



the work foundation

Changing demographics

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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Changing demographics have become an obsession for Government and businesses alike. All are struggling to understand and respond to the consequences of far-reaching changes within the population, the labour market and society as a whole. But what do these changes really mean for the labour market and for the way people work?

To answer some of these important questions, the Work Foundation commissioned IFF Research to carry out a telephone survey of 1000 adults aged 16+ in September 2004. Our main findings include:

- **Working hours dissatisfaction**
 - More than half of our survey respondents are **dissatisfied with their current working hours** – the majority would prefer to work fewer hours.
- **Support for flexible working**
 - There is overwhelming support for making flexible working available to everyone – on the whole respondents did not subscribe to the negative image of someone who works flexibly as being unproductive or unsuccessful;
 - Currently two-thirds of respondents are able to work flexibly – and almost all of this group make the most of these arrangements;
- **Small businesses are good at flexible working**
 - Those working in small businesses and in large organisations are most likely to have flexible working available to them: those working in medium sized organisations were least likely to agree they could work flexibly.
- **Creating a ‘career lay-by’, not a ‘career cul-de-sac’**
 - Over two-thirds of respondents believe that career structures need to allow for time out without damage to career prospects and that organisations need to change the long hours culture;
 - This suggests that the career structure needs to be changed. Currently if you step off the ‘career motorway’ and take time out, you get stuck in a ‘career cul-de-sac’ – often with fewer opportunities for training, lower wages and little change to progress. Organisations need to respond to changing demographics and find a way to create ‘career lay-bys’ instead.
- **‘Not working’ is not a desired option**
 - The majority of respondents do not see ‘not working’ as ideal at most periods of their lives and careers. However, as responsibilities change, most respondents support the idea of being able to work on a flexible basis and to work full or part time depending on their situations;
- **The gender gap**
 - Men and women’s expectations of how they would like to work or ‘should’ work when they have children are significantly different. The majority of both men and women expect men to be the main breadwinner and women to take time out of their careers to care for children, particularly young children.

■ **The generation gap**

- Younger respondents would like to work flexibly throughout their lives and stop working or considerably reduce their working hours before they reach retirement age.
- In contrast, those aged over 55 see themselves working into their sixties – many of them full-time. Older workers may need to continue working, given the current pensions situation: women in particular are likely to find themselves with low incomes in retirement because of the time taken out of the labour market, often to care for children. However, many older workers may also choose to work, depending on the type of job they do.
- This is a clear message that people do not want to be written off at 60. High numbers of unemployed people over 55 who want work demonstrate that more needs to be done to persuade employers of the benefits of employing older workers. The Age Discrimination legislation, coming into force in 2006, needs to tackle the assumptions made about older workers, and encourage the creation of procedures that can bring employment to an end when appropriate – rather than having a default retirement age that may ignore someone's skills and abilities.

■ **Employers and the Government should invest and legislate for change**

- Over 90% of respondents believe that employers should invest money in changing working practices;
- Employers wield considerable power in determining the culture of the organisation and how this supports workers to work flexibly and to balance their work with their other responsibilities;
- Respondents recognise that decisions leading to change need to be made at different levels - four-fifths of respondents see negotiations having to take place at team level, for example. However, the ability to have conversations at a team level is shaped by the culture of the organisation, and so employers and Government are seen as having a key role to play in enabling change to happen without the individuals involved suffering career death or other penalties.

What can we expect of the future workforce?

As the population changes, the Government and employers need to respond to the repercussions these changes create for the labour market. Ways of working need to respond to the changing market, to the changing consumers who are also the changing employees. When designing products, companies understand that at different times in their lives, different people need and want different things. It is not such a giant leap to apply this to the labour market: to start talking not just about working hours, but about working lives, which helps encompass the way that each person can and wants to work may change over the lifetime. Our survey respondents have demonstrated that they want to be able to work in different ways as their responsibilities change – not to stop making an economic contribution, but to make a different one at different times. They are looking to their employers and the Government to provide a working climate that enables them to make changes without impacting on their career success or their earnings potential. With the labour market becoming more female, older and more diverse, these are growing demands that the Government is already starting to respond to – and that all employers need to sit up and listen to. The UK's demographics are already changing: the workplace cannot afford not to.

1. Introduction

Imagine *The Office* in 2020. David Brent might still be hanging around, displaying slightly slower dance moves, dispensing similar 'jewels' of wisdom. Gareth and others are probably still thinking about moving on. All of them, of course, are over fifteen years older than when we first saw them in 2002. But, looking around the office, there aren't that many younger people working with them these days: there aren't as many around. Some of the older workers are well over sixty-five: David Brent might say they're there because they love their work, but in reality they cannot afford to retire. Most of the new starters are female, more people are working flexibly or part-time, and Slough's Asian population would have continued to grow making the office more ethnically diverse than it used to be. Welcome to the 'new faces' of the labour market.

These 'new faces' reflect the dramatic changes taking place in the UK population. Changing demographics have become an obsession for Government and businesses alike. All are struggling to understand and respond to the consequences of far-reaching changes within the population, the labour market and society as a whole.

Key Trends

- The workforce is set to grow by 300,000 from 2004 to 2010 – 80% of this growth will be women;
- There will be 2.7 workers to every 1 non-worker by 2020 (compared to 4:1 in 1990);
- 8% of the workforce will be from an ethnic minority by 2030;
- 1 in 5 UK workers will be mothers;
- 25% of all families will be single parent families;
- 1.8 children per family;
- Up to 10 million people will be caring for elderly relatives.

(Britain in 2010, Department of Work and Pensions, 2001)

Age is amongst the most significant of these changes. All the anti-ageing creams in the world cannot change the fact that the UK population is ageing, and there are fewer younger workers to support them. With a lower birth rate and a higher life expectancy also comes an extension of both youth and old age. Young people tend to stay on in education longer and to evade responsibilities and children until later in life. Older people are taking advantage of their good health to enjoy a lengthy retirement. Our ageing population will not only affect the way our society is run, with businesses realising the worth of the 'grey pound' and 'grey power' becoming something to be reckoned with (pensioner protests at Council tax rises for example). The ageing population also requires a serious review of the way we fund pensions, of our current age of retirement, and of our strategies for eldercare.

Changing households are also impacting upon the labour market and society. More and more families choose, or need, to have two parents working, and there are more and more complex family structures: by 2010 a quarter of all families will be single parent, and one in ten children will be stepchildren.¹ The employment rate of mothers with dependent children has risen from 57 per cent in 1990 to 65 per cent in 2000²,

¹ Department for Work & Pensions, 2001

² *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents* (2003) DTI

significantly closing the gap with fathers and making it unsurprising that an estimated 82 per cent of extra jobs created between 1998 and 2011 will be taken by women.³

The 'two for one' offer⁴, where for every employee an employer gets, they get one person – usually a wife, sometimes a mother – for free, is over. But someone still needs to look after the children and do the housework. And so debates about childcare, work-life balance and the damaging effect of long hours cultures on talent retention and productivity have shot up the agenda.

But what do these changes really mean for the labour market and for the way people work? As it becomes more and more likely that we'll have to work until we're 70, will we really be willing to work for at least 50 years, 9 till 5? How will people's expectations about their lives and careers change – and what effect does your social class have upon whether you can realise those expectations? What will the future labour force demand of policy-makers and employers in five, ten or twenty years time? And how do businesses ensure that they don't sidetrack people who take time out of the labour market, whether to look after children or elderly parents, or just to take a career break?

To answer some of these important questions, the Work Foundation commissioned IFF Research to carry out a telephone survey of 1000 adults aged 16+ in September 2004. This report presents the findings of this survey, examining whether there are differences between men and women, between different generations and across sectors and industries. Most of all, it seeks to illustrate how the changing demographics of the UK population could affect individuals, employers and policy-makers over the next twenty years.

³ Armitage, B. & Scott, M. (1998). "British Labour Force Projections: 1998-2011", in *Labour Market Trends*, Vol. 106, No. 6 Pages 281-297, ONS.

⁴ Burgraff, S.(1997) *The Feminine Economy and Economic Man*: Reading Mass, Perseus Books

2. How are people working now?

■ *Responsibilities for changing the way we work*

Our survey findings are broadly in line with those of the Labour Force Survey⁵: working hours are spread across part-time, standard hours, and long hours working.

Part-time – less than 16 hours a week	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Almost one in ten respondents (8%) work less than 16 hours per week (3% of men surveyed and 12% of women).▪ Those working in the public sector and retail-hospitality are more likely to work part-time than other sectors.▪ Semi skilled and unskilled workers are more likely to work part-time than those in other job roles.
Standard hours – 16-40 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Two-thirds (63%) work between 16 and 40 hours;▪ Those working in professional and skilled non-manual occupations are more likely to work standard hours.
Long hours – over 40 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 30% work 40 hours or more, two-thirds of whom are men. 4% of respondents work over 60 hours per week.▪ Those working in agriculture, manufacturing/construction are more likely to work over 60 hours per week.▪ Managers and skilled manual workers are more likely to work longer hours than those in other job roles.

Although our survey found that nearly half of respondents would prefer to keep working the same hours, this means that over half were unhappy with the hours they currently work.

7% of respondents said they would prefer longer hours. Whilst half of these people are currently working less than 16 hours a week, nearly 4 in 10 people who agreed with this statement currently work between 16 and 40 hours a week. The fact that those in skilled manual and unskilled roles are more likely to prefer longer hours suggests that a desire for longer hours may be partly to do with the extra money that can be gained for longer hours of work.

There is also a large minority who would prefer shorter hours: over four in ten (43%) of respondents would like to work a shorter week and, unsurprisingly, the vast majority saying this are currently working over 40 hours a week. Those who work in agriculture, manufacturing/construction, business services and transport/distribution, who are already more likely than other sectors to work over 40 hours each week, are also more likely to prefer shorter hours.

Managers come out strongly as a group who would prefer shorter hours. More than 40% of managers work over 40 hours each week and this is also the group that is most likely to prefer shorter hours.

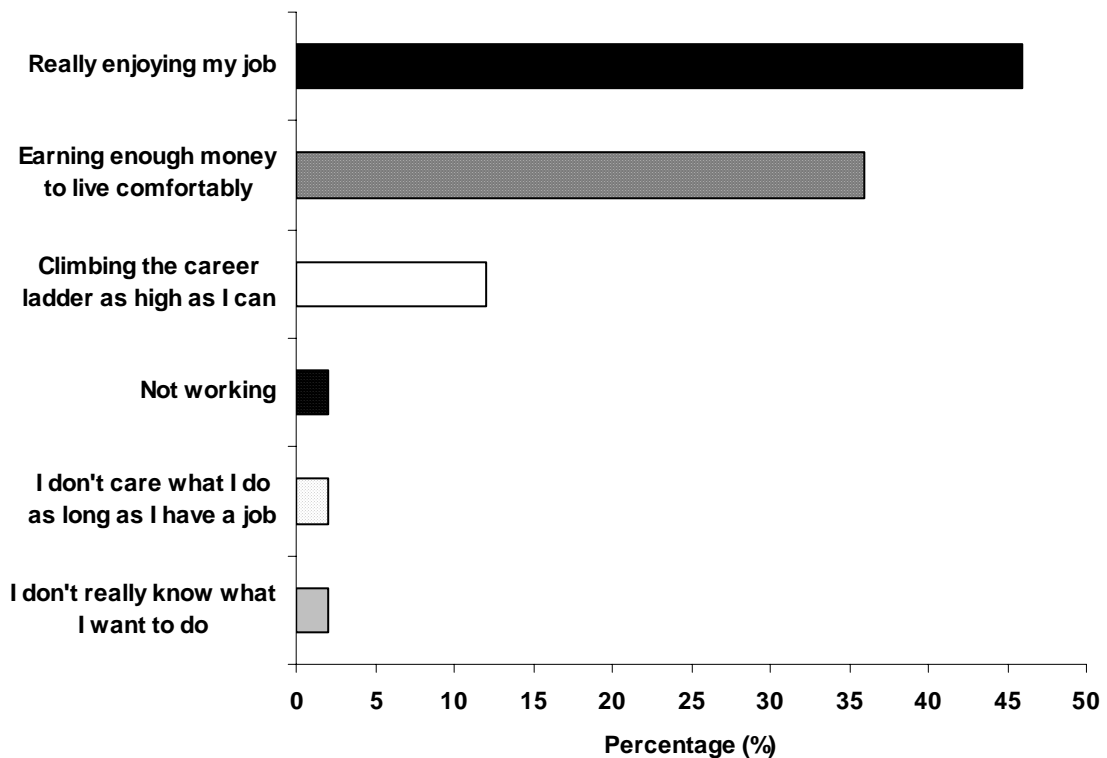
⁵ For the period July – September 2004

■ **What are people's ideas about 'success' in paid work?**

Different attitudes to work may affect individuals' views about the hours they would like to work. 'Success' means different things to different people: for some it is about enjoying their job, whilst for others the main objective is to climb the career ladder as high as possible. Understanding how people regard their career helps illuminate why people may say that they wish to work longer (perhaps to earn more money or progress in a career) or shorter (to see more of friends and family) hours.

The chart below illustrates the results of the survey: it is clear that the vast majority want to really enjoy their job and earn enough money to live comfortably, with only 13% saying that they wish to 'climb the career ladder as high as I can'.

Chart A: Ideas about success at work:



Those working in the public sector, retail/hospitality, and business services were much more likely to say that their priority is to 'really enjoy my job'. Managers, professionals, skilled non-manual workers and semi-skilled occupations were also more likely to agree with this statement.

In contrast, those working in agriculture, manufacturing/construction and transport/distribution, and those in skilled manual or unskilled occupations, were much more likely to say that their main aim was to earn enough money to live comfortably.

Climbing the career ladder as high as possible was not number one for any sector or job role, but it did feature particularly for those employed in business services and those employed in managerial and semi-skilled occupations. For all of these groups, their attitude to work has some impact upon their views on flexible working.

■ ***What do people think of flexible working?***

Debates about long working hours, working cultures and business performance have meant that flexible working has shot up the policy and business agenda. In the past six years there has been legislation to extend maternity and paternity leave and offer parents of children under 6 the right to request flexible working. In the business world, 'flexible working' is being seen as a solution both to recruitment and retention issues, and to the need to respond more effectively to 24/7 customer demands. But do people really think it is a good idea?

Our survey found that, on the whole, respondents do take a positive view of flexible working. This is particularly interesting given that 40% of respondents do not have flexible working arrangements for their jobs.

Most tend to disagree that flexible working is either a way of people avoiding doing as much work as possible or is harmful to careers. In addition, respondents generally did not agree with the view that working long hours is the only way to get things done. For example, four-fifths of respondents agree that it is very important to combine work and other responsibilities or interests.

Attitudes to career success have some impact upon attitudes to flexible working, but not as much as might be imagined. Regardless of whether respondents want to enjoy their job, earn enough money or climb the career ladder, around nine in ten respondents in each group support the idea of flexible working for everyone (over 90% for those who want to enjoy their job, almost 90% for the other two groups). Those who are keen on earning enough money to live comfortably are also keen on offering part-time work to those near retirement age to retain them, with nearly nine in ten supporting the idea.

The emerging picture shows that many respondents want to change their working hours and that most regard flexible working positively. Changing demographics is therefore having an impact on people's expectations of their working lives.

■ ***Are people working flexibly?***

Expectations may be changing, but are people making use of opportunities to work flexibly? And are businesses really offering these opportunities?

We found that almost two-thirds of respondents (57%) said that they worked in a job that allows flexible working arrangements. This may be a reflection of lack of publicity for the flexible working rights, or may simply reflect the fact that many respondents are not parents. Of those that said flexible working was available to them, however, over 90% make use of these arrangements (over half of all respondents), suggesting that it may be those who have most interest in flexible working that are most likely to know whether the organisation offers it.

Table A: Does your job-role allow you to arrange your working time flexibly?

Yes and make use of it	Yes but don't make use of it	No
Women	Men	Men
Younger workers	Workers aged 35-44	Older workers
Self-employed	Full-time	Full-time
Public sector	Transport & Distribution	Agriculture, Manufacturing, Construction
Skilled non-manual	Semi-skilled	Skilled manual and semi-skilled
Non-members of a trade union	Non-members of a trade union	Trade union members

Women are more likely than men both to work in a job offering flexible working and to make use of this arrangement. This may reflect the fact that women continue to bear the brunt of housework and childcare. However, it is as likely to be an indication of the sector that they work in and whether the respondent works full or part-time, as to indicate a genuine gender difference in attitudes to flexible working.

Younger workers are also more likely to have access to flexible working. Two-thirds of respondents aged 16-24 work in a job allowing flexible working, but this drops to less than 50% for those over 55.

Unsurprisingly those with higher salaries and higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to have flexibly working arrangements available to them. Not only does educational attainment shape the sectors, job roles and salaries of individuals, it also influences how they are able to work.

Interestingly, trade union members are slightly less likely to have flexible working arrangements available to them – this seems to be related to job role. For example, respondents to our survey working in professional, skilled manual, semi-skilled occupations are more likely to be trade union members, whilst those in skilled non-manual, managerial and unskilled roles are less likely to be members. Those employed in the public sector are more likely to be union members – and also more likely to work flexibly.

■ **Why work flexibly?**

With over half of respondents working flexibly, it is clear that people think there are good reasons to take advantage of different working patterns. But why?

Reasons for wanting to change ways of working tend to vary from individual to individual: the workforce has numerous activities and responsibilities that they like or need to 'balance' their work with. However, it is clear from our survey that caring responsibilities – for children and older relatives – are central to a desire to work flexibly.

Over 1 in 10 respondents to our survey have caring responsibilities that affect their ability to work. Of these, nearly a fifth (18%) have children under the age of 6, nearly a third (30%) have children aged 6 to 16, one in ten (10%) have elderly blood

relatives to care for, and roughly 3% have other caring responsibilities. In total, half of respondents have at least one of these caring responsibilities.

By their nature, however, these responsibilities will vary over a lifetime. This is one of the reasons that The Work Foundation has consistently argued that 'work-life balance' is a misleading phrase: 'balance' varies from individual to individual and at different points in their life. However, understanding people's expectations of the kind of 'balance' they would like to achieve as their responsibilities change over their lifetimes will be key to employers seeking to retain talent and to the Government seeking to respond to the pensions crisis as well as maintain a healthy economy, with an economically active population.

■ ***Which organisations offer flexible working?***

Contrary to popular belief, small businesses are good at flexible working. Respondents who work in small businesses are more likely than those who work in medium-sized organisations to work flexibly, and those working in medium-sized organisations are slightly less likely to have flexible working arrangements available to them.

However, it is worth noting that those in small businesses are also more likely not to make use of the flexible working arrangements their organisations have in place. There are a number of possible reasons for this. It may be because in small organisations decisions are made differently than in larger organisations – they are more subject to negotiation and discretion, particularly as people are more likely to work closely with those making the decisions about working flexibly. Definitions of 'flexibility' may also vary: it may be that in smaller organisations, people feel that they have more control over their time. However, there is a flip-side to this: as smaller organisations are unlikely to have HR policies in place, flexible working arrangements will largely depend on workers' relationships with their managers. Less capacity to cover for people in small organisations may also make people more reluctant to take up flexible working, as they will know the impact this might have on colleagues if arrangements are not put in place effectively. This may mean that, in reality, small firms need more help than they are getting to ensure that they understand how to re-organise work and design jobs appropriately for people so that the business continues to thrive and employees have access to flexible working.

It was surprising to find that respondents who work medium sized organisations are less likely to work flexibly than others. Medium sized organisations are more likely than their smaller counterparts to have HR functions and policies, and it would be expected that this would make it more likely that there would be greater access to flexibility. However, the greater bureaucracy that HR policies can create may contribute to the response we found: the form-filling might put people off, even though in medium-sized organisations there could be access to greater flexibility than in smaller companies. Larger organisations will have the capacity and the human resources strategy in place to communicate flexible working policies and strategies to employees and to ensure that work is covered if necessary.

But before looking at how to make different working patterns happen, the key question is: how do people want to work?

3. How would people like to be working?

■ Working differently at different times

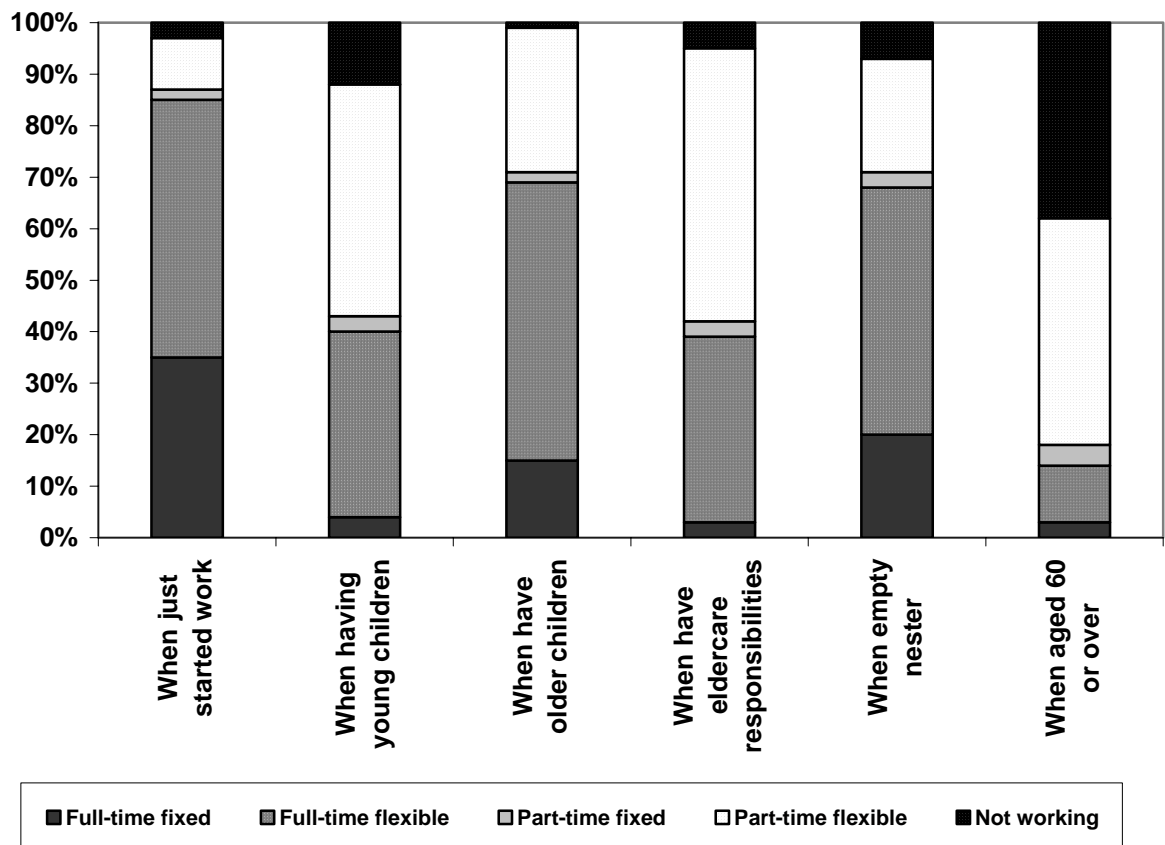
More than half of our survey respondents would like to change their current working hours, and the majority agree that there are benefits to flexible working, at least in theory. Looking over the next twenty years, changing demographics are likely to have a continued impact upon these expectations and perceptions. More and more of us will be retiring after the age of 65. Two income households mean that there needs to be some way to manage childcare, eldercare and housework, whether that means outsourcing or working differently to manage these responsibilities yourself. So what will that mean for the way we want to work?

To try to understand people's aspirations about ways of working, we asked people to imagine themselves at different life and career stages and to think about their ideal working situations. The different stages we asked about were:

- You've just started work;
- You've got young children;
- You've got older children;
- You have eldercare responsibilities;
- You are an 'empty nester' (in 40s/ 50s and no caring responsibilities);
- You are aged 60 or over.

The results are illustrated below:

Chart B: How would people like to work at different life stages?



Below we have outlined the preferences expressed for each situation. Running through the whole analysis are two clear themes:

- **Gender gap:** for each of these situations, men are more likely to prefer full-time working than women, and they are also more likely to prefer fixed working patterns than women;
- **Generation gap:** younger respondents are more likely to want to work flexibly at the start of their career, whereas older respondents are more likely to want to work flexibly when they have older children and when they have an 'empty nest'. Most older workers want to keep working when they go past the age of 60;

■ ***When just started work***

There is a clear **generation** gap here, particularly for those who are closer to the start of their career. Respondents aged 16-24 are 7 times more likely than 55+ respondents to see part-time flexible working as ideal when just started work.

This is in contrast with the responses from those who are still in quite early stages of their career: almost 90% of those aged 25-34 think that the ideal working situation at this time is full-time (either fixed or flexible).

■ ***When have young children***

It is the **gender** gap that is most significant at this stage of life:

- **Ideal = working full time** - less than 15% of women agree, compared to over 70% of men;
- **Ideal = working part-time** - roughly 20% of men agree, compared to almost 70% of women;
- **Ideal = not working** - 17% of women say that not working would be ideal, compared to just 5% of men.

It is clear that the responsibility for childcare is likely to continue to rest predominantly upon women. Both men and women, of all ages, think that young children have a greater influence on the way women work than on the way men work. However, male respondents who currently have young children are more likely than other men to see part-time flexible working as ideal at this stage in their lives.

■ ***When have older children***

The biggest surprise here is that there is not a gender gap, but instead a **generation** gap for this time of life.

Whilst you might expect the results found for young children to be mirrored here, in fact the majority of both men and women would ideally like flexible full-time working when they have older children. Those surveyed who currently have children aged 6 to 16 have similar levels of dissatisfaction with their current working hours as the rest of the sample – two-fifths would like to reduce their hours. This raises questions about current government policy, and business practice, which focuses on leave for young children, not older. Research demonstrates the importance of the early years

of a child's life for his / her subsequent development.⁶ However, there is a growing debate about children's needs later on, particularly since older children may not feel that another carer is a substitute for the parent they wish to talk to about school work or other issues that they are confronting day to day.

There are, however, significant differences across age groups for this life stage. Those respondents who are older (and have presumably had or currently have older children) are far more likely to opt for flexible part-time working than younger age groups. This suggests that expectations around ideal working situations are altered by experience.

■ **When have eldercare responsibilities**

There is not so much a **gender gap** here as a **gender surprise**. Children appear to come second best to their parents for men: men are far more likely to see flexible part-time working as ideal when they have eldercare responsibilities than when they have young children. This suggests that while both men and women still see care for young children as something that requires women to change their working patterns, and not men, when it comes to eldercare then responsibilities have a more equal balance. This reflects the current situation too: eldercare responsibilities are much more equally divided between men and women.

Men and women are likely to have eldercare responsibilities in their forties and fifties. Male expectations about how they work at this stage in their lives, compared to when they have children in their twenties and thirties, are different. Young male respondents to our survey are more likely than their female counterparts to see career success in terms of climbing the career ladder as high as possible. By the time men reach forty, their expectations about career success change with the majority aiming to earn enough to live comfortably. Therefore men are more willing to change their working arrangements to fit in with caring responsibilities at later stages in their careers than when they have children.

■ **When empty nester**

Whilst men and women tend to have similar expectations for this period in their lives (i.e. they would prefer full-time, flexible working), there is a **generation gap**. Older respondents are more likely to opt for flexible and part-time working than their younger counterparts.

■ **When aged 60 or over**

Again the **generation gap** was most significant at this life stage. Although the majority of respondents would prefer to be either working flexibly on a part-time basis or not working, older respondents are far more likely to see working, full-time and part-time, as ideal at this stage in their lives and careers. For those aged over 55, more would prefer to be working full-time than not working at all (25% compared to 22%).

With the age discrimination legislation coming into force in 2006, this is a significant finding. There is clearly strong support from those who are already older workers for the government's 'active ageing' policies – and yet it continues to be the case that it is notoriously difficult for those aged over 55 to find work: both men and women.

⁶ Harker, L. & Kendall, L. (2003) *An Equal Start: Improving support during pregnancy and the first twelve months*: ippr

Although the focus tends to be upon men when discussions are had about older workers, women continue to be particularly affected by poverty in retirement, partly because they are more likely to work in 'female' occupations, which tend to be paid poorly, and partly because they are more likely to take time out of the labour market to care for children.⁷ Enabling men and women to continue to work, whether for financial or other reasons, will be vital to individuals and to the economy that will benefit from their skills and experience.

Supporting 'active ageing' policies requires more recognition of the skills and experience of older workers, as well as helping organisations to think about using them in more imaginative ways. For example, this could involve moving someone from a physically arduous job to training others in that job or to using their skills in a less physically demanding way, or moving older workers outside the hierarchy to run projects or mentor younger people. The largest group of older workers would prefer to work part-time and flexibly; surely a good thing for organisations and individuals alike because it allows organisations to retain experience and workers to retain a foot in the labour market. The age discrimination legislation will provide a legislative 'stick'; more publicity around the 'carrots' of the benefits of a diverse workforce may be required to make the spirit of the law a reality.

The finding that, in contrast to older workers, younger workers are much more likely to want to stop working when they reach 60 is not particularly surprising. At 25 the prospect of working for more than 40 years would seem daunting. However, the reality is that too few pensions are likely to provide a comfortable retirement for those in their twenties, thirties and forties now. Pension provision is becoming an alarming topic for those in their forties, starting to glimpse retirement in their future. For twenty-somethings, the poor provision may either be alarming or it may not be something that touches their consciousness at all; it is enough to deal with paying off student debts and trying to find enough money to get a toehold on the property ladder.

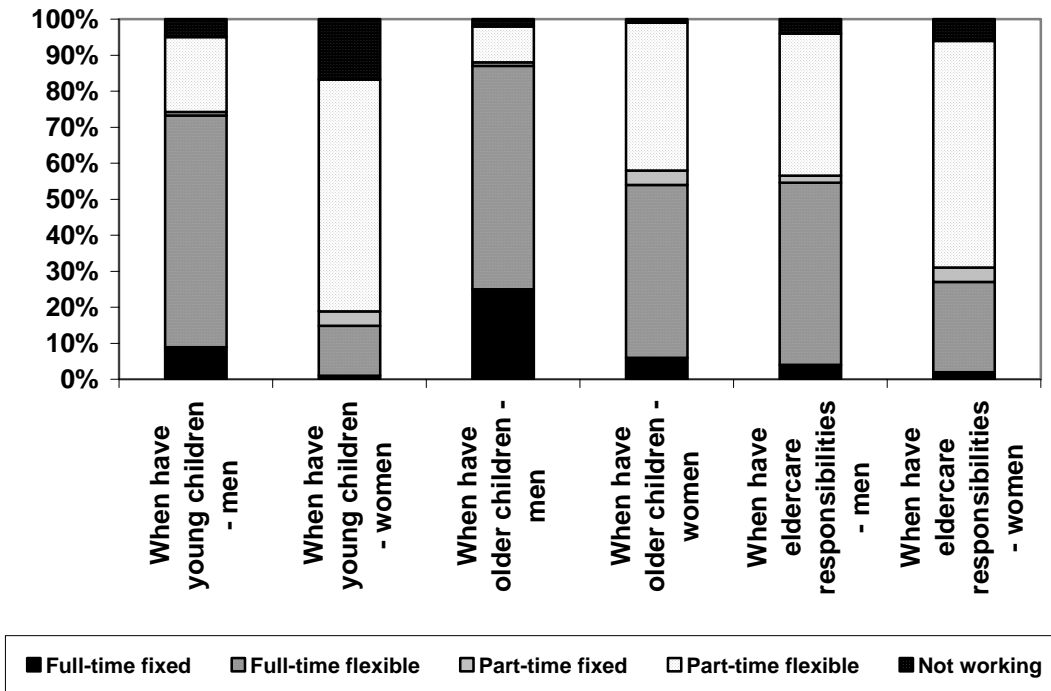
However, the mismatch between the expectations that young people have about retirement ages and the reality of their pension provision is likely to be storing up a policy problem for the future. 'Active ageing' may be desired now, but required by more and more people who do not have enough money to fund their retirement. We need to start talking more about what the changing demographics will mean not just for older workers, but for younger workers who are likely to find pension provision wanting and may be in the position of looking after both children and elderly relatives at the same time. Thinking about 'lifetime working hours' and taking a longer perspective about work is one way of responding to demands about work-life balance and grappling with issues around pensions and retirement.

■ **Summary of the gender and generation gaps**

The two charts below illustrate the gender and generation gaps more clearly. The first chart shows results broken down by gender.

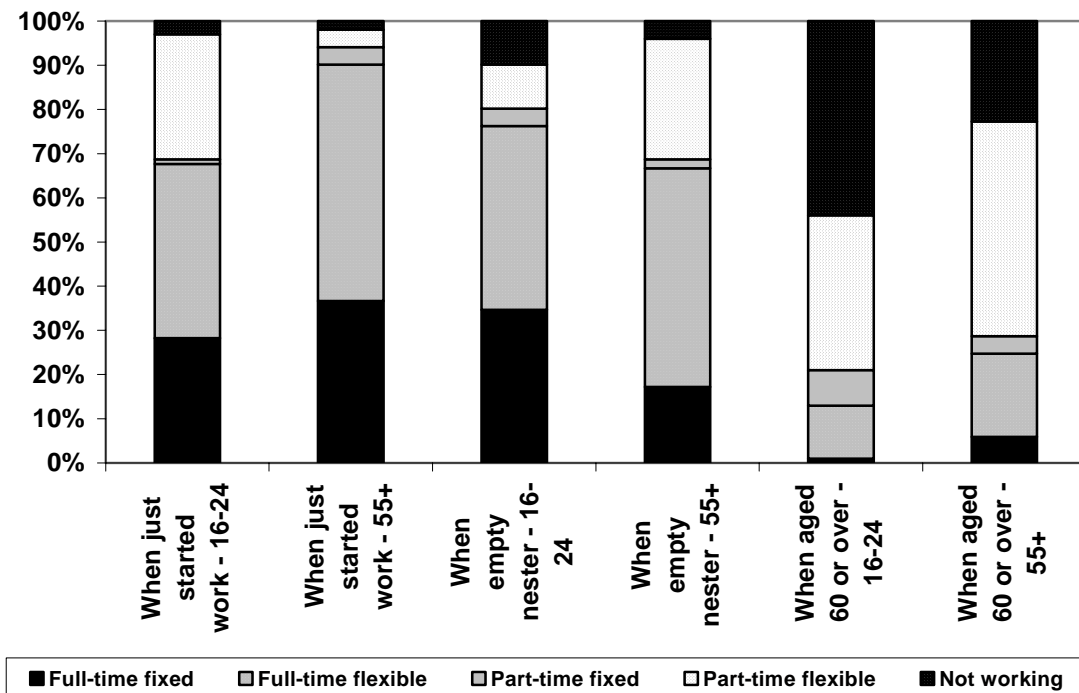
⁷ Katherine Rake found both a mother and a gender gap in her report *Women's Incomes over the Lifetime*, published by the Women's Unit in 2000.

Chart C - How would men and women like to work at different life stages?



This second chart contrasts results for the youngest age group (16-24) and the oldest (55+)

Chart D: How would 16-24 year olds and over 55 year olds like to work at different life stages?



These charts reinforce the gender and generation gaps. Men and women have very different expectations around working whilst parents. For different generations, the differences are equally stark. Young people would prefer greater flexibility throughout their careers and would like to have stopped working by the time they reach 60. However, three-quarters of older people surveyed would like to continue working beyond 60.

■ **How do job roles and sectors influence expectations of work?**

In addition to the gender and generation gaps, we also found that the sectors people work in and their job roles affect how they would like to work at different stages of their lives. The table below summarises these findings.

Generally those employed in the public sector and those working in skilled non-manual occupations (white collar workers) are more likely than others to expect flexibility and also a change to the basis on which they work (full or part-time), as they grow older. Many of the differences may be attributable to gender and the gendered nature of occupations and job roles – for example, respondents working in the traditionally male domains of agriculture, manufacturing and construction are more likely than those employed in other sectors to see full-time working as the best option throughout their careers, irrespective of their responsibilities outside of work.

	Sector	Job role
<i>When just started work</i>	Those in the public sector are more likely to expect or desire flexible working, and those working in retail/hospitality are more likely to see part-time working as ideal.	Those currently in semi-skilled and unskilled roles are more likely to see part-time working as ideal at the start of working lives.
<i>When have young children</i>	Around two thirds of those working in agriculture, manufacturing/construction, transport and distribution see full-time working as ideal when they have young children. This may be because these are male dominated sectors.	Those in managerial and skilled manual role are more likely than others to see full-time working as ideal when they have young children. Fewer than 20% of respondents in skilled non-manual roles see full-time working as desirable at this stage – compared to 40% of the sample as a whole.
<i>When have older children</i>	There is little variation across the sectors at this stage.	Those in skilled non-manual occupations are much more likely to see part-time working as ideal at this stage of their lives.
<i>When have eldercare responsibilities</i>	Fewer than half of those employed in retail/hospitality, the public sector or transport & distribution sectors regard full-time working as a good option when they have eldercare responsibilities. Those employed in agriculture, manufacturing/construction and business services are more likely than these other groups to continue working full-time	Half of respondents in managerial roles expect or desire to work on full-time basis when they have eldercare responsibilities, whereas only a quarter of skilled non-manual workers see this as a desirable option.
<i>When 'empty nesters'</i>	There is little variation across the sectors around expectations	Again, there is little variation here.

	for this stage.	
<i>When aged over 60</i>	There is little variation here, although public sector workers are more likely to see not working as the best option when aged over 60.	Respondents in skilled manual and unskilled occupations are more likely to see themselves working beyond 60 than those employed in other job roles. Almost half of skilled non-manual workers would like to have retired by this age.

■ **Should the way we work change?**

People may have ideas about what would be ideal, but do they really think that it is practical to make the way we work change?

	Percentage agreeing with statement	Who is more likely to agree?
<i>Employers should keep working the same way they have always done</i>	9%	<i>Men, those working in retail/hospitality, skilled manual, semi-skilled and unskilled respondents</i>
<i>Employers should offer flexible working for parents only</i>	11%	<i>Men, those working in agriculture, manufacturing/construction, semi-skilled workers</i>
<i>Employers should do whatever is best for the business</i>	68%	<i>Men, those working in agriculture, manufacturing/construction</i>
<i>Employers should offer part-time work to those near retirement age in order to retain them</i>	84%	<i>Managerial and skilled non-manual</i>
<i>Employers should offer flexible working to everyone</i>	88%	<i>Women, public sector workers (94% compared with 69% of agriculture, manufacturing/construction)</i>
<i>Employers should invest money in changing working practices</i>	92%	<i>Public sector workers</i>

The responses demonstrate that, although individuals' experiences may influence their attitudes somewhat, there is overwhelming support for making flexible working available to everyone and for employers investing money in changing working practices. This is a clear message to both employers and policy-makers. Less than one in ten respondents thought that things should stay the way they are now.

Over 8 in 10 respondents also sent a message that practices should change for older workers, adapting working patterns in order to retain their skills. This suggests that more and more people are thinking about gradually moving into retirement, rather than 'falling off the cliff edge'.

However, it is worth noting that over two-thirds of people think employers should do what is best for the business, i.e. they should not introduce working patterns that are detrimental to the business. Whilst those who wish to climb the career ladder as high

as they can are more likely to support this (nearly four-fifths do so), and those who enjoy their job are less likely to see this as an issue, DTI research⁸ suggests that this attitude has increased over the past five years. It also suggests that people are aware that, for flexible working to succeed, it needs to be implemented for the business as well as for individuals.

⁸ *The Second Work-Life Balance Study: Results from the Employees' Survey (2004)* DTI

4. Changing ways of working?

So given these preferences and aspirations, what is stopping us revolutionising the way we work? The answer is a number of things: at an individual, organisational and societal level. Often public discussions tend to focus upon the individual barriers – ideas about success, attitudes to division of labour in the home, concern about the impact on colleagues – and yet many of these are directly affected by the organisational and societal barriers. Whilst tackling deep-rooted ideas about gender roles is a long-term challenge, it is more likely that some of the organisational barriers could be broken down.

■ *Individuals' barriers*

At an individual level, there is some disagreement about what is preventing people from changing the way in which they work – and an individual's response tends to vary according to their current working arrangements.

Respondents who do not currently have flexible working arrangements are more likely than those who do work flexibly to think that workload and the nature of their jobs are barriers to change.

Ideas about career success can also act as barriers to changing ways of working. Interestingly, it is those who wish to earn money to live comfortably who are most likely to see barriers to change. Those who enjoy their jobs are least likely to view career damage as an issue. All of the groups see the nature of their job as the biggest barrier to change, suggesting that work organisation and job design are key enablers if different working patterns are to be implemented.

	Group 1 - Really enjoying my job	Group 2 - Earning enough money to live comfortably	Group 3 - Climbing the career ladder as high as I can
Biggest barrier to working flexibly	Nature of respondents' jobs means they cannot work differently	Most likely to agree with statements about barriers to change. The biggest barrier is also the nature of respondents' jobs not allowing them to work differently.	The biggest barrier for this group is the nature of their job not allowing them to work differently.
Least significant barrier to working flexibly	Thinking that changing working practices is harmful to careers.	Less significant barriers are not being able to afford to work differently, the organisation not allowing respondents to change working practices, and not being paid for longer hours.	None.

The importance of work organisation and job design to creating opportunities at an individual level is borne out by the finding that those who work long hours agree that their organisation would not allow them to work differently than they currently do. People feel that their long hours and inflexible working patterns are fixed by the type

of work, workload and resistance to change from employers. The control over this inflexibility is seen to be in the hands of employers. This implies that respondents feel reliant on employers leading the way and being more open to different ways of working.

Organisations arguably create the climate of the workforce and the independence, or lack of independence, that employees have over their own workloads, job roles and also working hours. Individuals need to make their own decisions and act responsibly, but it is also clear that the choices and decisions that organisations make can create both barriers and opportunities, which impact at an individual level. People need to trust that asking for flexible working won't result in 'career death'. The fact that one investment bank told a senior partner that they were too senior to take their paternity leave demonstrates that this is not just a myth. Individuals rely on their employers to provide real opportunities for flexible working – not poisoned chalice policies or 'career death' options - before they can make a decision about whether or not to take it up.

The success that organisations such as BT, PwC and Lloyds TSB are starting to have in changing ways of working demonstrates the results that can be achieved when organisations do recognise that they have a role to play in enabling people to manage their workloads and other responsibilities differently. Having home-workers who are 31% more productive than their office-based counterparts hasn't done BT any harm either.⁹ Respondents to this survey certainly believe that wider organisational change will remove these barriers.

■ **Organisational and societal barriers**

Whilst there is a lack of consensus about barriers at an individual level, there are clearer findings about the organisational and wider societal barriers to change, as the table below illustrates:

	Percentage agreeing with statement	Who is more likely to agree?
<i>Men need to start doing more at home if things are to change</i>	56%	<i>Women and older workers, Skilled non-manual workers and Retail/hospitality and Public Sector workers</i>
<i>Career structures need to allow you to take extended time out without damaging your career prospects</i>	68%	<i>Women and older workers, Unskilled workers, Public Sector workers</i>
Attitudes to flexible working need to change	74%	Women, Business Service workers
Organisations need to change the long hours culture to stop people working such long hours	77%	Women and older workers Skilled non-manual
There needs to be better childcare and eldercare provision	79%	Women and those aged 25-34 and 55+, Professional, Public Sector workers

⁹ See Case Studies on www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk.

Women are most likely to agree with all of the statements listed, as are public sector workers. The fact that nearly four-fifths of respondents agree that there needs to be better childcare and eldercare provision demonstrates its importance. The Government's recent announcements about childcare are a good step in this direction, as are discussions about extending the right to request to all carers. More attention, however, needs to be paid to the issue of eldercare.

Looking at those who have different ideas about career success also illustrates the importance that all groups of people place upon flexible working. The top three priorities for these groups are:

	Group 1 - Really enjoying my job	Group 2 - Earning enough money to live comfortably	Group 3 - Climbing the career ladder as high as I can
Who is responsible for changing working practices?	1. Better childcare and eldercare provision 2. Changes to attitudes about flexible working 3. Organisations changing the long hours culture.	1. Better childcare and eldercare provision 2. Changes to attitudes about flexible working 3. Organisations changing the long hours culture.	1. Better childcare and eldercare provision 2. Changes to attitudes about flexible working 3. Career structures enabling extended time out without damaging career prospects.

Better childcare and eldercare is highlighted as vital. Great progress has been made upon these issues: this survey demonstrates that there is a will for more to be done. But beyond the infrastructure, there are attitudinal changes that people want to see. This is always difficult – how can a policy change an attitude? - some attitudes may be more amenable than others. A seismic shift in ideas about the domestic division of labour would be required for men to do more at home, for example. Men are starting to do more around the house and become more involved with children – but not enough men are doing enough to change the way we work. Nor is this amenable to short-term policy changes, either Government or organisational.

However, some attitudes about flexible working and long hours are more amenable to change. Government policies supporting flexible working for parents have had a clear impact in the short as well as the medium and longer term. Proposals to extend the right to carers are to be welcomed. So what else should be done, and who should be doing it?

■ **Changing the way we work**

When respondents were asked 'who has responsibility for change', it was clear that all were aware that barriers to changing the way people work occur at the individual, team, organisational and wider societal level – and so need to be tackled at all of these levels.

	Percentage agreeing with this statement
<i>People must talk to the teams they work in and work out different ways of working</i>	80%
<i>Employers must make necessary changes to ways of working voluntarily</i>	66%

<i>The government must legislate to make changes</i>	64%
<i>It is up to individuals to request flexible working</i>	58%
<i>Trade unions must negotiate agreements about changing ways of working</i>	58%
<i>It is up to managers to sort it out</i>	41%

Most significantly, four-fifths of respondents understand the need for changes at the level at which workload is negotiated – in teams. Research has found that flexible working works best when there is ‘balance’, not between work and life, but between the needs of the individual, the needs of the organisation and of the team, and the needs of the customer.¹⁰ If an individual’s working pattern is changed to suit their personal needs, but it does not work within the team and there is resentment, that individual is likely to be unhappy with their work-life balance. Work organisation and job design are key components of any organisational strategy to change working patterns.

As argued above, however, it is up to the organisation, with its power to hire, fire and promote each individual, whether there is the opportunity to change ways of working. It may be up to the individual to start the conversation with their manager about moving to flexible working, but the ability to have that conversation is shaped by the culture, and that tends to be shaped by the people at the top. Commitment from senior managers is the only way in which attitudes are likely to change within the organisation, making conversations possible.

‘Harder’ changes are also required if culture change is to be embedded. Organisational performance management structures can reinforce the ‘long hours culture’ if they focus on time over output, and if it tends to be those who stay the latest who get promoted – even if an organisation ‘says’ it supports flexible working. If those who take time out have their career prospects damaged, it also sends a clear message: choose between flexibility and your career. Two-thirds of respondents agreed that there should be some way of taking time out without damaging your career prospects. Currently if you drive off the career motorway at any stage, you end up in a cul-de-sac, tending to stay in part-time work in areas that aren’t too important. What this survey is finding is that people want to be able to move into a lay-by at different stages of their life, and then be able to rejoin the career motorway and go as far as their skills, ability and experience will allow them too. And they are also saying that this will only happen if employers help to make it happen.

This also means that managers have to be supported and trained in work re-organisation, so that flexible working can be implemented effectively for both the business and individuals – or both the business and the individuals involved could suffer the consequences of poorly organised work.

Government also has a role to play as it sets the legislative framework within which organisations operate. Responses about the role of legislation and the need for employers to voluntarily make changes suggest that respondents understand the ‘reality gap’ that may exist between policies and practice. Legislation can kick unwilling employers into realising that flexible working is an issue – but much of the success of flexible working depends upon the goodwill of employers, and their commitment to making it work. All the processes and procedures in the world can’t

¹⁰ Rapoport, R. & Bailyn, L. (1996) *Relinking Life and Work: Toward a Better Future*: The Ford Foundation

help those working in an organisation that is introducing paternity leave in order to “weed out the losers”.¹¹ But legislation can start the conversations in the first place.

When it comes to making changes it is worth noting the reappearance of the generation gap: older workers are more likely than younger workers to see the role of trade unions and managers in changing ways of working as being important. This indicates a more traditional approach to changes at work – an approach that younger workers do not subscribe to.

There are also some differences between those with different career goals. Those who want to enjoy their job are more likely to support the idea that people must talk to the teams they work with to achieve different ways of working, whereas those more focused on earning enough money are more likely to support the role of Trade Unions in negotiating changes to working practices. Those people most focused on progressing in their career are more likely to see the Government’s role in legislating for change as key – but do go along with everyone else and agree that decisions should be made at team level.

The message is clear: Government and organisations need to take the lead in changing wider attitudes and making flexible working possible – and it is managers and teams who will need to make it happen.

¹¹ Reeves, R. (2002) *Dad’s Army: The case for father-friendly workplaces*, The Work Foundation

5. Conclusions

The way we live is changing – and the way we work is, slowly, catching up. As demographics shift, the Government and organisations gradually respond to the repercussions it creates for consumers, citizens and for the labour market. More parents are in work – one in five workers will be mothers in 2010 – and there is more flexible working. Up to 10 million people will be caring for elderly relatives by 2010, and the government is now talking about offering flexible working rights to carers. It is starting to change.

However, this survey shows that the way we work still has quite a bit of catching up to do with the way we live. Over four in ten people would like to reduce their current working hours. 90% of people support the idea of flexible working for everyone. And only one in ten people think we should keep working the same way we have always done.

Organisations need to take note: with the prospect of working till the age of 70 (or above) looming, people would like to be able to adapt their hours of paid work around their different responsibilities. Since over 50% of people agree too that their idea of success is 'enjoying their job', it is more likely that those who are in a position to do so will move to an organisation that enables this to happen.

Working hours dissatisfaction

- More than half of our survey respondents are **dissatisfied with their current working hours** – the majority would prefer to work fewer hours.

Support for flexible working

- There is overwhelming support for making flexible working available to everyone – on the whole respondents did not subscribe to the negative image of someone who works flexibly as being unproductive or unsuccessful;
- Currently two-thirds of respondents are able to work flexibly – and almost all of this group make the most of these arrangements;

'Not working' is not a desired option

- The majority of respondents do not see 'not working' as ideal during most periods of their lives and careers – however, as responsibilities change, most respondents support the idea of being able to work flexibly and to work full or part time depending on their situations;

There is a clear **gender gap** that has emerged from the findings. Men and women both agree that the responsibilities that come with children vary according to gender, with women wanting to take on most of the responsibility when children are young: over two-thirds of women want to work part-time when their children are young, compared to only a fifth of men. However, both men and women want to work full-time and flexibly when they have older children. Parents seem to top the pecking order for men: they are more likely to see part-time flexible working ideal when they have eldercare responsibilities than when they have children. This raises issues for both Government and organisations about two less high profile areas: supporting people to work flexibly when they have older children, and enabling people to

manage their eldercare responsibilities as these look set to grow over the next twenty years.

The Government and social partners should put more effort into encouraging fathers to request the right to work flexibly. It is clear that too few men are taking a lead or equal share in childcare. This creates more problems for working mothers as employers still view working parents as predominantly working mothers.

The **generation gap** suggests that the expectations of the workforce are likely to change and grow over time. Younger people are much more demanding, for example, about having full-time flexible working at the beginning of their career: a clear message for graduate recruiters. Those who are older are more likely to say they would like to work flexibly when they have older children: a product of experience, perhaps. Organisations could seek to capitalise on this by offering existing parents the opportunity to work flexibly, and move ahead of the market. It is also significant that whilst younger people cannot bear to think of working beyond 60, and tend to wish to stop, older people are more likely to want to work full-time than they are to want to stop working. Again, given the current difficulty that many older workers experience getting work – and with age discrimination legislation approaching in 2006 – this is something that both Government and organisations need to take into account.

Employers and the Government should invest and legislate for change

- Over 90% of respondents believe that employers should invest money in changing working practices – and over two-thirds believe that career structures need to allow for time out without damage to career prospects and that organisations need to change the long hours culture;
- Employers wield considerable power in determining the culture of the organisation and how this supports workers to work flexibly and to balance their work with their other responsibilities;
- Respondents do recognise the different levels at decisions which lead to change are made – four-fifths of respondents see negotiation taking place at team level, with employer-led changes and Government legislation supporting this decision-making. Decisions can only be made at a team level, if the wider organisation has a climate support this type of negotiation and discretion.

Flexible working and the opening up of choices to employees is not just an issue for employers in sectors that are widely seen as providing a better work-life balance to employees working in certain occupations. 9 out of 10 respondents want flexible working for everyone, irrespective of sector and occupation – this sends a clear message that flexible working is not just, for example, for women working in the public sector but should be available across sectors and job roles.

The Government should extend the right to request flexible working to all groups of workers but phased in over the next 4 years. Carers have already been included but the next group should be over 55s still active in the workforce and thinking of retirement. A target should be set to include all groups of workers by 2009. Overall, our survey results indicate that there needs to be a re-think about the way that careers work. Currently there tends to be a career motorway: if you get off for any reason, whether childcare, eldercare or something else, you tend to be stuck in a cul-de-sac, off the promotion fast lane and sidelined into particular areas. This is

losing good people, and with the changes in the workforce – more women, more mothers, more dads concerned with being involved with parenting, more people with eldercare responsibilities – organisations are set to lose even more people. Some way has to be found to create ‘career lay-bys’ – places where people can wait for a while, and then, if they have the skills, experience and ability, get back on the career motorway. This might not mean promotion: for some it may just mean the opportunity to ensure equal terms and conditions with full-time counterparts, the opportunities for training, the chances to have a challenging and enjoyable job. But it does mean creating performance management systems and career development systems that value individuals’ abilities and skills, not whether they have followed a traditional career path.

One way of responding to this need could be through trailing a ‘career passport’ that could be ported through working life indicating successes in skills acquisition, management ability or potential and significant achievements. This could encourage a longer view of working life and help ensure that those returning from career breaks were more likely to be properly assessed and re-integrated into the labour market. A vital role that Social Partners and organisations could play is also through providing targeted support at particular times in individual’s lives. This may mean making a conscious effort to list skills and achievements before going on parental leave, providing an individual with opportunities to get in touch and keep up to date whilst away, and a chance to have a discussion about their role before they return to work. For older workers, it is also important to trial and publicise different ways of using their skills, e.g. as mentors, as trainers, or as leads on specific projects.