

Flexible Working Employees and Employers Survey

December 2005

Executive Summary

Flexible Working Requests – Employees

- In the past two years 12% of employees had approached their current employer to make a request to change how they regularly work.
- 18% of females made a request in comparison to 6% of their male counterparts.
- Overall 75% of the requests were agreed to by the employer.
- The main reasons for working flexibly were because it was ‘in the nature of my job/ type of work’ (21%) and ‘childcare needs’ (20%).

Desired Flexible Working Arrangements – Employees

- Flexi-time was the most desired (23%) flexible working arrangement with employees, followed by working part-time (15%).
- Females had a greater desire to work part-time (24%) than their male counterparts (7%).
- Of those who are parents, 36% desired none of the arrangements and 23% desired flexi-time arrangements.
- Working flexi-time was the most desired flexible working arrangement amongst carers (30%), followed by working part-time (17%).
- The least favoured flexible working arrangements for all employees were working annualised hours (1%) and job share (5%).
- Of those who were parents, the least favoured arrangements are working annualised hours (2%) followed by job share (6%).
- The least favoured flexible working arrangement for carers were working annualised hours (0%) and working a compressed week (2%).

Availability of Flexible Working Arrangements – Employees

- Of the employees surveyed, working part-time was the most available flexible working arrangement (51%).
- Twice as many females (69%) stated part-time arrangements were available to them than males (33%).
- The second most available type of working arrangement was flexi-time (31%).
- Working part-time was also the most common type of flexible working arrangement available for parents/ legal guardians (51%), followed by flexi-time (32%).
- Part-time working was the most available flexible working arrangement (76%) for carers.

Practiced Flexible Working Arrangements – Employees

- In the past year, 22% of all employees practised the most popular flexible working arrangement by working part-time, followed by 18% who practised flexi-time.

- Part-time working arrangements had a large variation in the involvement of males (8%) and females (35%).
- A greater percentage of parents (26%) had worked part-time, in contrast to 17% of those who were not parents.
- Working part-time was also the most common flexible working arrangement amongst carers (41%).
- None of the flexible working arrangements were used by 18% of employees.
- Of the 17 people that adopted flexible working practices, 15 of them maintained both their existing job and its level of seniority.
- 36% percent of employees thought that working reduced hours would have a negative affect on their career prospects.

Satisfaction with Current Working Arrangements – Employees

- Just over half of all employees (52%) stated they were currently satisfied with their overall working arrangement, with a further 32% stating they were very satisfied.

Work life balance – Employees and Employer

- Overall, there were no major differences between the attitudes of employers and employees regarding flexible working practices.
- Almost three quarters of employees (74%) and 70% of employers agreed that ‘everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives in the way they want’.
- The majority of both employers (92%) and employees (94%) agreed that ‘people work best when they can balance their work and other aspects of their lives’.
- Two thirds of employers (66%) and 63% of employees agreed that they ‘must not expect to be able to change their working pattern if doing so would disrupt the business’.
- Fewer employers (31%) than employees (34%) agreed with the statement ‘it’s not the employer’s responsibility to help people balance their work with other aspects of their life’.
- An equal percentage of employers and employees (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’.
- In regards to the above statement, women, parents and those in professional occupations tended to have higher expectations from their employers in terms of how parents should be supported.
- In excess of a third of employees (34%) stated that greater flexibility in working arrangements was the single option, if anything, that their employer could provide to enable them personally to achieve a better work-life balance.

Provision of flexible working arrangements by Employers

- Nearly nine in ten employers (87%) said that they provided one or more flexible working practices to their employees.
- Smaller businesses with 5-9 employees were more likely (17%) 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 employers (83%), followed by flexi-time (26%).
- In relation to part-time arrangements, 88% of businesses with more than 50 employees provided it to their employees (or had done in the last 12 months) in comparison to businesses with 25-49 employees (81%), 10-24 employees (77%) and 5-9 employees (68%).
- The least common flexible working practices were working a compressed working week and working from home (both 7%).

Benefits of providing flexible working practices – Employers

- Nearly seven in ten employers (68%) said that flexible working arrangements had a positive effect on employee relations.
- Approximately half of employers said that flexible working practices had a positive effect on labour turnover (51%), absenteeism (50%), productivity (49%) and recruitment (45%).
- Businesses that do not offer flexible working practices do not feel that such a provision would have a positive impact on absenteeism, labour turnover, productivity and recruitment, whereas those businesses who offer such practices are much more likely to feel they have a positive impact.

Employer and Employee perceptions

- Eighty-three percent of employers stated that part-time working is currently being used, or is available to employees in their workplace whereas only 51% of employees stated that part-time arrangements were available.
- The percentage of employers who provide flexi-time (26%) was less than the percentage of employees who stated it was available to them (31%).
- More than a quarter of employees (30%) stated that working reduced hours was an option available to them; however only 17% of employers stated that they provided it.
- Even though part-time working arrangements were the most common flexible practice provided by employers (83%), when asked what they desired rather than what was available to them only 15% of employees wanted to work in this way.

Flexible Working Employees and Employers Survey

Background

In April 2003, the Department for Employment and Learning introduced a new right for parents of children under the age of six, and of disabled children under 18, to make a request of their employer to work flexibly. The new law placed employers under a duty to consider seriously such requests, which they could decline only for sound business reasons. The aim of the policy was to support working parents in balancing their work and family responsibilities. This was a key facet of a wider programme of 'family-friendly' measures introduced at the same time, including improved paid maternity leave, and new paternity and adoption rights. The Department commissioned research during 2003 on the attitudes of both employers and employees towards flexible working practices, and on the extent to which these were in use. This report details the main findings of the Employees Survey (carried out by way of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, April & May 2003) and the Flexible Working Employers Survey 2003. This initial research is designed to act as a baseline against which the impact of the 2003 flexible working law could be measured by way of comparative research at a later date.

Methodology

The employee research was carried out by way of the NISRA Omnibus Survey¹. As part of the survey in April and May 2003, a sample of 2,200 addresses was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list of addresses. A list of all household members who were 16 years of age or over was compiled and one person was randomly selected as the respondent for that address. The selected respondent was then asked to complete the interview, resulting in a final sample size for the Employee Survey of 1,043.

During June and August 2003 the Central Survey Unit (CSU) of NISRA carried out a survey of employers. A sample of 1,900 businesses throughout Northern Ireland was selected from the BT Business Database and a computer assisted telephone interviewing questionnaire was conducted. In total, productive interviews were obtained from 1,009 businesses.

The surveys examined the provision of flexible working practices in the workplace and the eligibility of employees to use and take up these practices. The flexible working practices that the Flexible Working Employers Survey 2003 and the Employees Survey covered were:

- Part-time working
- Term-time contracts

¹ Details of NISRA Omnibus Survey can be found at <http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/surveys/survey.asp?id=6&details=0>

- Job shares
- Flexi-time
- Compressed working week
- Annualised hours
- Reduced hours
- Working from home

In addition to this, the Employees Survey covered full-time working arrangements.

Flexible Working Requests – Employees Survey

Over the past two years, 12%¹ of employees had approached their current employer to make a request to change how they regularly worked for a sustained period. In particular, 18% of females made a request in comparison to 6% of their male counterparts. A higher percentage of parents/ legal guardians (14%) also made a request than those employees with no children (10%). Of those who were working full-time only 10% made a request to change how they regularly worked whereas 18% of those who were then working part-time made a request.

The most common types of flexible working requests were to work reduced hours or 'part-time hours'². Other common requests included 'flexi-time' and 'job share'.

The main reasons for working flexibly were because it was 'in the nature of my job/ type of work' (21%) and 'childcare needs' (20%). This was closely followed by 'it makes my life easier, to get things done, be more efficient' (19%) and 'to spend more time with my family' (17%).

Less than half (45%)³ of employees who did not currently make use of some or all of these ways of working stated the main reason they had not made use of flexible working arrangements was that they were 'happy with current working arrangements'. The other dominant causes for not using flexible working practices included financial reasons (19%) and 'the job does not allow it/ does not suit my job' (18%). The latter applied more to males (22%) than females (15%).

Of those making requests 30%⁴ were in writing, and 77%⁵ of those had a meeting with their employer to discuss the request. Overall, 75%⁶ of the requests were agreed to by the employer. *Figure 1* demonstrates that having a

¹ Q13 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

² Q5 Omnibus Survey

³ Q6 Omnibus Survey (n=556)

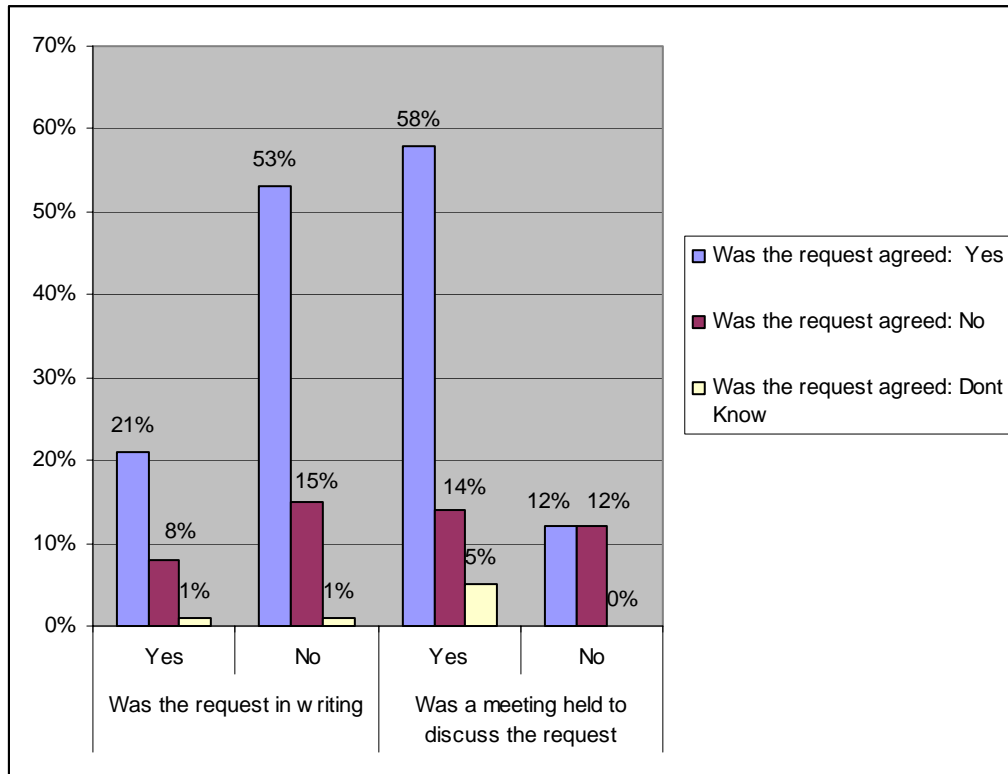
⁴ Q16 Omnibus Survey (n=132)

⁵ Q17 Omnibus Survey (n=43)

⁶ Q18 Omnibus Survey (n=132)

meeting with the employer was more effective in agreeing a request (58%) than not holding a meeting (12%). A request in writing was less likely to be agreed (21%) than a request that was not in writing (53%).

Figure 1: The likelihood of agreeing a request in relation to whether it was in writing or a meeting was convened

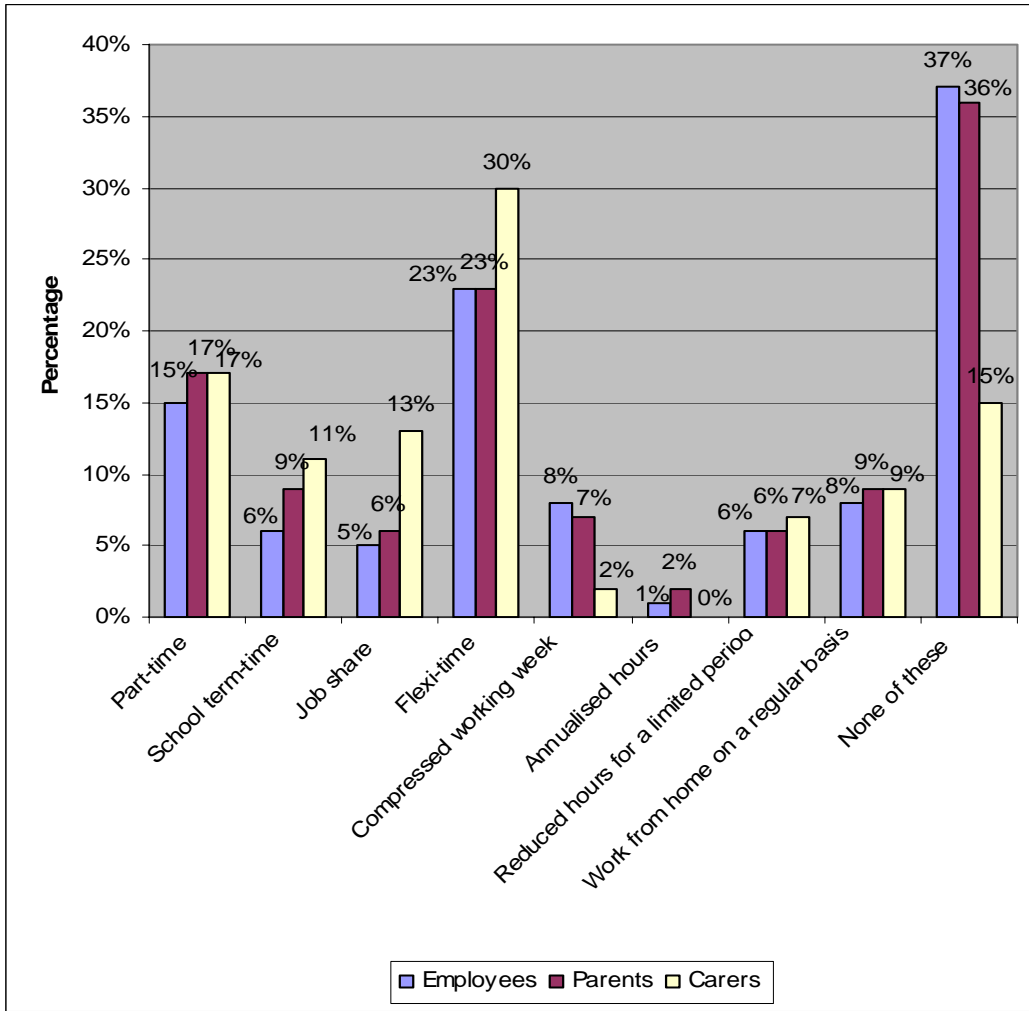


Desired Flexible Working Arrangements – Employees

Figure 2 shows the desired flexible working arrangements of employees, parents and carers (those with other caring needs of relatives, friends or neighbours). With regard to carers, the sample size was extremely small (46 carers). Thus, percentages quoted in relation to these practices should be taken with some degree of caution.

Employees who did not report being happy with current working arrangements were asked what other arrangements they would prefer. More than one third of them (37%) had no preference for any particular option. Nearly one quarter (23%) expressed a desire to work flexi-time and 15% wanted to work part-time. Females had a greater desire to work part-time (24%) than their male counterparts (7%).

Figure 2: Flexible working arrangements desired by all employees, parents and carers



A similar pattern can be seen amongst parents, with 36% desiring none of the arrangements and 23% desiring flexi-time arrangements. A greater percentage of those who were parents (17%) would prefer to work part-time than all employees (15%), and more specifically those who were not parents (12%). Working flexi-time was the most desired flexible working arrangement amongst carers (30%), followed by working part-time (17%) and job share (13%). However, 15% stated they desired to work none of these options.

Of those who currently work full-time, 14% desired to work flexi-time and 7% would prefer to work part-time. In comparison, 16% of those who currently work part-time desired to work flexi-time, and only 3% would like to work full-time. Working school term-time was the next most popular desired working arrangement (9%) of those currently in part-time employment; however only 2% of those in full-time employment desired this.

The least favoured flexible working arrangement for all employees was working annualised hours with only 1%¹ of employees stating that they would like to work in this manner. The second least favoured arrangement was job share (5%), which was much more popular amongst women (8%) than men (2%). Both working during school term-time and working reduced hours for a limited period were the next least favoured arrangements (6% of employees). However, the former was associated with a greater female percentage (11%) than male (2%), while the latter had a greater male percentage (8%) than female (4%).

Amongst those who are parents, the least favoured arrangements were working annualised hours (2%), followed by job share (6%) and working reduced hours for a limited period (6%).

No carers desired to work annualised hours; this was followed by working a compressed week (2%) and working reduced hours for a limited period (7%).

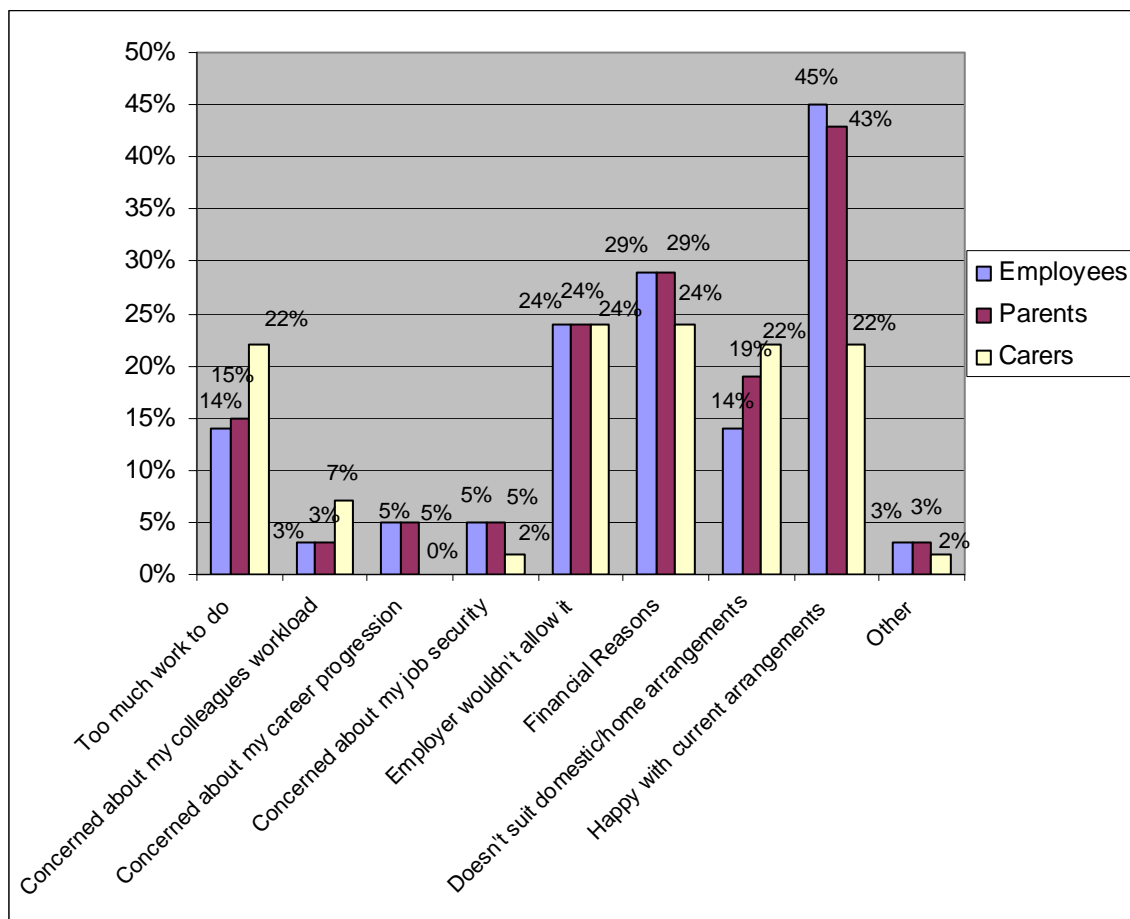
Figure 3 illustrates the most popular reason for these arrangements not being favoured – that 45%² of employees were happy with their current arrangements. This finding is somewhat confusing, as earlier in the survey this group had passed up the opportunity to indicate that they were happy with arrangements. It is possible that some respondents allowed other factors to influence their responses.

Financial reasons (29%) were another significant reason given for not favouring the alternative working arrangements outlined. 24% considered that their employer would not allow the necessary changes to working patterns. In both cases, males showed a stronger attachment to these views (31%, 26%) than their female counterparts (26%, 20%).

¹ Q7 Omnibus Survey (n=786)

² Q8 Omnibus Survey (n=783)

Figure 3: The reasons why flexible working arrangements were not favoured



A similar trend is apparent amongst those who were parents, with 43% stating they were happy with current arrangements, 29% stating financial reasons and 24% affirming their ‘employers wouldn’t allow it’.

The most popular reasons with carers were financial (24%) and ‘employer wouldn’t allow it’ (24%). This was followed closely by ‘too much work to do’ (22%), ‘doesn’t suit domestic/ home arrangements’ (22%) and ‘happy with current arrangements’ (22%).

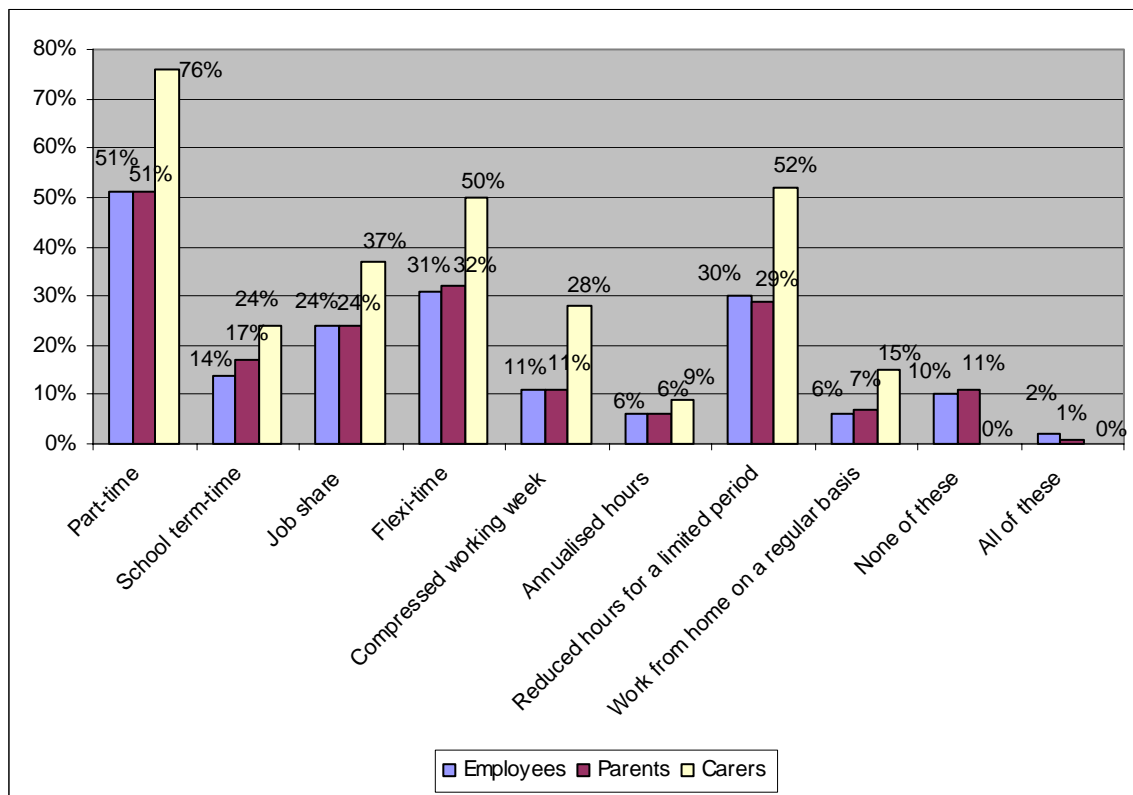
Availability of Flexible Working Arrangements - Employees

Figure 4 shows the flexible working arrangements that were available to employees, parents and carers. Working part-time was the most available flexible working arrangement (51%)¹ reported by employees. More than twice as many females (69%) as males (33%) stated that it was available to them. Availability of part-time working arrangements was greater in the public sector (60%) than in the private sector (44%). The second most popular type of working

¹ Q3 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

arrangement was flexi-time, with 31% of employees stating this was available in their workplace. Again, the corresponding percentages for those employed in the public sector (37%) were greater than for those employed in the private sector (25%). Flexi-time was followed closely by working reduced hours for a limited period, with 30% of employees (25% of males and 35% of females) stating that it was available. Working annualised hours and working from home on a regular basis were the least available categories (6% each). Furthermore, only 2% of employees stated they had a choice of all the categories.

Figure 4: Available flexible working practices of employees, parents and carers



Working part-time was also the most common type of flexible working arrangement available for parents/ legal guardians (51%), followed by flexi-time (32%) and working reduced hours for a limited period (29%). Parents' responses closely mirrored those of all employees.

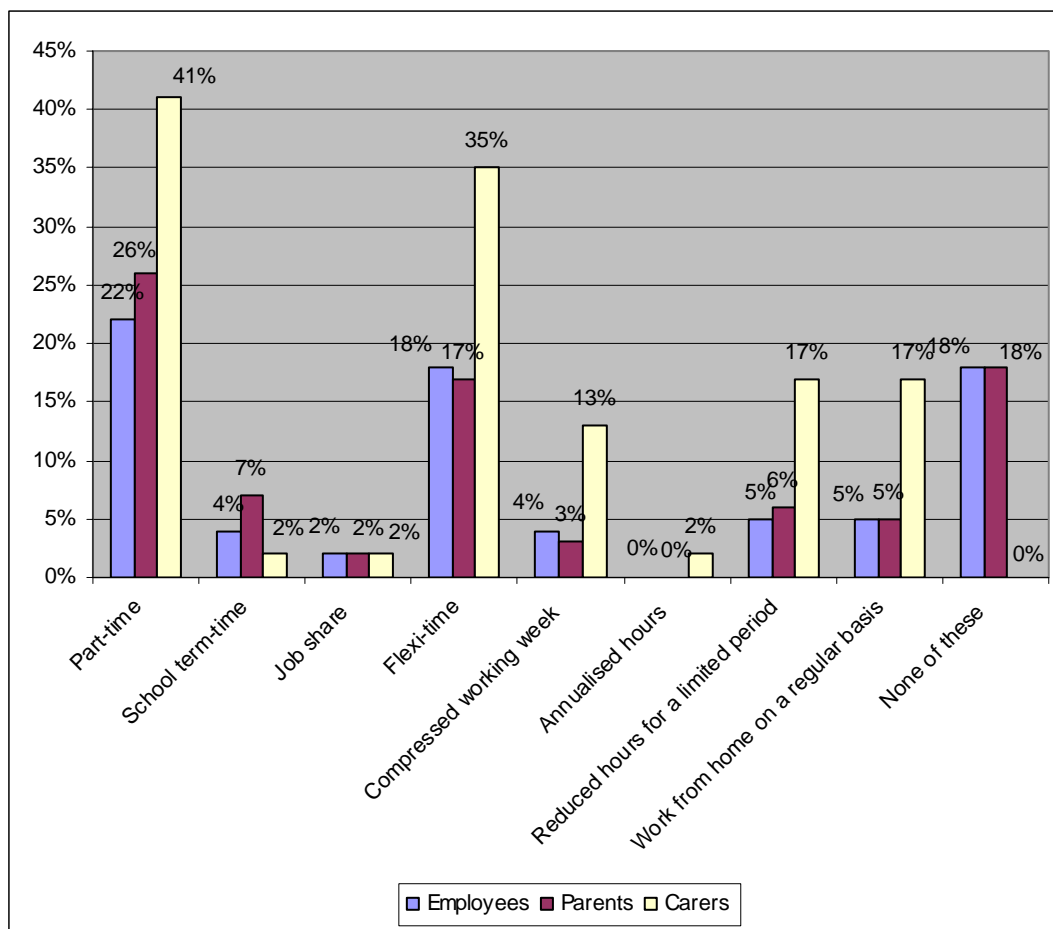
Carers enjoyed a greater availability of all the flexible working arrangements than employees generally or parents. Part-time working was the most available arrangement (76%) for carers. Following this working reduced hours for a limited period (52%) and working flexi-time (50%) were the most available flexible working arrangements for carers. Of course, this does not necessarily suggest that employers treat carers more generously; rather, as seems more likely,

carers may feel unable to take up employment of flexible working arrangements are not available to them.

Practiced Flexible Working Arrangements – Employees

As *Figure 5* shows, in the past year 22%¹ of all employees surveyed practised the most popular flexible working arrangement by working part-time, with a large variation in the involvement of males (8%) and females (35%). This was followed by 18% of all employees availing of flexi-time. There was no variation between the percentage of females and male participation (both 18%). However, 18% of employees also stated they used none of the flexible working arrangements.

Figure 5: Practiced flexible working arrangements used within the last year by all employees,



A greater percentage of parents (26%) than employees (22%) or non-parents (17%²) had worked part-time. A similar pattern was evident in relation to working only during school term time; there was a greater participation rate among

¹ Q4 Omnibus Survey (n=936)

² Q4 vii Omnibus Survey (n=936)

parents (7%) than non-parents (1%). However, 18% of parents still used none of the flexible working arrangements, a figure that corresponds with that for all employees and which is only 1% less than the figure for non-parents.

Working part-time was also the most common flexible working arrangement amongst carers (41%), and was indeed more commonly practised than full-time employment (28%). There was a marked contrast between the percentage of carers who worked full-time (28%) and the 47% of all employees who did so. After part-time employment, working flexi-time was the second most practised working arrangement for carers (35%). Most of the flexible working arrangements were associated with a disproportionately high participation rate for carers by comparison to both employees and parents. This suggests that carers experience difficulty in balancing caring responsibilities with the commitments associated with full-time work.

Of the 17¹ employees who adopted flexible working practices, 15 maintained both their existing job and its level of seniority. 14 of these people were female and 10 were parents or legal guardians. Of the remaining number, one person kept the same job but not the level of seniority and one did not know. No respondents claimed they did not keep the same job or level of seniority.

However, 36%² of employees thought that working reduced hours, for example, part-time hours or job sharing would have a negative affect on their career prospects. Males agreed more strongly with this (42%) than females (29%). Failure to work beyond one's contracted hours was also thought to have negative impacts on career prospects (28%), alongside taking leave to look after children or other dependants (23%). In both these cases a higher percentage of males agreed that career prospects would be negatively affected – 32% and 25% respectively. For females the percentages were 24% and 21% respectively.

Satisfaction with Current Working Arrangements – Employees

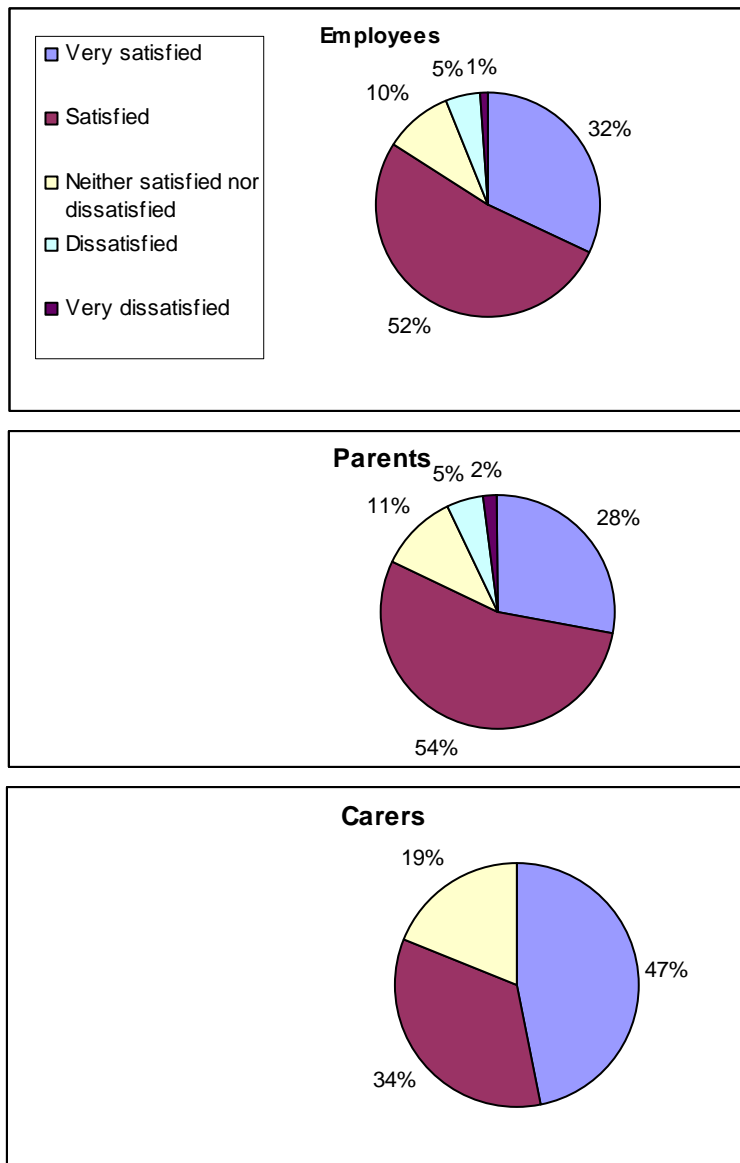
Illustrated in *Figure 6* are the rates of satisfaction expressed by carers, parents and all employees with their current working arrangements. Just over half of all employees (52%)³ stated that they were currently satisfied with their overall working arrangement, with a further 32% stating they were very satisfied. 5% were dissatisfied and only 1% very dissatisfied. A higher percentage of parents were satisfied (54%); however, fewer parents claimed to be very satisfied (28%). 47% percent of carers were very satisfied with their working arrangement and 34% were satisfied. The remaining 19% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. No carers stated they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

¹ Q12 Omnibus Survey (n=17)

² Q27 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

³ Q23 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

Figure 6: Satisfaction for all employees, parents and carers in their current working arrangements.



Promotion of Flexible Working Practices – Employees

Two thirds of employees (66%)¹ felt that their manager did enough to provide and promote flexible working practices. This percentage was greater amongst females (72%) than males (60%), but identical for parents and those who were not parents (66%). There was a marked difference across Northern Ireland, with employees in Belfast more likely (73%) to say that their manager provided and promoted flexible working practices than employees in the East (65%) and West

¹ Q22 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

(65%). There was also a marked difference between the public sector (71%) and the private sector (61%).

Even though the majority of employees felt that their employers promoted flexible working practices, 47%¹ of them were not aware that, from the 6th April 2003, employers legally had to consider requests to adopt flexible working practices from parents with young children under the age of 6 or with disabilities. In the region of one third of employees (34%) were aware of the policy and its detail; however there was a greater level of awareness amongst those who had children under 6 in the household (39%) and those who were parents (39%). On the other hand, there was a greater lack of awareness amongst those who were not parents or legal guardians (54%).

Just under two thirds of employees (61%)² felt this right was 'fair in relation to other employees without children under the age of 6, with a higher percentage of females in agreement with this (65%). However, 20% of both males and females felt that the policy was unfair.

Parents

Over three quarters of those surveyed with jobs worked full-time (78%). Of those who worked full-time, a greater percentage had no children (46%) in comparison to those who worked part-time hours (29%). See *Table 1* for further information. Figures were similar for the percentage of employees with 1 child both in full-time (14%) and part-time (13%) employment. However, of those who had 2 children, a greater percentage worked part-time (27%) than full-time (22%). The trend was more evident still amongst those with 3 children, with 20% working part-time and 10% full-time.

¹ Q19 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

² Q20 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

Table 1: The nature of the employee’s employment against how many children employees parent

% within Part-time or Full-time employment

		Part-time or Full-time employment		
		Full-time	Part-time	Total
Number of children	0	46%	29%	42%
	1	14%	13%	14%
	2	22%	27%	24%
	3	10%	20%	12%
	4	6%	7%	6%
	5	1%	2%	1%
	6		0%	0%
	7		1%	0%
	9		1%	0%
	11		1%	0%
	Total		100%	100%

Work life balance – Employees and Employers

Employers were presented with a set of statements covering various aspects of flexible working and were asked whether they agreed, disagreed or neither with these statements. Employees were offered the additional categories of ‘strongly agree’ and ‘strongly disagree’, which have been combined with the agree and disagree categories respectively for comparative purposes. Responses are reported in *Figure 7*.

Figure 7: Attitudes of Employees and Employers regarding flexible working

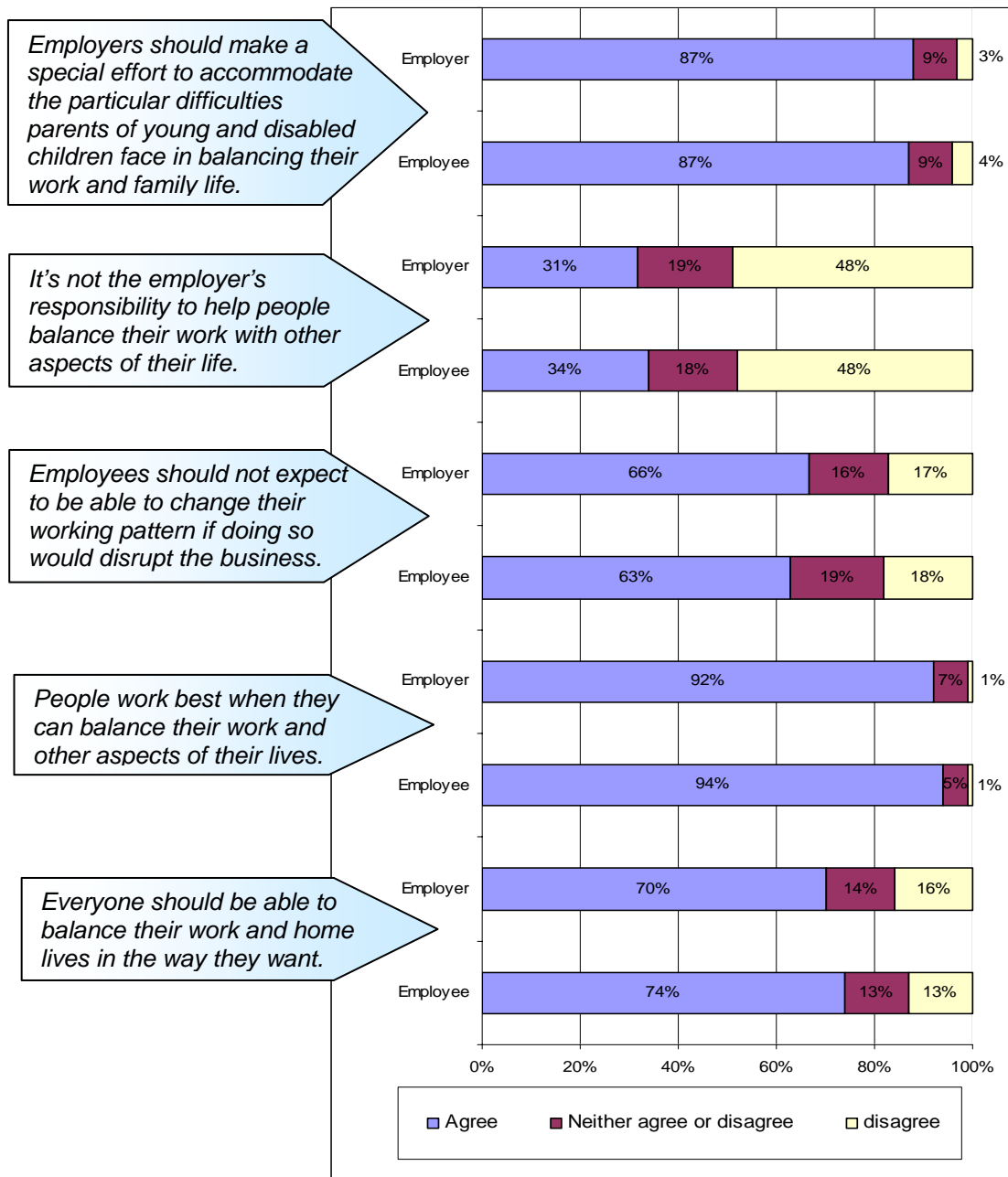


Figure 7 illustrates that, overall, there were no major differences between the attitudes of employers and those of employees regarding flexible working practices. An equal percentage of employers and employees (87%) agreed that 'employers should make a special effort to accommodate the particular difficulties parents of young and disabled children face in balancing their work and family life'. Of the employees, 88% of females agreed in comparison to 85% of males, and a greater number of parents agreed (88%) than non-parents (84%).

life'. Of the employees, 88% of females agreed in comparison to 85% of males, and a greater number of parents agreed (88%) than non-parents (84%). Professional (89%) and unskilled manual (89%) socio-economic groups had the greatest agreement rates in contrast to managerial and technical (87%).

In relation to the statement 'everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives in the way they want' 74%¹ of employees and 70%² of employers agreed. 16% of employers disagreed, more than employees by a margin of 3%. A higher percentage of male employees disagreed (16%) than female employees (10%). A marginally higher percentage of parents agreed (75%) with the statement than those who were not parents (72%). When assessed by socio-economic group, a higher percentage of partly skilled employees (78%) agreed with the statement than in managerial and technical (73%) and professional (71%) employees. A similar trend was evident with those who had higher educational qualifications, with 16% of those educated to degree level or higher disagreeing with the statement in comparison to only 7% of those with no qualifications.

There was a strong positive response to the statement 'people work best when they can balance their work and other aspects of their lives', with 92% of employers and 94%³ of employees agreeing. Of the latter, a greater percentage of females agreed (95%) than males (93%) and a greater percentage of parents (96%) than non-parents (92%). Additionally, managerial and technical (96%) and partly skilled (96%) socio-economic groups were more inclined to agree with the statement than unskilled manual (87%) socio-economic groups.

These findings suggest that there is a positive disposition towards flexible working patterns from the perspective of both employees and employers, with little difference in attitudes between both groups. However, there is some indication that these strong positive feelings are tempered by an acknowledgement of some of the difficulties involved. This is exemplified by the finding that just over one third of employees agreed (34%) with the statement 'it's not the employer's responsibility to help people balance their work with other aspects of their life'. A similar percentage of employers agreed (31%). However, just less than half of employees and employers (48%) disagreed with the statement, with a greater percentage of females disagreeing (51%) than males (44%) and parents (50%) than non-parents (44%). A greater percentage of managerial and technical (57%) and skilled non-manual (53%) employees also disagreed with the statement than did those in skilled manual (36%) and unskilled manual groups (30%). Those who were in partly skilled (40%) or unskilled manual groups (40%) were most likely to agree.

¹ Q28 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

² Employers Survey p45 (n=1009)

³ Q29 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

In addition, two thirds of employers (66%) and 63% of employees agreed that they 'must not expect to be able to change their working pattern if doing so would disrupt the business'. The percentage of employees who agreed was slightly lower (63%)¹. 19% of employees neither agreed nor disagreed, while 18% disagreed with the statement. A higher percentage of females (21%) than males (14%), and of parents (17%) than non-parents (16%) disagreed. In comparison with the percentages for all employees, fewer of those in the managerial and technical socio-economic group agreed with the statement (59%) and a greater number disagreed (23%). This stands in contrast to the trend amongst the unskilled manual group, of which 77% were in agreement and 13% against.

These findings could suggest that turning flexible working arrangements into practice could be difficult in some instances. This is a difficulty acknowledged by many employees as well as employers.

When asked 'what single option, if anything, could your employer reasonably provide for you personally to achieve a better work-life balance', the largest percentage of employees (44%)² replied 'nothing, my employer does as much as I could reasonably expect'. However, only 41% of males held this view, compared with 46% of females. A lower percentage of parents gave this reply (36%) than non-parents (54%).

The next most popular view as to what more the employer could do was to offer greater flexibility in working arrangements (34%). This option was secured more support from males (38%) than females (31%). Parenthood did not have a bearing on responses, with 34% of parents and non-parents feeling that employers could do more in this area.

The third most popular category, requested by a mere 6% of employees, was 'more information relating to parental rights to time off'. The figure for parents was slightly higher (8%). There was a marked difference between the demand from parents and non-parents for 'more support in paying for childcare' (7% compared to 1%) and 'more support for arranging childcare' (6% compared to 2%).

A greater proportion of part-time (54%) than full-time (41%) employees felt that there was nothing more they could reasonably expect their employer to do to promote work-life balance. The greater satisfaction of part-timers in this regard is underlined by the fact that, while 38% of full-time employees felt that providing greater flexibility in working arrangements would be the single most beneficial option their employer could pursue, only 21% of part-timers felt the same way.

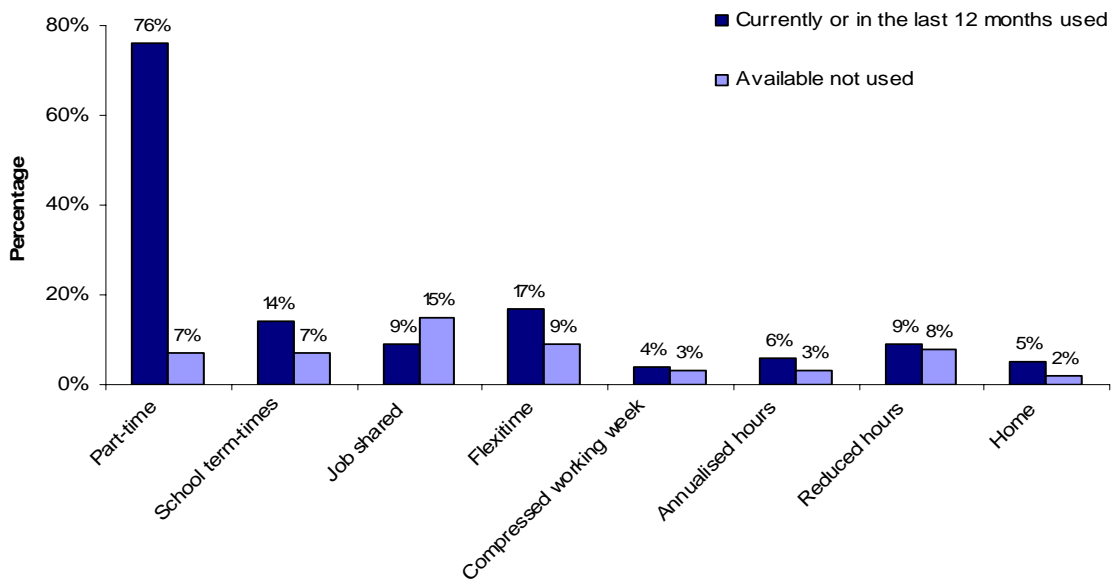
¹ Q30 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

² Q33 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

Provision of flexible working arrangements by Employers

Nearly nine out of ten employers, 87%¹ of businesses, made some type of flexible working arrangement available to their employees. *Figure 8*² shows provision of flexible working practices in businesses. Part-time working was the most common type of flexible working practice with approximately three quarters of employers (76%) saying that an employee currently, or in the last 12 months, used this arrangement. A further 7% of employers said that they made provision for part-time work but that no one had used it in the past 12 months. The next most common flexible working arrangement was flexi-time with 17% of employers saying that an employee currently, or in the last 12 months, used it and a further 9% saying that it was available but that no one had used it. The least common flexible working practices were working a compressed week and working from home, with fewer than one in ten businesses saying that these options were available or currently used (7% and 7% respectively).

Figure 8: Provision of flexible working practices



The provision of flexible working arrangements differs across businesses. Smaller businesses with 5-9 employees were more likely (17%)³ than businesses with 50 or more employees (6%) to have no flexible working practices. The majority of businesses with 50 or more employees (92%) provided at least one

¹ Employers Survey p17 (n=1009)

² Employers Survey p18 (n=1009)

³ Employers Survey p17 (n=1009)

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 than single independent establishments (77%) to say that an employee in their organisation currently used, or had in the last 12 months used, flexible working practices.

Table 2¹ shows the breakdown of the three most common flexible working arrangements by the size of the businesses surveyed. Part-time working arrangements were much more common than school term-time and flexi-time arrangements. In businesses with 10-24 employees, for instance, 77% had an employee currently working part-time or an employee who had done so in the last 12 months; 16% had an employee similarly using flexi-time; and 13% had employees making use of school term-time arrangements.

88% of businesses with more than 50 employees provided part-time arrangements for their employees (or had done so in the last 12 months). This compares to 81% for businesses with 25-49 employees, 77% (10-24 employees) and 68% (5-9 employees).

Participation rates in both flexi-time and school term-time correlate with company size. Only one in ten businesses with 5-9 employees had employees who worked flexi-time in the last 12 months and 7% who worked school term-time. This contrasts sharply with companies having more than 50 employees, where 32% of staff had worked flexi-time and 30% had worked school term-time.

Table 2: Percentages of businesses stating that they had an employee who currently or in the last 12 months worked one of these flexible working patterns

Size of business	Part-time	School term-time	Flexi-time	Unweighted total
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

Benefits of providing flexible working practices – Employers

The most common advantage of flexible working arrangements mentioned by employers was that ‘employees would be happier’, with over a quarter of employers mentioning this benefit (27%)². The next most common benefit reported by the employers was ‘staff retention’ and ‘recruitment’ (10%).

Employers were asked to assess whether flexible working practices had a positive, negative or no effect on a number of dimensions of workplace

¹ Employers Survey p20 (n=1009)

² Employers Survey p47 (n=1009)

performance which included absenteeism, labour turnover, productivity, recruitment and the state of employee relations at the workplace.

Nearly seven in ten employers (68%)¹ said that flexible working arrangements had a positive effect on employee relations. 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 offering 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 3* shows that just under one fifth of employers with no flexible working practices thought that such practices would have a positive effect on absenteeism (19%). This compares to over a half of employers offering or using between one and three practices (51%) and over two thirds of employers offering or using four or more practices (68%). It would appear, therefore, that businesses which do not offer flexible working practices do not feel that such provision would have a positive impact on absenteeism, whereas those businesses which do offer such practices are much more likely to feel they have a positive impact. This is also evident in relation to labour turnover, where 70% of employers with 4 or more flexible working practices thought that flexible working had a positive effect, compared to only 17% of employers with no flexible working practices.

Table 3: Percentage of employers who reported that flexible working practices had a positive effect on workplace performance 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%

Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1009 managers

Employer and Employee perceptions

This section summarises the key findings for employers² and employees.³ *Figure 9* shows the difference between the perceptions of each group, comparing the flexible working practices that were currently provided or available to employees against the flexible working practices that employees *believed* were available to them. However these results should be approached with due care and attention as other factors are prevalent and could influence responses.

¹ Employers Survey p50 (n=1009)

² Employers Survey p18 (n=1009)

³ Q3 Omnibus Survey (n=1043)

As the most common flexible working arrangement, 83% of employers stated that part-time working was currently being used or was available to employees in their workplace, whereas only 51% of employees stated that part-time arrangements were available.

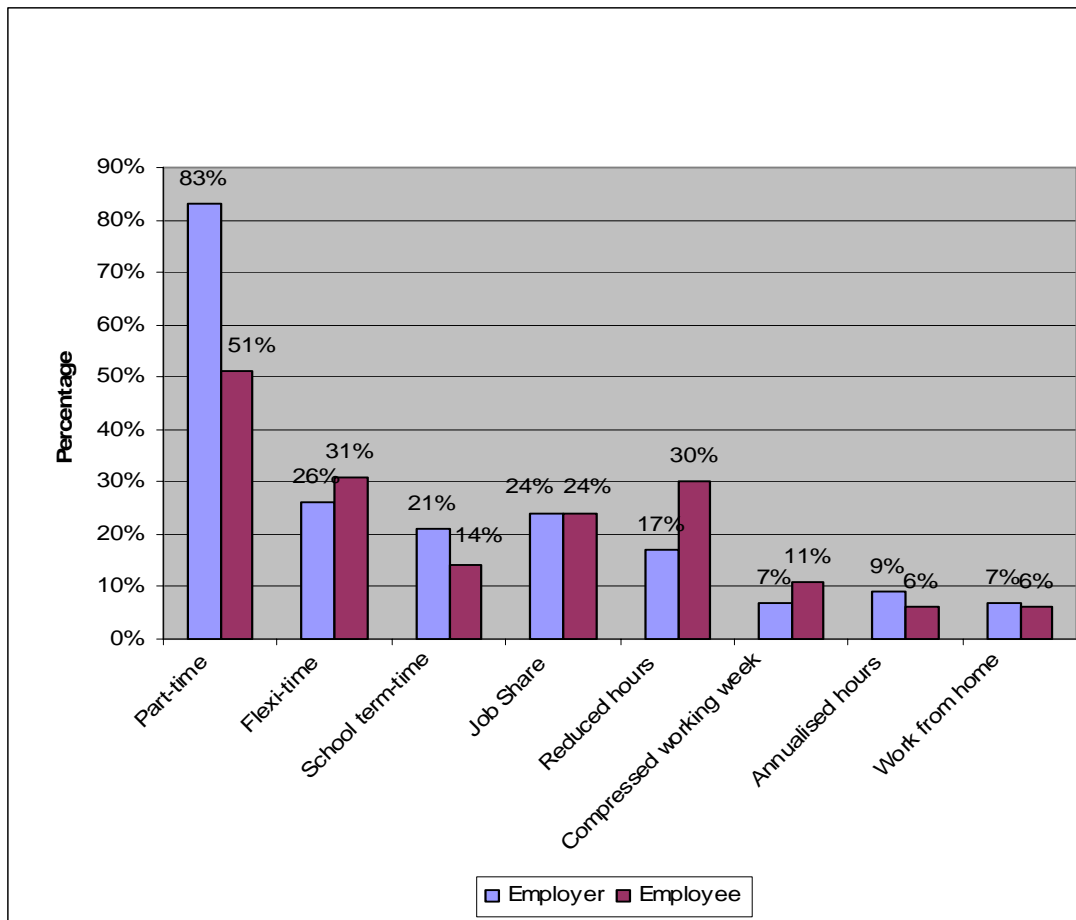
Flexi-time was the next most common flexible working arrangement. However, the percentage of employers who provided it (26%) was less than the percentage of employees who stated it was available to them (31%).

Following this, the third most common flexible working arrangement provided by employers was job share (24%). This percentage was identical to the percentage of employees who stated that job share was available to them.

However, the third most common arrangement for employees was working reduced hours for a limited period (30%). As only 17% of employers stated that this practice was currently being used or was available to employees, the negative contrast in the percentage was substantial.

On the other hand, 14% of employees had stated that working during school term-time was available to them whereas 21% of employers claim to provide it.

Figure 9: Flexible working practices provided by employers and flexible working arrangements that employees stated are available to them.



Even though part-time working arrangements were the most common flexible working practice provided by employers (83%), when asked what they *desired* rather than what was available to them, only 15%¹ of employees wanted to work in this way. The most desired flexible working practice by employees was flexi-time (23%); however it was only the second most common flexible practice provided by employers (26%).

Using the percentages of flexible working practices provided by employers as the expected frequencies and the percentages of practices that employees stated were available to them as the observed frequencies, the chi-squared goodness of fit statistical test was used to explore if there was a statistically significant level of difference between the two sets of results. Figure 10 illustrates the results of the statistical test were: $\chi^2=134.072$, $df =7$, $p<0.001$. These results show that the level of flexible working practices that employees state are available to them differ significantly from the level of flexible working practices that employers

¹ Q7 Omnibus Survey (n=786)

provide. Further, it appears that more employees noted the availability of 'working reduced hours for a limited time' than expected, and fewer employees noted 'working part-time hours' than expected.

Figure 10: Chi-squared test assessing the significant level of difference between the available flexible working practices provided by employers and the flexible working arrangements that employees stated are available to them

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Work part-time(working less than 30 hours a week)	532	633.2	-101.2
Work only during school term-time	122	160.2	-38.2
Job Share	207	183.1	23.9
Work Flexi-time	221	198.4	22.6
Work a compressed working week	79	53.4	25.6
Work annualised hours	48	68.7	-20.7
Work reduced hours for a limited period	232	129.7	102.3
Work from home on a regular basis	39	53.4	-14.4
Total	1480		

Test Statistics

Employees	
Chi-Square(a)	134.072
df	7
Asymp. Sig.	.000

0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 53.4.