

The Second Work-Life Balance Study: Employee Survey Summary of Emerging Findings

Aim and Objectives

- The **aims** of this study were two-fold. First, to monitor change since the 2000 work-life balance (baseline) study¹ by collecting data on (a) employer provision of work-life balance practices and policies; (b) employee take-up of, and demand for, these initiatives; and (c) the impact of employers' provisions (including costs and benefits). Second, to establish a robust baseline for future evaluation, in terms of the provisions brought in under the Employment Act 2002².
- The employee survey's **objectives** included:
 1. To assess employees' **awareness** of the current statutory leave entitlements, including maternity leave, parental leave, and time off for dependants, as well as forthcoming new rights;
 2. To assess **take-up** of work-life balance practices including reasons for non-take-up (e.g. impact on job security and promotion);
 3. To ascertain the **demand** for work-life balance practices;
 4. To establish the extent to which work-life balance practices meet employee **needs** including views on the **feasibility** of employers extending these arrangements; and
 5. To ascertain employees' views on the **impact** of work-life balance practices.

Attitudes to Work-Life Balance

- Employee attitudes to work-life balance have remained relatively constant since the 2000 work-life balance study. The majority of employees continued to agree that everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives in the way they want to (78 per cent). The majority (95 per cent) also agreed that people work best when they can balance their home and other aspects of their lives.
- Most employees thought their employer had a role to play in ensuring their work-life balance. The majority of employees disagreed with the statement that it is not the employers' responsibility to help people balance their work with other aspects of their lives (57 per cent), and agreed that they should make a special effort to accommodate the particular difficulties parents of young children and disabled children face (85 per cent).
- However, compared with the 2000 study, more employees agreed that business needs must take priority over employee demand for changed working patterns. Three-fifths of employees (60 per cent) agreed that employees must not expect to be able to change their working pattern if to do so would disrupt the business, compared to just over half (53 per cent) in 2000.

¹ T.Hogarth, C.Hasluck and G.Pierre from IER, with M.Winterbotham and D.Vivian from IFF Research, *Work-Life Balance 2000: Results from the Baseline Study*, 2001, DfEE Research Series, no. 249.

² There is an accompanying survey of employers which was conducted by the National Centre for Social Research.

Awareness of the *current* statutory leave entitlements and *new* rights

- Over half of employees (54 per cent) were aware of the right to unpaid time off to deal with unexpected or sudden emergencies involving a dependant (time off for dependants). Women were more likely to be aware of this right than men (57 per cent compared to 51 per cent), especially if they worked full-time (60 per cent), and were not mothers (58 per cent) (when compared with fathers (49 per cent)). Parents whose youngest child was under two (61 per cent) were more likely to be aware of the right than those whose youngest child was between two and five (45 per cent).
- However, awareness of the right to *parental* leave was low amongst employees (22 per cent). Even fewer employees were aware that this right also extended to adoptive parents (16 per cent) and parents of children under 18 with a disability (13 per cent). Parents were no more likely to be aware of the this right than other employees, but those whose youngest child was under two years old were more likely to be aware than other parents (43 per cent were aware of the right to parental leave, 33 per cent were aware that it extended to adoptive parents and 20 per cent were aware that it extended to parents of children under 18 with a disability).
- Nearly a half of employees (49 per cent) were aware of the new entitlement to two weeks paid (£100 per week) paternity leave from April 2003. Awareness was highest among full-time employees, managers and professionals and those who had been with the same employer for more than five years.
- Two-fifths of employees (41 per cent) were aware of the extension of *paid* maternity leave to six months from April 2003, but over half said they were unaware of this change. Less employees (32 per cent) were aware that, from April 2003, women who had worked for the same employer for a year would be entitled to a further six months *unpaid* maternity leave.
- Two-fifths of employees (41 per cent) were also aware that employers will have to consider requests to adopt flexible working practices from parents of young children (under the age of six) or with disabilities. Parents, including those whose youngest child were under six years old, were no more likely to be aware of this new right than other employees.

Requests for flexible working

- One in six employees (17 per cent) had approached their employer (in the last two years) to make a request to change how they regularly work for a sustained period of time. These requests were most likely to be made by women, mothers, parents whose youngest child was under two years old³ and those in services and sales, and least likely by older employees (45+ years) and full-time workers.
- Nearly three in ten employees who made a request to change how they regularly work (29 per cent) wanted to reduce their hours (including working part-time). A further 23 per cent wanted to change *when* they worked including the number of days they worked (such as a compressed working

³ Nearly a third (31 per cent) of employees with children under the age of two had made a request to change how they regularly work.

week or changing shifts). One in eight (13 per cent) wanted to work flexi-time, and less than 10 per cent wanted to work longer hours (nine per cent) or take some form of time off (eight per cent).

- Nearly half (48 per cent) of requests were dealt with by a line manager or supervisor rather than by the managing director (21 per cent), the head of department (14 per cent) or the personnel department (12 per cent). Just over a quarter of employees who made a request (27 per cent) put their request in writing, whereas three-quarters had a meeting to discuss the request (with their employer or line manager/supervisor).
- Of those employees who made a request to change the way they regularly work, over three-quarters (77 per cent) said their request had been agreed. Agreement to such requests did not vary significantly by the size of the establishment the employee worked in, an employee's occupation or their length of service, or by whether they were a parent.

Leave arrangements and work-life balance practices: take-up, demand and feasibility

Take-up of leave arrangements

Paternity leave

- Nine per cent of fathers of children under the age of 16 had taken time off for paternity leave in the last year (and with their current employer). Over three-quarters of these fathers said they had taken fully paid leave (77 per cent), whilst 17 per cent had taken it as annual leave. The remainder took it as unpaid leave (four per cent) or took the time off but made it up later (three per cent).
- Of fathers with a child of one year old or under, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) had taken time off for paternity leave (in the last year and with their current employer).
- The average length of paternity leave was nine days. This varied considerably: 31 per cent took less than 5 days leave, 42 per cent took between one and two weeks leave, and 27 per cent took more than two weeks leave.

Time off for dependants

- Of those employees who had experienced an emergency in the last year, which they had to deal with at short notice involving a dependant during their working week, around nine in 10 employees (86 per cent) had taken time off.

Parental leave

- Awareness of what their employer provided – as well as the right to parental leave – was low amongst employees who were parents of children under the age of 16. Nearly two-fifths (39 per cent) did not know whether their employer provided it. However, women working full-time (43 per cent), parents whose youngest child was under two (41 per cent) and mothers with one child (45 per cent) were the most likely to report that their employer provided it. Where parents stated that it was provided (35 per cent), a relatively high proportion did not know about the detail; a quarter

did not know whether a written policy existed, and over a quarter (28 per cent) did not know whether it was paid or not.

- Only five per cent of parents with children under 16 had taken parental leave in the last year (and with their current employer). Of those parents who said their employer provided parental leave, about one in eight (13 per cent) had taken this leave in the last year (and with their current employer). This was more common if the youngest child was under two years old (20 per cent). Most parents had taken between one and two days (41 per cent), which suggests that parental leave is being used more flexibly than is provided for in the legislation.

Availability and take-up of work-life balance practices including childcare

- Reported *availability* of work-life balance practices varied considerably. Employees stated that working reduced hours for a limited period (62 per cent), working part-time (57 per cent) and working flexi-time (48 per cent) were more commonly available than other practices including job-sharing (41 per cent), working only during term-time⁴ (32 per cent), working a compressed working week (30 per cent), working annualised hours (20 per cent) and working from home on a regular basis (20 per cent).
- Where practices were provided, *take-up* in the last year (and with their current employer) was highest for flexi-time (55 per cent), working from home (54 per cent) and term-time working (46 per cent). Around a third had also taken up working a compressed working week (36 per cent) and working annualised hours (32 per cent). A further one in five (20 per cent) had reduced their hours for a limited period, one in seven had job-shared (15 per cent) and over one in ten had worked part-time (11 per cent)⁵.
- When *all* employees were considered, a quarter (26 per cent) had worked flexi-time and one in ten (11 per cent) had worked from home on a regular basis over the last year and with their current employer.
- Most employees who work in one of these flexible ways did so mainly 'to make their lives easier, to get things done and to be more efficient' (18 per cent), for childcare needs (17 per cent), because of the demands of the job (15 per cent) or because of the nature of their job or the type of work they did (11 per cent). Parents, particularly mothers and those with young children, and those employees in the lowest income bracket (under £11,999 per year), were more likely to work flexibly because of childcare needs. On the other hand, men (including fathers), employees who were not parents and those in higher income groups were more likely to do so because it makes their life easier⁶.

⁴ Working part-time was only asked of those who worked full-time. Term-time working was only asked of parents with children under 18.

⁵ This was only asked of those who did not currently work part-time.

⁶ The question on take-up of flexible working patterns included asking part-time employees (who said that the arrangement would be available if required) if they had worked full-time in the last year and with their current employer. Thus, the responses to the question on why employees work in these ways also include why employees had worked full-time.

- The main reasons for *not taking up* flexible ways of working were because employees were happy with their current working arrangement (34 per cent) or they did not suit the employee's job (26 per cent).
- Two-thirds of employees (66 per cent) considered that their manager did enough to provide and promote flexible working practices.
- Employees who were parents of children under the age of 16 reported very low levels of employer provision of *childcare* facilities. The highest level of reported provision was for employers providing information about local provision and availability of childcare (12 per cent), and then for accessible childcare facilities (nine per cent). Take-up was very low. Where employers provided some assistance, over four-fifths (84 per cent) of parents of children aged under 16 years did not use any of the facilities.

Demand for work-life balance practices and feasibility of employer implementation

- There was substantial demand for work-life balance practices amongst those employees without the flexible working patterns covered in the survey. The most common wish was to work flexi-time (49 per cent), which was also the case for the 2000 survey (47 per cent). Around a third of these employees wanted to work reduced hours for a limited period (36 per cent), to work a compressed working week (34 per cent), to work only during school term-times (32 per cent) and to work from home on a regular basis (29 per cent)⁷. A further quarter wanted to work annualised hours, a fifth (22 per cent) wanted to work part-time and one in six (17 per cent) wanted to job-share.
- Women were more likely than men to want to work part-time, only during school term-times and through job-sharing, whereas men were more likely than women to want to work a compressed working week. These findings are consistent with the 2000 survey findings. However, it seems that women are now demanding as much flexibility as men in their working day or over a longer period in the form of flexi-time and annualised hours.
- There were no specific differences in demand for work-life balance practices between parents and non-parents, but there were between mothers and fathers, and demands varied depending on the age of a parent's youngest child. Mothers were more likely than fathers to want to work part-time, work during term-time only and job-share. Nearly half of mothers (48 per cent) wanted to work during term-time only compared to a fifth of fathers (20 per cent), and twice as many mothers (26 per cent) than fathers (12 per cent) wanted to job-share. In addition, those parents whose youngest child was under six years old were more likely to want flexi-time, reduced hours for a limited period and home-working, whereas those whose youngest child was under two wanted to work part-time and those whose youngest child was under 12 wanted to work only during term-time.

⁷ Managers and professionals (35 per cent) who did not currently work from home on a regular basis were more likely to want to work this way than clerical and skilled manual employees (27 per cent), services and sales employees (24 per cent), and operatives and unskilled employees (22 per cent). There are other variations in demand for working from home, and these will be identified in the final report (see About the study below).

- Employee demand was highest for working flexi-time and working reduced hours for a limited period. Nearly a half of employees (45 per cent for both arrangements) who did not work in these ways thought that their job could be carried out with these working patterns. Around a third of those not working part-time said their job could be done on a part-time basis (35 per cent). Comparable figures for working a compressed working week and annualised hours were 35 per cent and 31 per cent respectively. A lower proportion considered that their job could be done by working only during school term-time or from home on a regular basis (17 and 15 per cent, respectively).

Impact of work-life balance practices

- Of those employees who changed from full-time to part-time work in the last year, the majority (67 per cent) had their workload reduced accordingly. The majority (82 per cent) also retained their job and level of seniority, with only six per cent not keeping the same job or level of seniority.
- When asked about various working patterns and leave arrangements, only in the case of working reduced hours (such as part-time working) did more employees consider that this would negatively affect their career (51 per cent) than those who stated that it would not (38 per cent). However, there were still relatively high proportions of employees who considered that not being able to work beyond your contracted hours (i.e. leaving on time) (42 per cent), taking leave to look after their children or other dependant (37 per cent), working different work patterns (32 per cent), or working from home (25 per cent) would have a negative affect on their career.
- In most cases, men were more likely than women to consider that these working patterns would damage their career prospects, particularly in the case of working reduced hours (56 per cent of men compared to 45 per cent of women) and leaving on time (46 per cent of men compared to 37 per cent of women).
- In addition, men thought that working fewer hours would also affect their job security more than women. Nearly half of men (48 per cent) agreed that this would be the case compared to 38 per cent of women. Generally, over two-fifths of employees (43 per cent) agreed that working fewer hours might damage their job security, whereas just under two-fifths (38 per cent) disagreed with this statement.

About the study

- MORI was commissioned to carry out the study's employee survey. The survey was conducted by telephone, using CATI (computer aided telephone interviewing), and the interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes. The sample was generated using random digit dialling, and quotas were set for gender and industrial classifications. Interviews were carried out with employees in Great Britain, in establishments with five or more employees, and excluded the self-employed, proprietors and owners, and those under 16 years of age and those over 65. Fieldwork was conducted in January and February 2003. Interviews were achieved with 2,003 employees, and the response rate was 29 per cent. Gender, part-time/full-time, industrial classifications and age biases in the achieved profile were corrected by weighting the data.
- Only statistically significant differences at the 95 per cent level are reported here. However, an important caveat is that the figures presented in this summary are ***preliminary*** and not based on the final dataset. Thus, it is possible that the figures may vary slightly in the published report, due in Summer 2003.