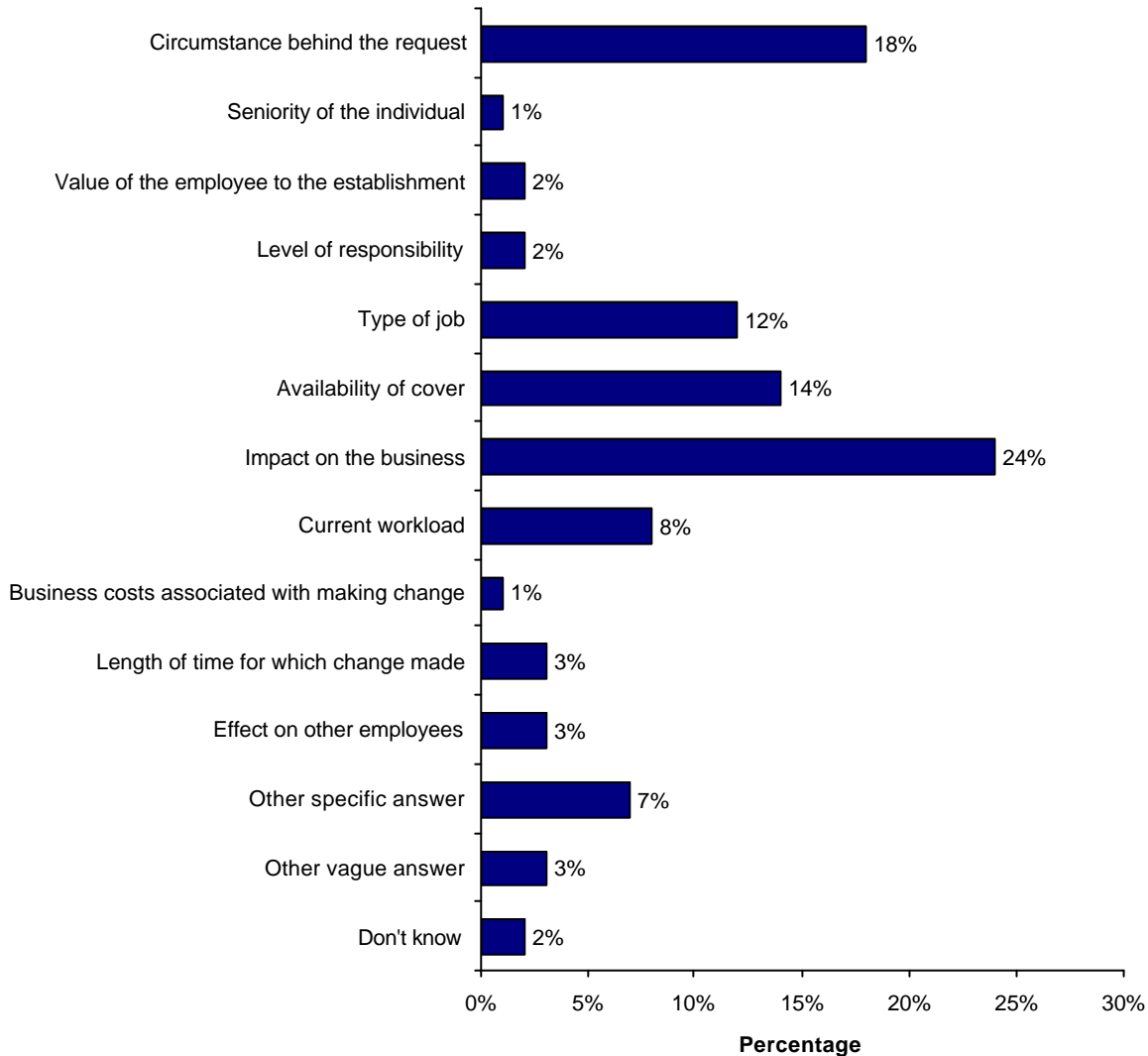
The most common reason employees asked to change their hours were when employees needed to look after their children (36%) or to look after someone other than their children (19%). Employees also made requests to change the way they regularly work when returning from maternity leave (15%) or when they wanted to do training (13%).

The majority of workplaces that had received a request from an employee to change how they regularly worked said they would give consideration to these requests (99%). Nearly one in five businesses (16%) that had not received a request reported that they would never get such a request. However, excluding these employers, 94% of businesses that had not received such a request said that if they had, they would give it consideration.

Employers cited a number of factors they used when deciding whether to accept a request to work flexibly. Nearly a quarter of businesses said that the impact on the business would be the most important factor (24%) followed by the circumstances behind the request (18%). Other factors that

employers said would be taken into account were the availability of cover (14%), the type of job (12%) and the current workload (8%) (Figure 17).

Figure 17 Factors taken into consideration when deciding whether an employee can change how they regularly work

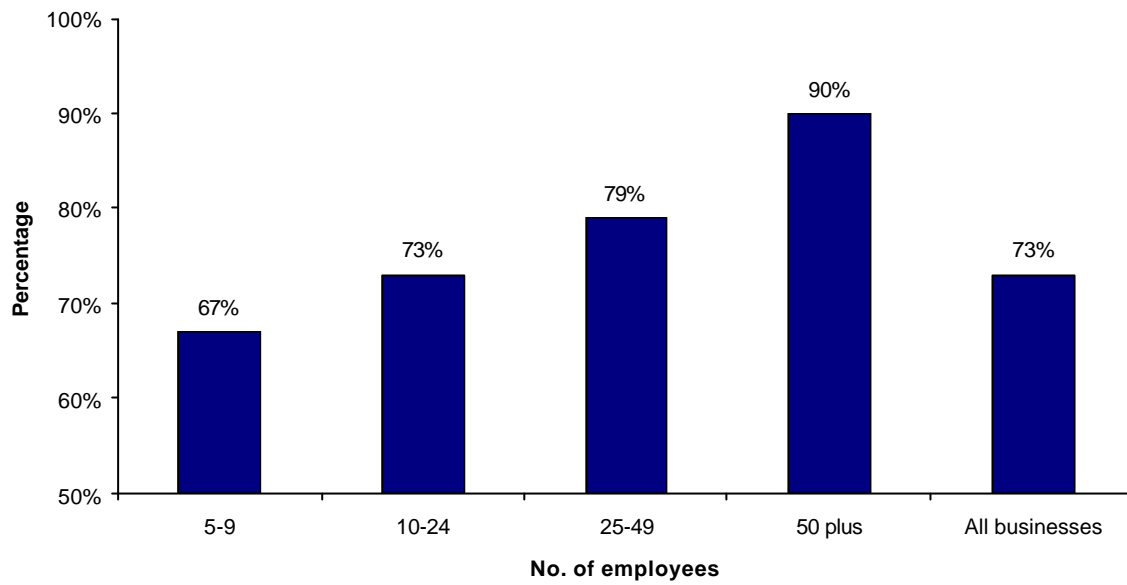


Figures are weighted and based on responses from 833 managers

Awareness of legal duties

Since April 2003, employers have a legal duty to give consideration to requests to work flexibly from parents of children under 6 or of disabled children under 18. Fewer than three-quarters of employers (73%) were aware of this duty. This awareness did not vary across businesses characteristics, with the exception of the size of business. Figure 18 shows how the more employees a business had the more likely the organisation was to be aware of the duty with nine in ten businesses with 50 or more employees being aware of the legal duty.

Figure 18 *Percentage of businesses that were aware of legal duty by employer size*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Promoting flexible working practices in the workplace

Introduction

The survey examined whether employers actively promoted flexible working practices in the workplace, including how employers informed their employees about available practices and how they consulted their employees in decisions regarding whether to introduce such practices.

Promoting work-life balance at the workplace

Just over two-fifths of employers (43%) reported that managers promoted the flexible working practices that were available to employees in the workplace. Businesses with 25-49 employees were more likely to promote flexible working practices (53%) than both larger businesses (44% of businesses with 50 or more employees) and smaller businesses (40% of businesses with 10-24 employees and 43% of businesses with 5-9 employees).

Businesses that were part of a larger organisation (50%) were more likely to promote flexible working practices compared to single independent establishments (37%). In relation to the size of the overall organisation, organisations with less than one hundred employees (44%) were less likely to promote flexible working practices than organisations with 1000 or more employees (56%).

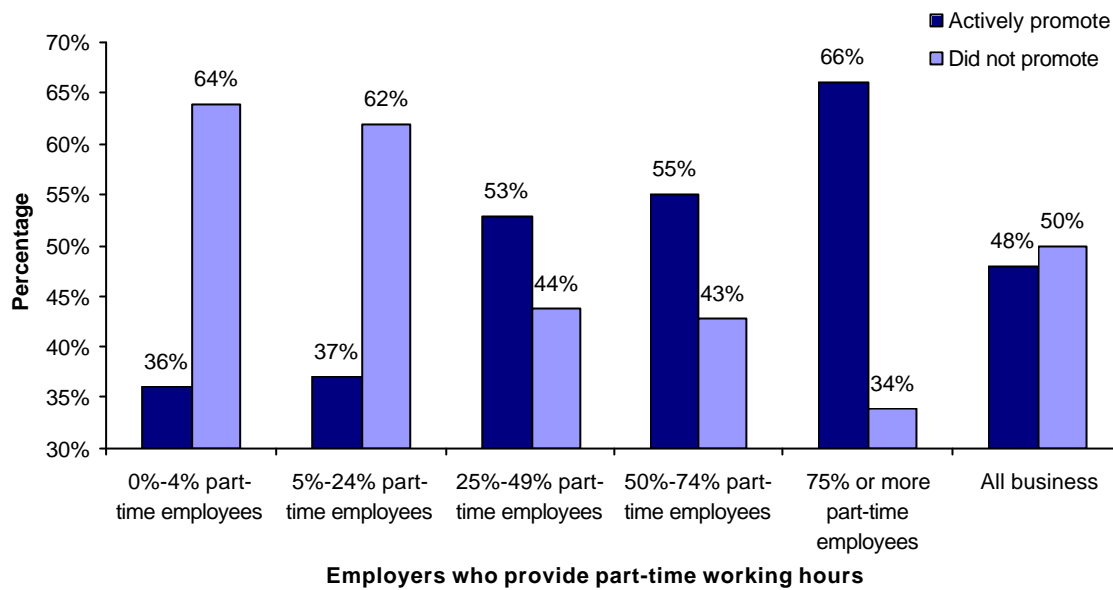
In relation to industry sector, businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector (66%) and in the health and social work and other community services sector (61%) were more likely to promote flexible working while businesses in the agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport sector (19%) and the manufacturing sector (23%) were less likely to promote flexible working practices in the workplace.

The number of flexible working practices had some effect on whether employers promoted flexible working practices. Just over two in five employers (43%) with one flexible working practice promoted flexible working practices in the workplace. However, nearly three in five employers (58%) with four or more flexible working practices actively promoted them in the workplace.

With the exception of part-time work, the figures for all the flexible working practices could not be analysed due to the low number of cases. However, there did appear to be a higher take-up in businesses where the flexible working practice was promoted, although this depended on the flexible working practice. Job sharing and working reduced hours for a limited period of time did not appear to be effected by promotion of the practice.

The figures for part-time working are more reliable as there were more employers making use of this practice. Figure 19 shows that of employers who provide part-time working as a flexible working practice, those with 75% or more part-time employees are more likely to promote flexible working practices (66%) compared to employers with 0%-4% part-time employees (36%).

Figure 19 Whether employers actively promote flexible working practices by take up of part-time working hours



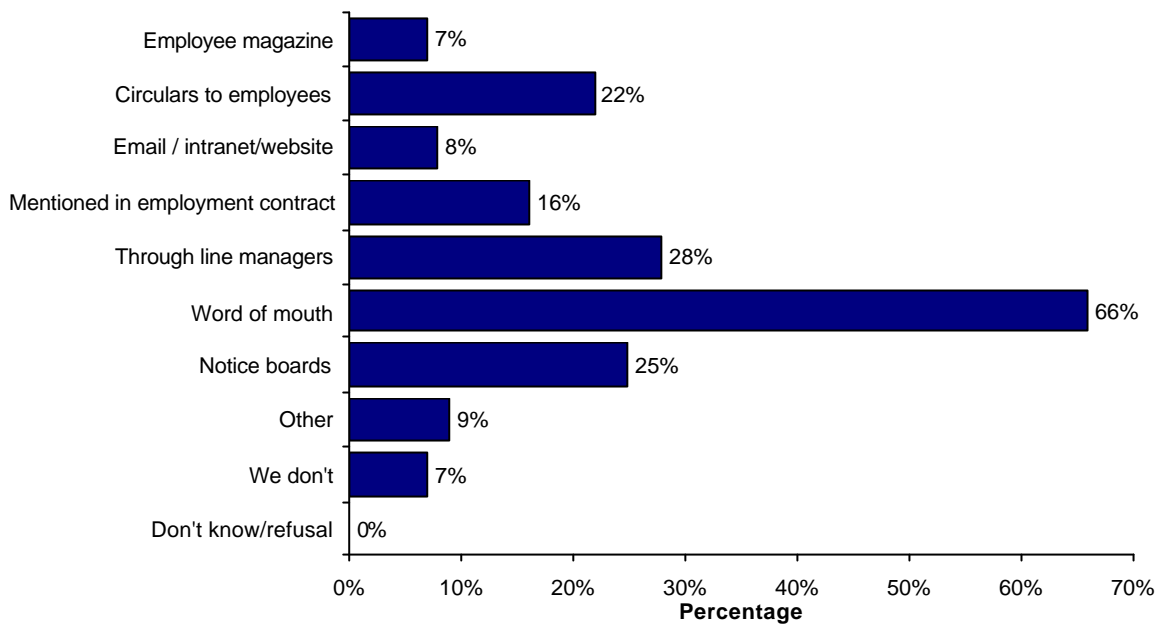
Figures are weighted and based on responses from 834 managers

Informing employees

In most businesses (93%), there was at least one process in place for informing employees about the types of working patterns, leave arrangements or facilities that can help them balance their work and their life outside work. There was not much variation between business characteristics as the incidence of this provision was so high. There was, however, some difference within industry sector. Only 1% of businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector did not have a process in place compared to 13% of businesses in the agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport sector.

The most common method of informing staff about flexible working practices was by word of mouth with two-thirds of all employers (66%) reporting this method. Nearly three in ten employers informed employees about working patterns and leave arrangements through their line managers (28%). Slightly fewer employers used notice boards (25%), circulars to employees (22%) or employment contracts (16%) to inform them about work patterns and leave arrangements. The employee magazine (7%) and email/intranet/website (8%) were the least common method of informing staff about working patterns and leave arrangements (Figure 20).

Figure 20 *Methods of communication with employees about available working patterns, leave arrangements or facilities that can help them balance their work and their life outside*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

The method used by a business to inform employees of work patterns or leave arrangements varied with the characteristics of the workplace. Table 5 gives a breakdown of some of methods of informing staff by workplace characteristics. Smaller workplaces of 5-9 employees (70%) and of 10-24 employees (69%) were more likely to use word of mouth to inform staff than businesses with 50 or more employees (46%). On the other hand, businesses of 50 or more employees were more likely to inform staff through their line managers (49%).

Across all industry sectors, the most popular method to inform staff was by word of mouth, ranging from 57% of businesses in the agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport sectors to 80% for businesses in the hotels and restaurants sector.

With the exception of using word of mouth to inform staff of working patterns, leave arrangements or facilities, businesses in the private sector, single independent establishments and businesses with no unions present were less likely to use any of the methods to inform staff (Table 5).

Table 5 *Methods communicating to employees about available working patterns, leave arrangements or facilities that can help them balance their work and their life outside by business characteristics*

	Employee magazine	Circulars	Through line manager	Word of mouth
Industry sector				
Agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport	6%	18%	24%	57%
Manufacturing	7%	21%	27%	59%
Wholesale and retail	5%	13%	29%	66%
Hotels and restaurants	3%	8%	30%	80%
Financial and real estate	7%	29%	27%	69%
Public administration and defence and education	13%	48%	27%	57%
Health and social work and other community services	11%	29%	32%	69%
Union recognition				
No union present	3%	15%	24%	69%
Recognised unions	21%	45%	40%	57%
Status				
Private sector	5%	16%	26%	68%
Public sector	18%	44%	40%	56%
Single or multi				
Part of a larger organisation	14%	32%	38%	58%
Single independent establishment	2%	13%	20%	72%
Size of business				
5-9 employees	6%	15%	21%	70%
10-24 employees	5%	20%	26%	69%
25-49 employees	12%	35%	39%	61%
50 plus employees	17%	41%	49%	46%

Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Just under half of businesses used more than one method to inform staff (48%). Larger businesses were more likely to use more than one method with nearly seven in ten businesses with 50 or more employees using two or more methods to inform staff (69%) than employers with 5-9 employees (37%).

Consulting employees

Employers were asked whether senior managers consult employees or their representatives about the introduction of flexible working practices effecting their establishment. Nearly three-quarters of employers reported that they did (72%).

Larger workplaces were more likely to consult their employees, with businesses with 50 or more employees (81%) more likely to consult their staff than other smaller businesses. Businesses in the health and social work and other community services sectors (83%) were the most likely to consult their employees while businesses in the agriculture, fishing, mining, utilities, construction and transport sectors (62%) were the least likely to consult their employees.

Managerial discretion

Introduction

The survey aimed to examine the extent to which line managers and supervisors in the workplace are able to make decisions about the implementation of flexible working practices.

Evidence of discretion when operating flexible working practices

Employers were asked the following question:

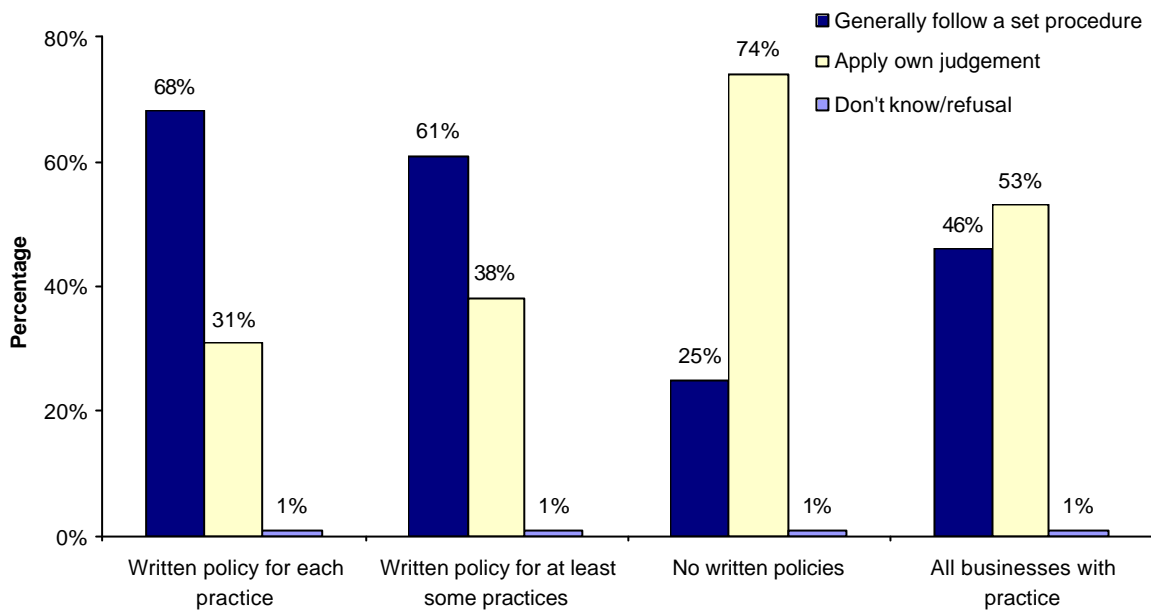
Which of the following statements best applies to how line managers and supervisors at this establishment operate the types of flexible working practices that we have been talking about?

Excluding establishments that have either no managers or no flexible working practices, just less than half of employers reported that managers generally had to follow a set procedure (46%) while just over half were allowed to apply their own judgement (53%).

There were differences in the percentage of businesses that reported managers applying their own judgement across business characteristics. In general, it was line managers and supervisors in businesses that recognised unions (79%), in the public sector (76%), with 50 or more employees (75%) and that were part of a larger organisation (59%) who generally had to follow a set procedure. Managers in businesses in the public administration and defence and education sectors were least likely of all the industries to be allowed to apply their own judgement, with 85% following a set procedure.

In the section on 'Provision, eligibility and take-up of flexible working time arrangements', the presence of written policies for the various flexible working practices was examined. The incidence of written policies did not vary much across the five flexible working practices. Working reduced hours for a limited period (37%) was the least likely to have a written policy and employers were more likely to have a written policy for job sharing (48%). Of employers who provided at least one flexible working practice, just over a third had all their practices covered by a written policy (34%). Where this was the case, managers were less likely to be able to use their own judgement than in circumstances where just some or none of the practices were covered by a written policy. In establishments where every flexible working practice had a written policy, just over two-thirds of managers (68%) followed a set procedure. In relation to establishments with no written policy for any of their flexible working practices, around two-thirds were allowed to apply their own judgement (65%) (Figure 21).

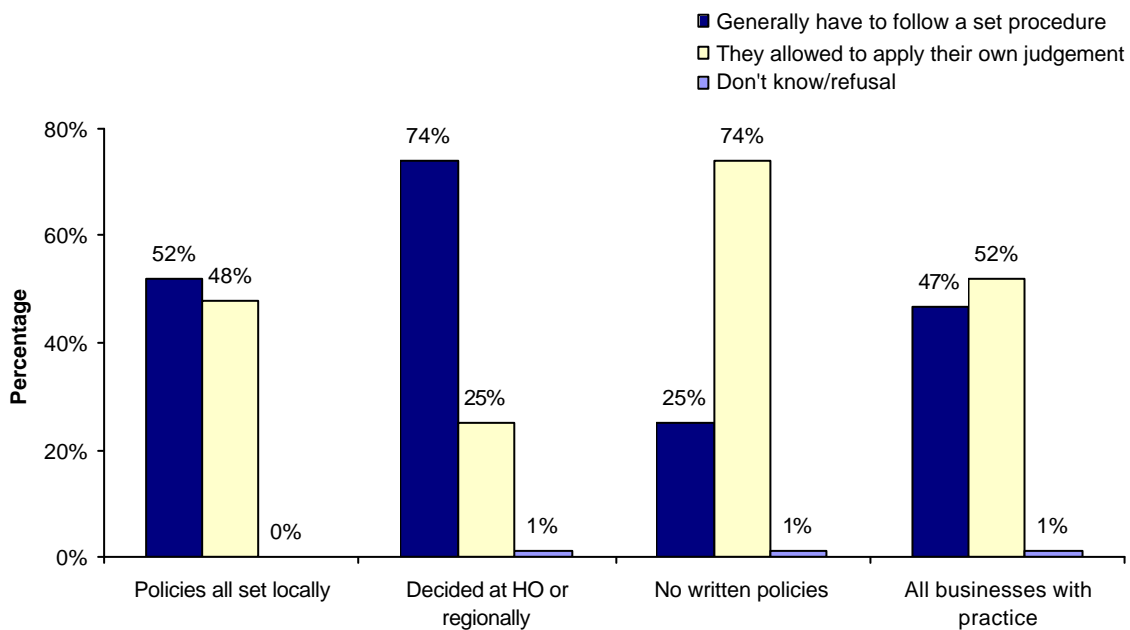
Figure 21 Whether manager can show discretion when operating policy by provision of written policies covering flexible working practices



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 872 managers

Figure 22 shows that where policy was developed locally, around half of businesses either allowed managers to apply their own judgement (48%) or had them follow a set procedure (52%). However, if the policy was set at head office or regionally, managers were less likely to be allowed to apply their own judgement (25%).

Figure 22 Whether managers can show discretion when operating policy, of written policies covering flexible working and where policy set



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 809 managers

Authority to make decisions

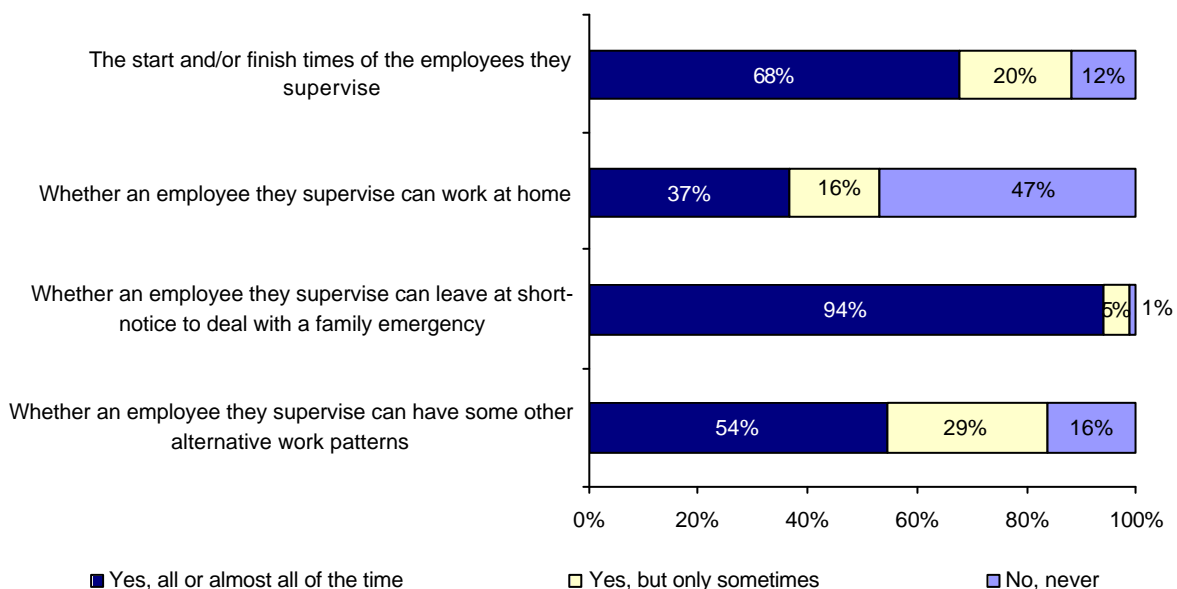
Employers were asked whether line managers or supervisors had the authority to make decisions on the following issues:

- ? the start and/or finish times of the employees they supervise
- ? whether an employee they supervise can work at home
- ? whether an employee they supervise can leave at short notice to deal with a family emergency
- ? whether an employee they supervise can have some other alternative work patterns

The percentages reported in this section do not include the employers who said these questions did not apply to them or their business.

While the majority of line managers had the authority to make decisions on whether an employee they supervise can leave at short-notice to deal with a family emergency (94%) and on the start and finishing times of their employees (68%), fewer managers had the authority to make decisions on whether employees they supervise can work at home (37%) or if they can have some other alternative work patterns (54%) (Figure 23).

Figure 23 *Whether line managers and supervisors have the authority to make decisions*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 838, 384, 853, 811 managers

Line managers in larger businesses with 50 or more staff (61%) are less likely to have the authority to make decisions on the start and finishing time of the employees they supervise all or almost all of the

time than line managers in businesses with 5-9 employees (74%). While the majority of line managers in both the public (87%) and private sector (89%) had the authority to decide on start and finishing times, 57% of line managers in the public sector had authority all or almost all of the time compared to 71% of line managers in the private sector. Three in five line managers in businesses where unions were recognised (60%) were able to decide start and finish times all or almost all of the time.

In relation to line managers' authority to make decisions on whether their employees can work at home, over half of businesses said that this did not apply to them (56%). Of those that it applied to, line managers in businesses with 5-9 employees (36%), in the private sector (35%) or that were part of a larger organisation (32%) were more likely to have authority all or almost all of the time than line managers in businesses with 10-24 employees (42%), in the public sector (41%) or that were single independent establishments (42%).

Managers' authority to make decisions on whether an employee they supervise can leave at short-notice to deal with a family emergency showed little variation across business characteristics.

Three-fifths of line managers in businesses where the size of the organisation was 100-1000 (60%) had the authority all of the time to make decisions on whether an employee they supervise can have some other alternative work patterns. Just under half of line managers (49%) in businesses where the size of the organisation was less than 100 or over 1000 said the same.

Impact of managerial discretion

Managers and supervisors were asked to rate the general relationship between management and employees at their establishment. There was no difference in the proportions saying that workplace relations were poor between businesses with different levels of managerial discretion.

Attitudes, advantages, disadvantages

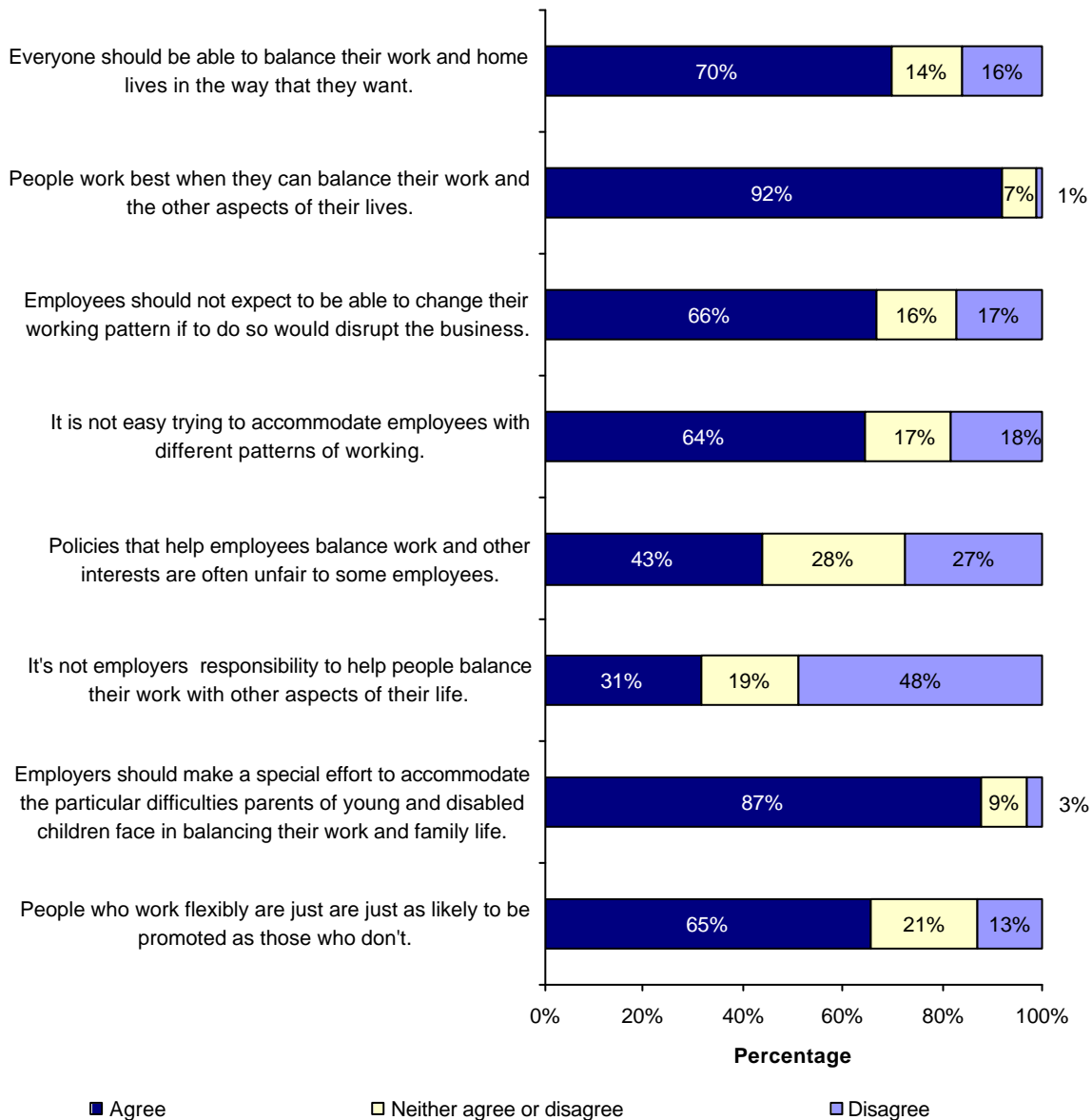
Introduction

The survey examined the attitudes of employers toward flexible working practices. It also collected information on the advantages and disadvantages employers have faced in implementing flexible working practices.

Attitudes to work-life balance

Employers were presented with a set of statements covering various aspects of flexible working and were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with these statements. Figure 24 reports the breakdown of responses from employers.

Figure 24 Attitudes of employers regarding flexible working



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

The majority of businesses said they thought that people work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives (92%). Seven in ten employers also said that everyone should be able to balance their work and home in the way that they want (70%).

The majority of employers believed that they had a role to helping employees balance their work and home lives and 87% agreed that employers should make a special effort to accommodate the particular difficulties parents of young and disabled children face in balancing their work and family life. Just under a third (31%) said that they did not think that it is the employer's responsibility to help people balance their work with other aspects of their life.

However, two-thirds of employers (66%) thought employees should not expect to be able to change their working pattern if to do so would disrupt the business. A similar number (64%) said that it is not easy trying to accommodate employees with different patterns of working while slightly fewer employers (43%) said that policies that help employees balance work and other interests are often unfair to some employees.

Just under two-thirds of employers (65%) reported that people who work flexibly are just as likely to be promoted as those who don't, although 13% of employers disagreed with this statement.

As a means of summarising the opinions of employers and how they differed across workplaces of different characteristics, the mean score was obtained, taking a value of one if an employer strongly agreed with a statement and a five if they strongly disagreed. Lower values indicated a higher level of agreement with a particular statement. The main points coming from this information are summarised below:

- ? Employers in larger organisations of 50 or more employees were likely to have a slightly lower mean score on the statements that were supportive of the work-life balance concept, indicating that they had slightly more positive attitudes.
- ? Larger organisations scored slightly higher on two of the less favourable statements, suggesting that they were aware of their role in helping their staff balance their work and home life.
- ? There was a small difference between the mean scores in the public and the private sector for all statements, except the statement 'It is not easy trying to accommodate employees with different work patterns', where the scores were similar. The differences in the statements suggest that employers in the public sector were more supportive of the work-life balance concept and their role in providing it than employers in the private sector.
- ? There was a larger difference between the mean scores for businesses with no unions and those that recognised unions for the statement 'It's not the employer's responsibility to help

people balance their work with other aspects of their life'. Businesses with no unions were more likely to agree with this statement.

- ? Businesses that were part of a larger organisation scored slightly higher on the favourable statements and slightly lower on the less favourable statements than those in a single independent establishment.

Advantages and disadvantages of work-life balance

Employers were asked in two open-ended questions to describe the advantages and disadvantages they saw arising from the provision of flexible working practices.

Benefits from providing flexible working practices

Employers were asked the following question:

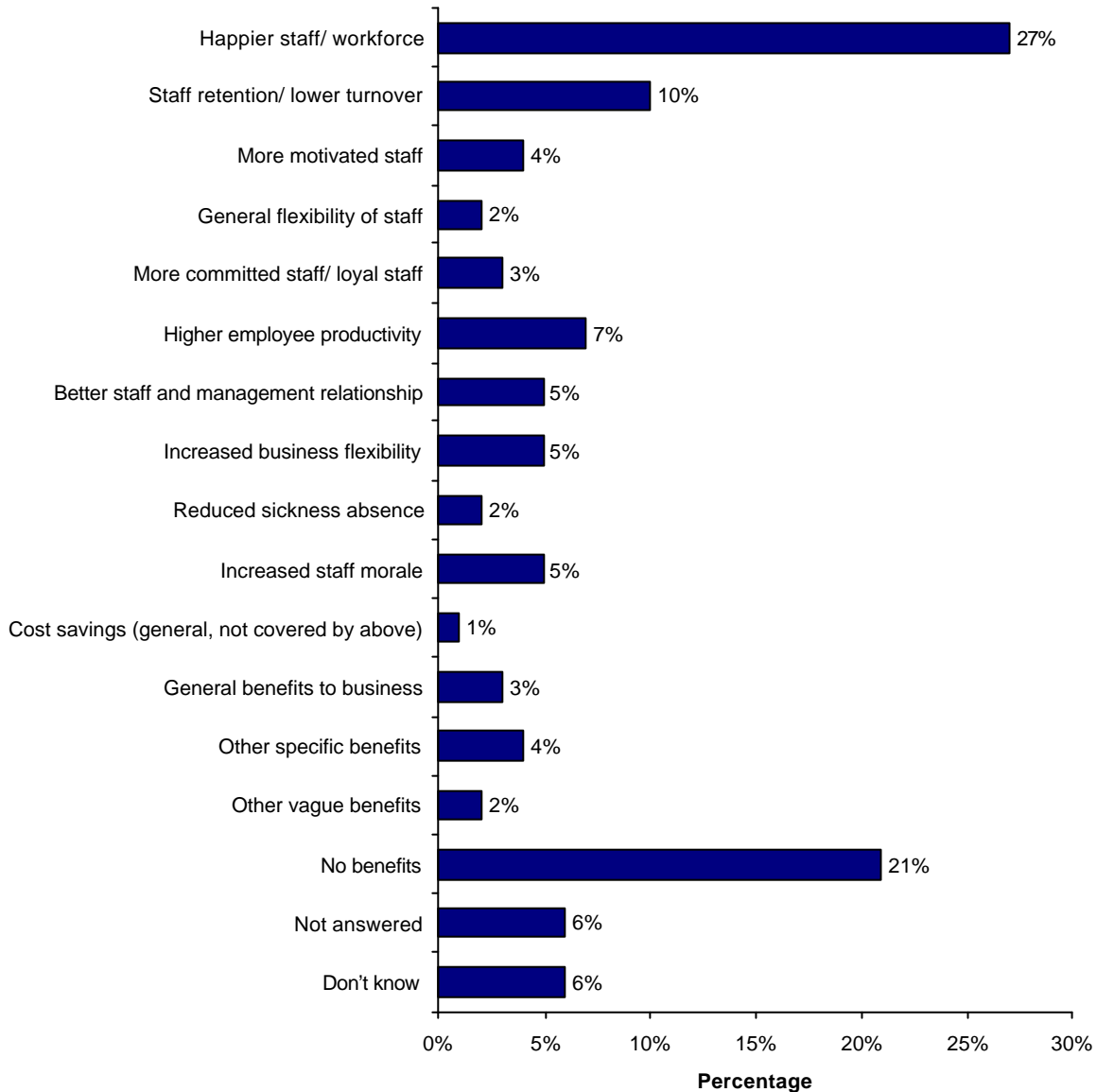
The flexible working practices we have been discussing may enable all employees to better balance their work and personal lives.

What, if any, are the benefits for this establishment from providing flexible working practices?

Figure 25 shows the advantages of flexible working practices reported by employers. The most common advantage mentioned by employers was that employees would be happier, with over a quarter of employers mentioning this benefit (27%). The next most common benefits of flexible working practices reported by the employers were staff retention and recruitment (10%) and higher employee productivity (7%). Cost savings (1%), flexibility of staff (2%) and reduced sickness absence (2%) were not frequently reported by employers as benefits to flexible working practices.

Just over a fifth of employers (21%) said that there were no benefits to flexible working practices. Employers who had no flexible working practices present in the workplace (46%) were more likely to say there were no benefits than employers who had flexible working practices currently in use (16%). The number of flexible working practices also had an effect on the benefits an employer mentioned. Employers who provided four or more practices (39%) were more likely to say that a happy work force was a benefit of flexible working practices than employers who provided between one and three flexible working practices (27%) and those that provided none (12%).

Figure 25 Benefits of having flexible working practices



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Figures sum to more than 100% due to multiple responses

Disadvantages of providing flexible working practices

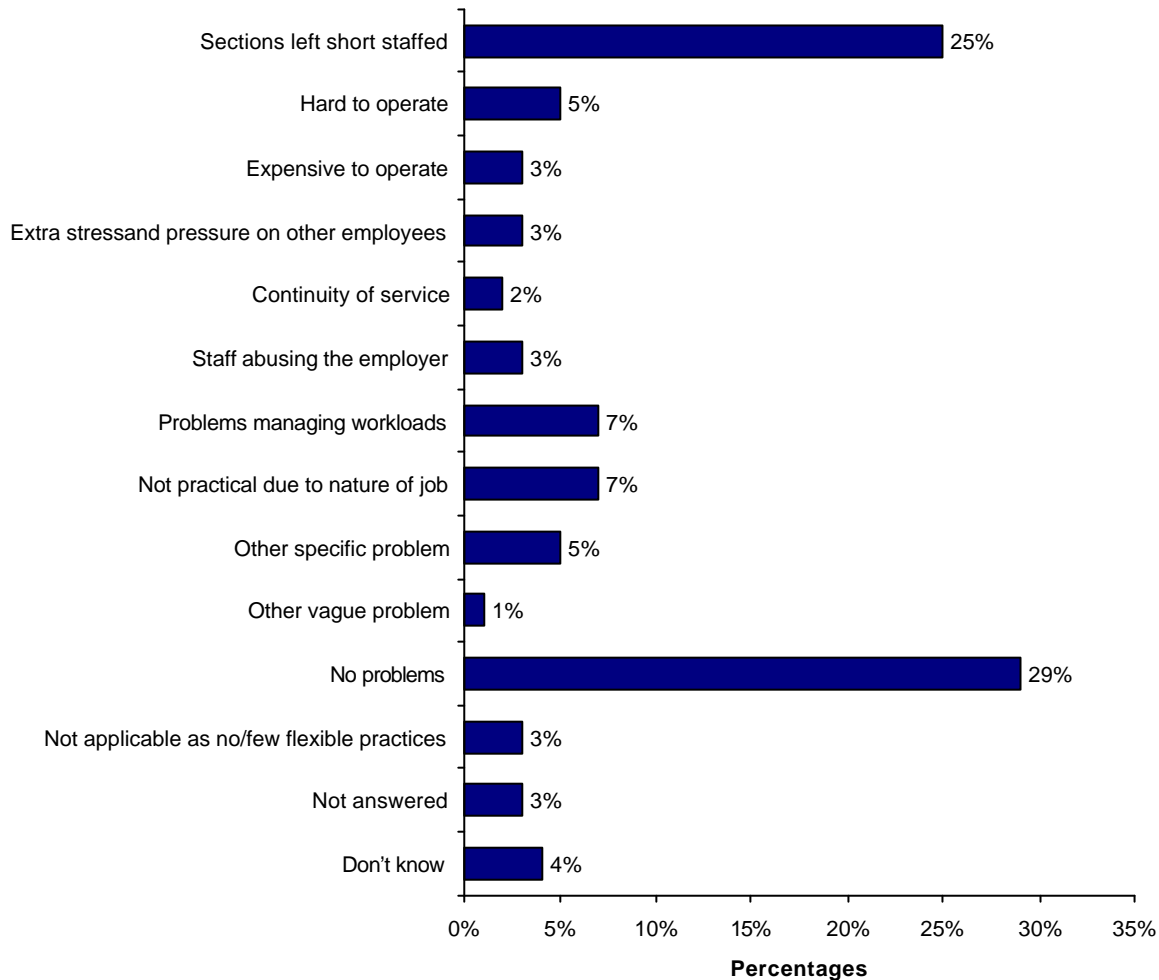
Employers were asked the following question:

And what, if any, are the main disadvantages, or what problems or difficulties have they created?

Figure 26 highlights the main disadvantages that the employers reported from having flexible working practices available to employees. A quarter of employers identified sections being left short staffed as a disadvantage (25%). Employers who currently had flexible working practices in place (28%) were more likely to mention sections being left short staffed as a disadvantage that employers who had no

flexible working practices present (10%). A number of other disadvantages were mentioned ranging from extra pressure on other staff, difficulties managing workload and problems for the business. However, less than one in ten employers mentioned any of these problems. Nearly three in ten employers said there were no disadvantages (29%).

Figure 26 *Main disadvantages of having flexible working practices*



Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Figures sum to more than 100% due to multiple responses

In relation to the advantages and disadvantages together, approximately two-thirds of employers mentioned either advantages (67%) or disadvantages (61%) to flexible working practices in the workplace.

Impact of work-life balance practices in workplace performance

Employers were asked to assess whether flexible working practices had a positive, negative or no effect on a number of dimensions of workplace performance which included productivity, absenteeism, labour turnover, recruitment, employee motivation and commitment and the state of employee relations at the workplace.

Nearly seven in ten employers (68%) said that flexible working arrangements had a positive effect on employee relations. Two-thirds of employers felt that they had a positive effect on employee motivation and commitment (66%). Approximately half of employers said that flexible working practices had a positive effect on the other four indicators (labour turnover - 51%, absenteeism - 50%, productivity - 49%, recruitment - 45%). Employers were more likely to feel that flexible working practices had no effect on these indicators than that they had a negative effect.

Employers that offered four or more flexible working practices to their employees were more likely to say that these practices had a positive effect on each of the indicators. Table 6 shows that a quarter of employers with no flexible working practices (25%) thought that such practices would have a positive effect on employee relations. This compares to nearly three-quarters of employers offering/using between one and three practices (72%) and over four in five employers offering/using four or more practices (84%).

Table 6 *Percentage of employers who reported that flexible working practices have a positive effect of workplace performances by the number of practices present in the workplace*

Workplace performance	No practices	1-3 practices	4 or more practices
Employee relations	25%	72%	84%
Productivity	14%	52%	67%
Absenteeism	19%	51%	68%
Labour turnover	17%	53%	70%
Recruitment	21%	47%	58%
Employee motivation and commitment	32%	69%	81%

Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

The provision of flexible working practices was compared with employers' estimates of financial performance and labour turnover. However, there was no difference between employers on both of these indicators by the number of practices they made available to their staff. The same was true in terms of employee-management relations and level of absenteeism in the workplace.

Costs of work-life balance

Employers were asked to describe the costs incurred when setting up flexible working practices as well as ongoing costs. In relation to set-up costs, just under a quarter of employers (24%) had set up flexible working practices in the last three years. Of these employers, 23% said there were direct costs incurred in setting them up. Employers in larger businesses of 50 or more employees (38%) were more likely to have started these practices in the last three years than employers in smaller businesses of 5-9 employees (17%). Businesses where unions were recognised (35%) were also more likely to have started these practices in the last three years than businesses with no unions (20%). Although the figures are too small to produce reliable estimates, the majority of the costs

incurred were for administrative costs and management time and relatively few of the costs were substantial.

In relation to ongoing costs, 10% of employers said there were ongoing costs resulting from the provision of flexible working practices. Again, the numbers are too small for further analysis. The most common costs identified by employers were the cost of training new staff and extra salary costs. Few employers thought the cost was substantial.

Overall, almost two-thirds of employers (64%) thought the practices had been of benefit to their organisation. One in five employers said the practices had been of no benefit to their business (20%).