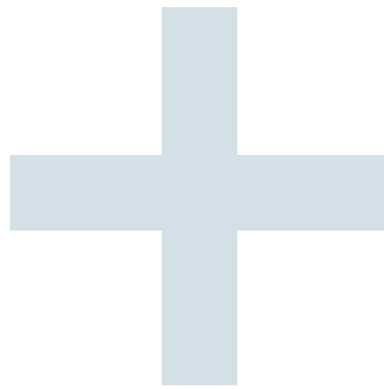

My Family Care™

Making work+family work



Working Parents & Carers Flexible Working Survey 2011

Research highlights & commentary

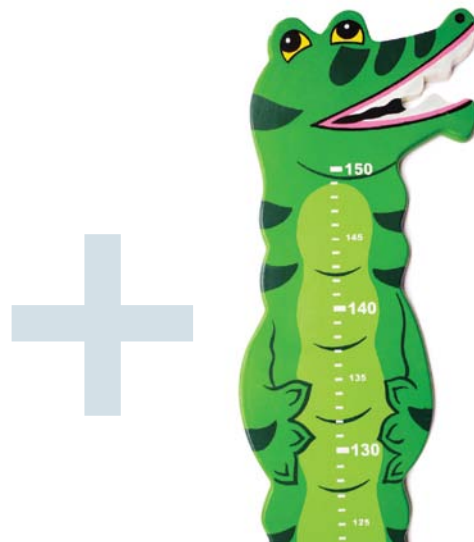
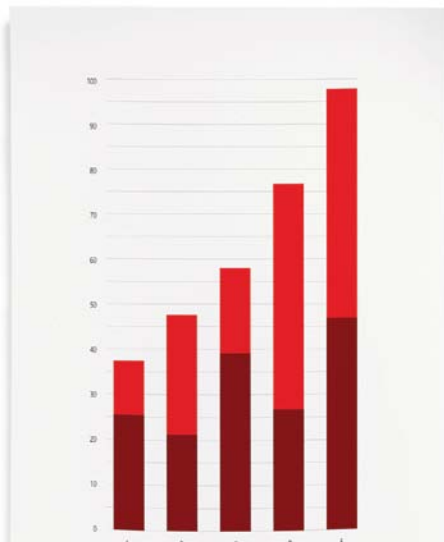
One thing is clear: Employer flexibility and support can make a very big difference to employer and employee alike.

"In exchange for the excellent treatment I have received I am extremely committed to my employer and put in whatever is needed to get the job done, I never take sick days etc and am determined to show my commitment wherever possible."

Female Respondent
Aged 31 – 40,
Professional in Legal sector,
South East England

"I'm not willing to work extra hours as I don't feel valued or that there is reciprocal flexibility. Since having children my role, responsibility and professional status has been reduced."

Female Respondent
Aged 31 – 40,
Manager in 'HR' sector,
South East England





Contents:

1. About the research
2. Research highlights
3. Commentary
4. Demographics and working patterns
5. Further reading



1

About the research:

What do working Parents and Carers really think?

We wanted to get to the heart of the challenges, needs and wants of those who combine work and family and to find out what really makes it work from the point of view of individual parents and carers. Our aim was to provide key insights for employers on how to get it right.

We've been carrying out a Working Parents Survey for several years, revealing what currently works and what is still needed. Employer flexibility has always occupied the top slot on the wish list of participants. Here, the results from over 1,400 parents and adult dependent carers demonstrate just how critical this is.

We contacted over 40,000 working parents and carers during summer 2011.

They included:

- 7,000 individual parents and carers registered with the My Family Care Backup Care services
- 8,000 employees from a selection of My Family Care corporate clients include banks, professional firms and multi-nationals
- 10,000 parents from My Family Care's childcare business www.tinies.com
- Additional parent and carers through Daycare Trust, Wearethecity.com, BT, and State Street

Over 1,400 parents and/or carers took part in the survey. Given the individual nature of work and domestic situations, many questions invited respondents to give additional comments and explanations. Over fifty percent of the respondents did so, reflecting the strength of feeling that combining work and family generates.

The findings reveal the current working patterns of parents and carers, the degree of flexibility they have (and need, given their personal circumstances), what else makes a difference and what can be done to maximise wellbeing and performance for both employee and employer.

My Family Care would like express our gratitude to our partners above for their support and help in generating such a substantial response.



2

Research highlights

Work / Life balance – myth, mystery or a moving goal post

Good employers are well aware that people's needs in accommodating home and work in our daily lives are always changing. Working parents and carers continue to look for ways of managing the demands of work and care responsibility.

Generation Y brings a new approach to the combination of work and home life, blurring the lines between them out of choice. Demographic and economic factors have a huge impact on our working patterns. We won't be retiring any time soon, and more and more of us will be combining work and adult care responsibility as the population ages.

More mothers work full-time than ever before. All in all, flexibility and employer support is critical in enabling the varied ways in which we need and want to work. But what does the employer get out of it? Are they just doing employees a favour in accommodating these needs or is this more of a win-win relationship? And how do employers accommodate such variations in working styles?

60%

of working parents and carers are not happy with their work/life balance

Combining work with parenting and caring is tough

Of the 1,400+ respondents, over half took the time to add further written comments, underlining their strength of feeling. When asked "How happy are you with your work/life balance based on your current working pattern?", just over 40% were Happy or Very Happy. It would have been surprising not to find some happiness: after all many participants came from a pool of leading organisations already paying attention to those with family responsibilities. That said there are still the majority who are not happy with their work/life balance: The neutral 30% who were neither happy or unhappy, and the 30% who were unhappy or very unhappy.



Flexibility and care are no longer female issues

The emerging working patterns shows that while almost no male parents or carers describe themselves as working part-time, patterns of flexibility as to working location and flexibility of hours worked during a full-time week are pretty much gender-neutral.

Childcare has historically been, and to a large extent still is, a responsibility shouldered primarily by women. So it's interesting to find that the gender ratio of respondents with adult and eldercare responsibility (60% female and 40% male) is more balanced than that of those who report they only have children to care for (80% female, 20% male). This reflects a different norm for carers, with men being as likely as women to be the primary carer in the case of a dependent parent or partner. With eldercare responsibility set to grow in line with the demographic changes in the UK, supporting working parents and carers will become a mainstream issue.

"I have to make daily visits to my parents, to check tablets have been taken and to set out the next day as well."

**Male respondent, aged 41 – 50,
Manager in telecommunication
sector, South East England**



"It's about give and take. They have been very understanding when I need it - and I repay that with loyalty and going the extra mile when I can."

Female respondent, aged 31 – 40, Manager in telecommunications sector, London

Flexible working links positively with work-life balance happiness, loyalty and productivity, but not necessarily career progression

There is a striking correlation between employees being 'happy with work-life balance, given their working arrangement' on the one hand and on the other hand, employer flexibility and practical support. This happiness is a valuable resource. 68% of those who are 'Very happy' with their working pattern are 'really committed' to their employer, while only 30% of those 'Very unhappy' with their working pattern feel the same way.

70% of those 'Very happy' feel they are very productive while only 40% of the 'Very unhappy' group feel the same. How valued an employee feels shows even greater polarisation, with over 85% of those who are 'Very happy' with their working pattern feeling valued by their employer, while only 25% of those 'Very unhappy' with their working pattern feel the same way.

That said, even those who are 'Happy' or 'Very happy' with their work-life fit are concerned that flexibility may negatively affect their career. Over 54% of this group thought 'flexible working will/would adversely affect career/progression in your company'.

"Due to the suggestion I need flexible working arrangements I have been told this will limit my promotion despite being far more capable than other candidates."

Female respondent, aged 21 – 30, Sales and customer service, Retail & Wholesale, South West England

What makes the difference to happiness with work/life balance on the work front?

There is a consistency in the building blocks of work-life fit that are needed and valued inside and outside work by parents and carers. The factors that enable happiness fall into place predictably, like Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Whilst those working part-time are more likely to express happiness with work life balance, high on the list of other workplace factors that also link with happiness are:

- True flexibility in the where and when of work (based on trust and autonomy)
- Supportive managers and colleagues, and
- Enabling technology

Those who report least happiness with current work/life fit respond that the above 'would help a lot'; with supportive managers being seen as 'make or break' for flexibility. There is a clear sense that understanding from managers is not consistent even across 'good' employers.



"My boss is a mother too and is therefore very supportive. I feel my work is as flexible as it can be at this stage in my career. However, I am aware that this supportiveness is very unusual and probably does not apply to even my firm as a whole. I have worked in other places where their inflexibility has meant I have had to leave."

Female respondent, aged 31 – 40, Professional, legal sector, London

The role of the manager

One very clear message was the pivotal role played by line managers. Respondents really appreciated a manager who appears to 'get it' – to understand the scope there is for wanting to do well in both areas and being able to do well given trust and flexibility. Sometimes they remarked this was more likely among those who are parents or carers themselves, though that is not a guarantee. The other resounding message was the perceived unfairness of inconsistency across an organisation.

Workload and its management

Many individuals felt challenged and sometimes stressed by their (perceived or real) high workload. Many saying that it wasn't possible to complete their work in their contracted hours. This appears to amplified as an issue as there is little contingency time in their days. If they're not working, then they're caring. This is a cause of pressure and stress to many. Many of those working part-time express that even though they are paid part-time they work longer hours to get the job done. This is a polarising issue as many readily accept that this is a reasonable trade-off for the flexibility that they have, whilst some express a degree of resentment over the perceived unfairness. In these instances it raises the question over how clearly the reality of the change in way of working was examined and understood by both parties, or was it simply expedient for both sides not to do so?

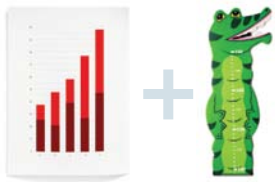
45%

Over 45% of respondents say they can rarely or never rely on close relatives or a support network to help out.

The Domestic reality also really matters!

The large body of data gathered also confirms what many of us know to be true personally: that a good domestic support system is a huge enabler. '60% of those who are 'Very happy' with their work/life balance state that they already have 'Childcare or other care arrangements that suit my working pattern' in comparison to less than 5% of those who are 'Very unhappy'. Those that have 'close relatives or a support network locally that can help out at short notice' are also more likely to be happier with their work life balance as are those reporting a more even share of the domestic workload (especially female respondents). A supportive partner and shared domestic workload are strongly linked to happiness with work/life balance. Commute times and inconvenient pickup and drop off times are a strong theme, making working from home – formally or informally – a win-win for wellbeing and productivity.

Many parents and carers are also managing their responsibilities in much more of a social vacuum than might have been true a generation ago. Grandparents emerge as a key source of childcare support (over 25% rely on them for all or part of their childcare) where present, yet for many, the reality is that the nuclear family is on its own in running the show. Over 45% of respondents say they can rarely or never rely on close relatives or a support network to help out.



The stress and impact of a care crisis

This lack of support system close by has a big impact when regular care arrangements break down or where care is needed unexpectedly. 85% of all respondent parents need occasional extra help when their regular care is unavailable and 33% of those responsible for eldercare also do. 'Occasional help' is not exactly infrequent either: over 50% of all respondents say they need emergency care for 5 days or more per year.

13% of all respondents (rising to 16% if director/partners and senior managers are excluded) take sick leave when care breaks down. As care breakdowns will happen multiple time per year, there are obvious implications for employers' absenteeism rates.

"We have zero emergency care provision so a simple ear infection means that my partner or I have to take days off and end up working into the night to catch up."
Male respondent, aged 41 – 50, Manager in Accounting Sector, North East England

Supporting employees through other means

There is a broad range of services and benefits offered by employers, the most widespread being childcare vouchers, closely followed by an Employee Assistance Programme/helpline.

The most popular potential benefits for those who do not already have them are employer provided backup care and on-site nurseries. This reflects the logistical challenge so many respondents report in combining nursery drop offs and commutes to work, and yet again underlines the importance of having the right childcare in place and in a convenient location, whether on-site at their employer's place of work or otherwise. The stress and impact of care crisis described above is also bought into focus.

Interestingly there is a correlation in many cases between happiness with work-life balance and whether or not the employer provides a particular type of support. This could be explained by more flexible employers possibly also being more likely to offer additional support. That said, for all types of services and benefits, the less happy with their work-life balance an individual is, the more likely they are to respond 'I wish we did' or 'it might be useful' to have the service or benefit.

A significant proportion of those expressing happiness with work life balance still felt that a number of these types of support would be helpful. For example, 40% of those 'Very unhappy' with their work/life balance 'wished they did' have employer provided backup care; however, there were still 20% of those at the opposite end of the happiness scale who also wished they had the support.

Focusing on specific demographic groups also shows strong correlation between happiness and already having a particular support and also between unhappiness and a stated desire for it. Considering just women aged 21-40, over 25% of those 'Very unhappy' wished they did have specialist advice on childcare solutions in comparison to under 5% of the 'Very happy'.



"I need more support to help find suitable and adequate childcare. I am embarrassed to say that now that I have a child, I truly understand how difficult it is for families, but most especially for working mothers. The Dads go to work every day without really considering the anxiety around childcare needs because it's always up to the mothers. The Dads are mostly in management positions as that's why there's not much thought put to helping staff."
Female respondent, aged 41 – 50, Senior manager, Pharmaceutical/Chemical sector, East of England

The way forward

Following this section, you'll find our commentary on the implications of the research findings for employers.

People responsible for culture change toward a more flexible working culture in organisations often remark that – beyond, strategy, policy and equipping managers – the final piece is working out how to help individuals actually make it work. We hope this study helps in that regard.



3

Commentary

"I do find combining childcare and work stressful and exhausting a lot of the time, but I know I am in very fortunate position because my work is flexible and fulfilling and I get a lot of support and understanding from colleagues, and it pays well enough that I can afford good quality childcare when I am at work."

Female respondent, aged 31 – 40, Professional, unspecified sector, Scotland



"If my working hours could be a little more flexible to match my childcare arrangements (or alternatively another means of childcare could be provided, possibly on-site?) my motivation levels would be higher, hence my productivity, and I would feel more engaged knowing that my employer understands my family commitments."

Female respondent, aged 31 – 40, Administrative/secretarial/technical role in Banking, London



"It would be really good for companies to invest in training for HOW to work part-time for both employees and employers. There is often the expectation that you will pretty much do the equivalent of a full-time job in part-time hours and you have to learn to say No to things when you work part-time."

Female respondent, aged 31 – 40, Manager, Childcare & Education, London

The value of happiness with work-life balance

Most employers recognise the jostle between wellbeing and career progression for those who interweave working and caring. All things considered, it is striking that over 40% of respondents here were 'happy' or 'very happy' with their work-life balance given their current working arrangements. With much talk anecdotally and in the media about time-poor parents (e.g. Children's Society, 2006) and the sandwich generation (caught between young children and elderly parents), we might wonder whether 'happiness' would be possible at all in the 30-40 decade.

So, given that we find that happiness here, seeing its strong correlation with engagement, (self-reported) productivity and commitment is of significant value to employers.

There is much that employers can do to enable and engage carers and parents, and there are sound talent retention, wellbeing and performance related reasons for addressing this group, along with diverse other employee groups.

Flexibility and the blurring of boundaries

Flexible working can describe a wide variety of working patterns, from occasional home working to working in term-time only and everything in between. Sometimes people use the term to describe the most rigid ways of compartmentalising work ("I don't work Wednesdays") and at the other end of the spectrum, it means having the kind of inspiring manager who knows productivity and trust are boosted when you work at home by informal arrangement on the morning your washing machine breaks down.

It's a complex area and the needs of each individual, role, and organisation may be very or subtly different. At an individual level, there are varying domestic situations, different views about the balance of work and home responsibilities, and different access to quality, quantity and type of additional care support.

What seems key here, is that what is most valued in flexible working arrangements is flexibility, rather than a sharp boundary between 'work' and 'life'. For the majority, flexibility also emerges as a two-way street: the employer & manager need to give a little (which the employee pays back in loyalty) and the most successful and well rewarded employee is likely to be the one who is also able to offer flexibility – to go 'above and beyond', when necessary.

It's all about time and how you use it

The underlying issue that runs through practically all of the feedback from respondents is the pressure caused by a lack of time. They simply have more 'mandatory' elements to their lives than their non-caring colleagues. So ways to save time and use it more productively will nearly always help; from the practical - working from home during rush hour and putting convenient childcare in place, to the developmental – training designed to help workload management and productivity for flexible working.



"I have a very flexible employer, so am very lucky, in terms of working location and hours as we are a global organisation - however the price I pay for this is an obvious limitation in my career and promotion prospects."

Female respondent, aged 31 – 40, Professional working in Consumer Products sector, South East England

Impact on career development

Career progression is a real hot potato when discussing the lot of working parents. Most believe or recognise that family-friendliness may come at the cost of promotion. There is also the ever-present sense of colleague resentment: both real and imagined. The only cure for this of being when flex comes as standard, and comes from the top. When the leadership group sees flexibility as a way of doing business: meeting needs in a global environment operating 24/7 world and saving on travel and real estate costs, then there is no stigma in being a parent or carer who delivers outcomes in a range of ways other than sitting at a desk 9 to 6.

Fairness, communication and consistency

One of the most powerful ways of encouraging fairness and consistency is to gather together the stories of those who work flexibly with a variety of backgrounds. This may be on an intranet site or as a Q&A panel in an internal network event. This sharing of experience and particularly making known how obstacles were overcome enable others to follow and spreads a kind of 'permission' to look for fresh ways of working.

Creating mentor schemes is a further layer of support to spread good practice. This kind of practice, alongside publishing case study stories acts to spread support and confidence as well as communication.

Engaging men in childcare

Men must surely be the next big thing in childcare! The rise of dual income with kids household continues unabated. There is much talk about Additional Paternity Leave though the reality in this survey is that it is still largely women who see themselves taking on the full responsibility for managing childcare. There are real opportunities to open up better communication around this. Coaching elements to new mums and dads will help breakdown some of these barriers and open up new perspectives.



"I have re-located my parent to a 'granny annex' - not sure this was the best solution for the relationship between my partner and myself. With hindsight I could have done with some support/ guidance about how to manage that transition better."

Male respondent, aged 61+, Manager, Energy sector, London

The challenges of eldercare

Eldercare is more equally shared between men and women than childcare and perhaps is less prone to resentment from colleagues as it does not attract the 'your choice' attitude that parents sometimes encounter. It is, however, a completely different prospect from caring for a child. In parenting, there is by and large a positive direction of travel: parenting may be exhausting, hugely challenging, hard to weigh up against work, but we often have happy, humorous tales to share, nice pictures, and even nappy changing is a reasonably upbeat topic. Not necessarily so in the world of adult dependent care. There can almost be a built-in sense of failure for those caring for with a dependent who is aging, who is excluded by disability or even perhaps terminally ill.

As well as practical support (by way of backup and respite care, information on practicalities such as finance, legalities etc), there is real scope to provide support, a sense of normalising through talking, which employee networks can offer.

The way forward

The building blocks of support for work-life happiness are clear. These building blocks provide support for practical and emotional needs outside of work, and practical, technological, managerial and cultural approaches within work. The employers whose employees are reporting the highest happiness with work-life balance – and concomitantly the highest engagement, productivity and loyalty – are making these available for employees to access and call upon as needed. And they are seeing them as a way of working to achieve results, not a special personal favour to a stigmatised group.

Onward plans

During October 2011, My Family Care is hosting a series of webinars for HR and Diversity leaders to explore these results together with internal practitioners in leading organisations. Following these we will publish further best practice guidance building on this research and the shared best practice from those debates. Please visit our website for details of how to register.

Flexible working – What really works?

With Melanie Flogdell, Head of HR Policy, Centrica
Wednesday 19th October 1pm – 2pm

In a state of flex - How flexible working is changing in city law firms.

With Jennifer Barrow, Head of Diversity, Baker & McKenzie
Thursday 20th October 10.00am – 11am

Flex in the City – How flexible working is changing in the world of banking.

With Emma Cashmore, Head of Diversity, Citi
Thursday 20th October 12.30pm – 1.30pm

4

Demographics and working patterns

Survey respondents:

Over 1,400 working parents and carers completed the survey. The diagrams below show a breakdown of the results. There was a good spread of respondents across different industries and seniority levels. Each individual industry level also shows a broad spectrum of seniority levels as well. 78% of respondents were female and 22% male.

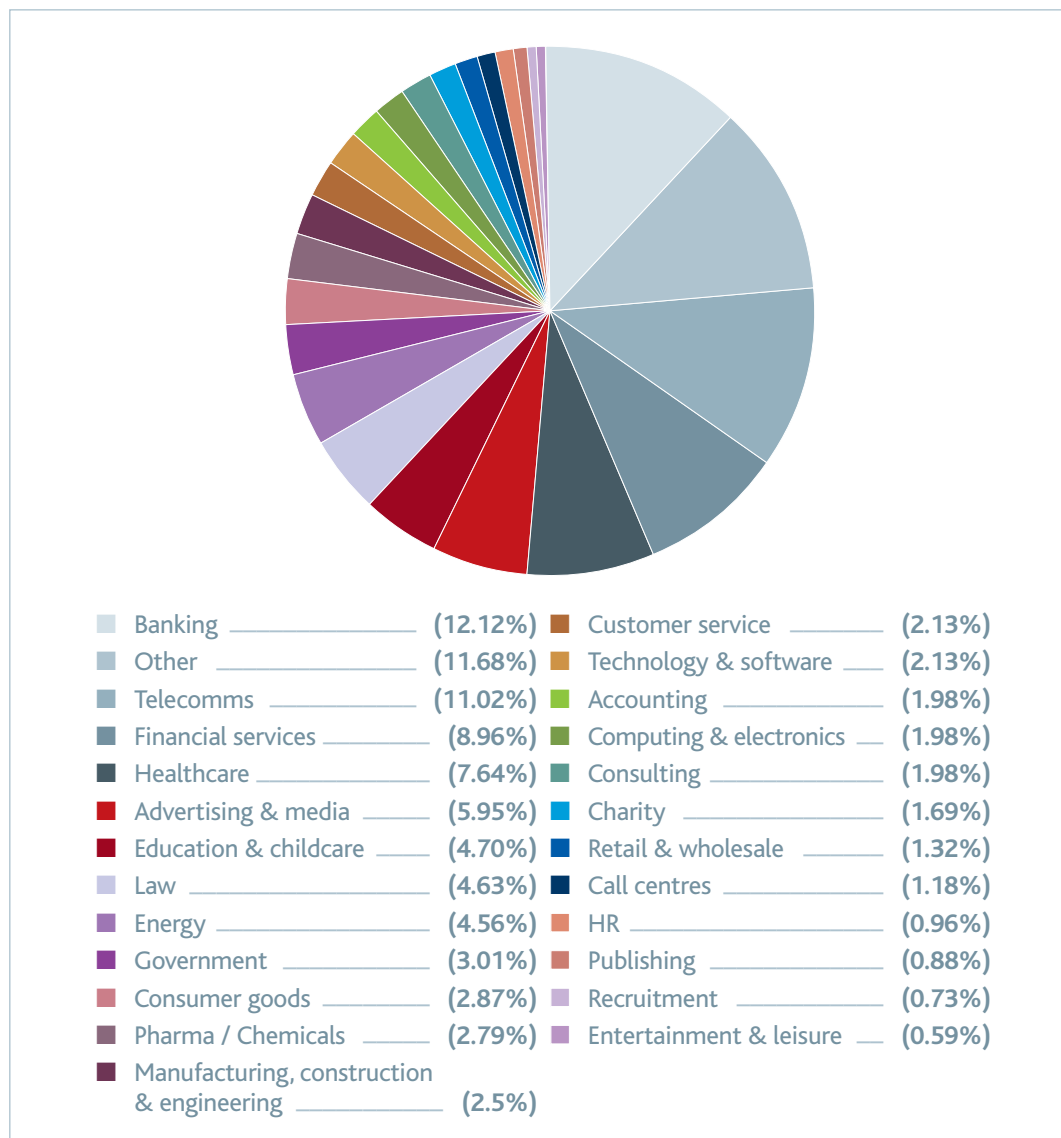
Over 65% of respondents work full time with part time working either 2 – 3 days or 4 days a week being the most common way of working fewer hours.

Although the private sector does make up 77% of the response base the public sector are well represented with over 300 respondents.

Who are they and what do they do?

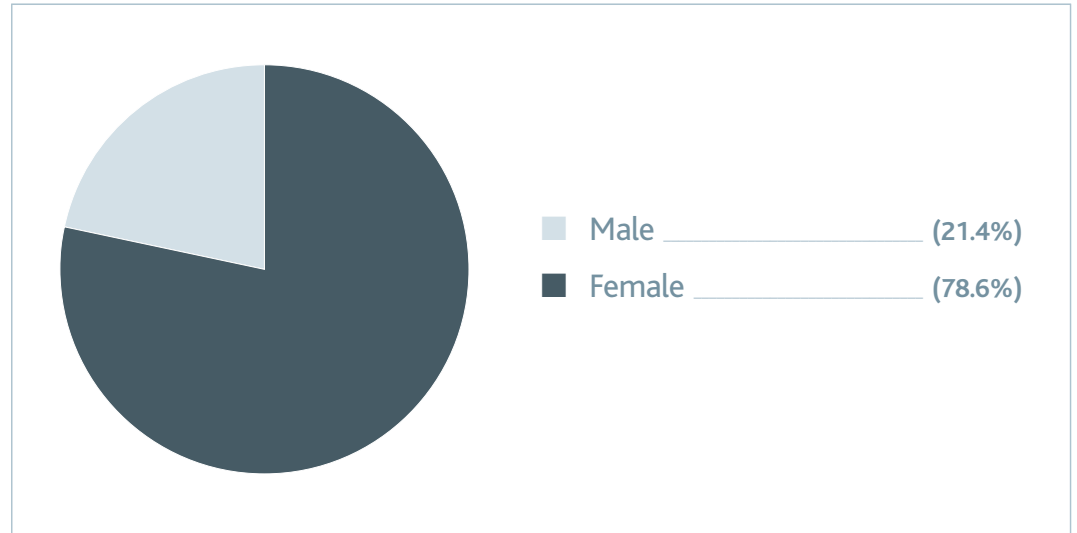
Occupation of respondents:

Chart 01



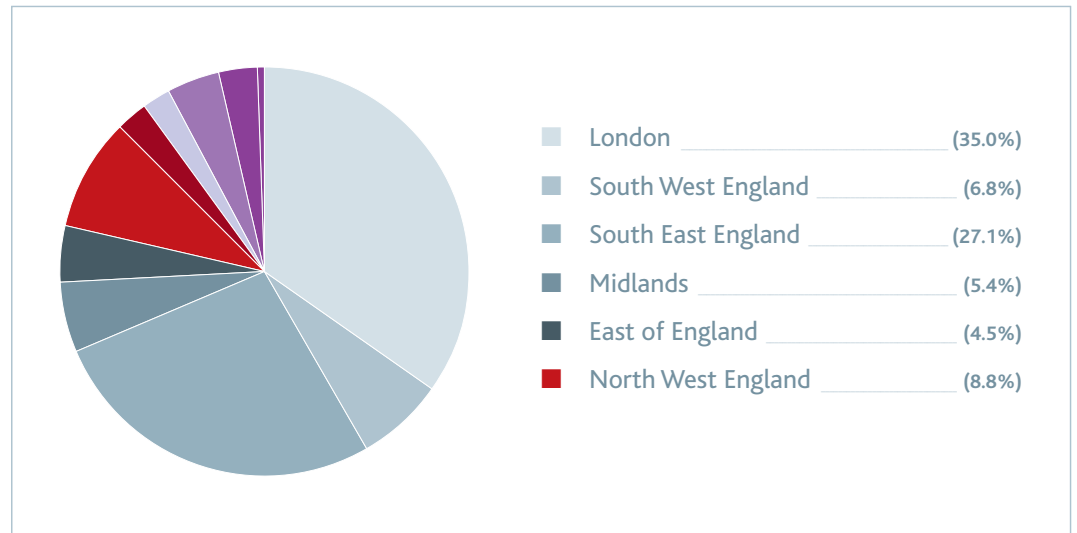
Response by gender:

Chart 02



Response by regionality:

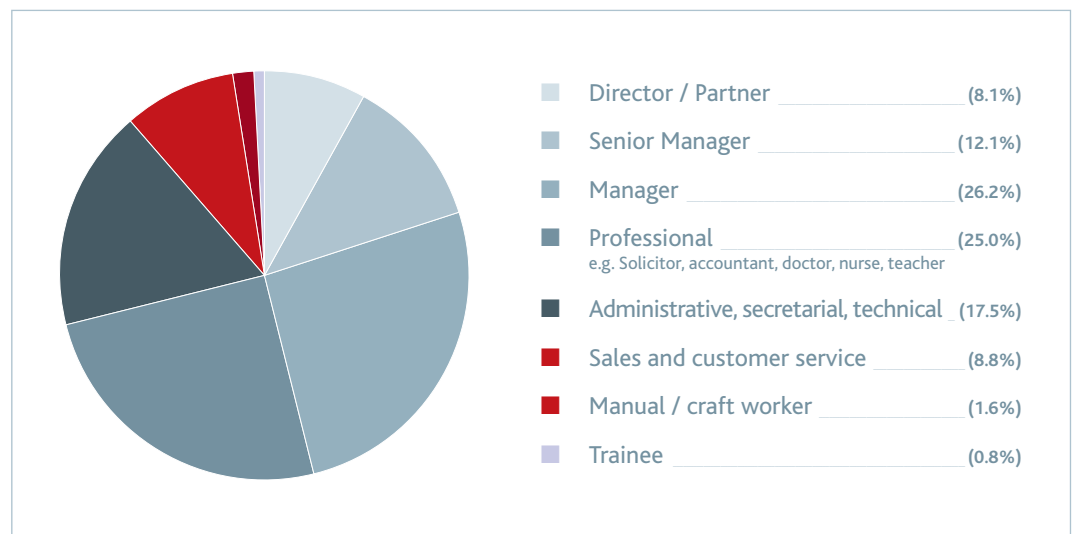
Chart 03



London and the South East collectively represent 62% of respondents.

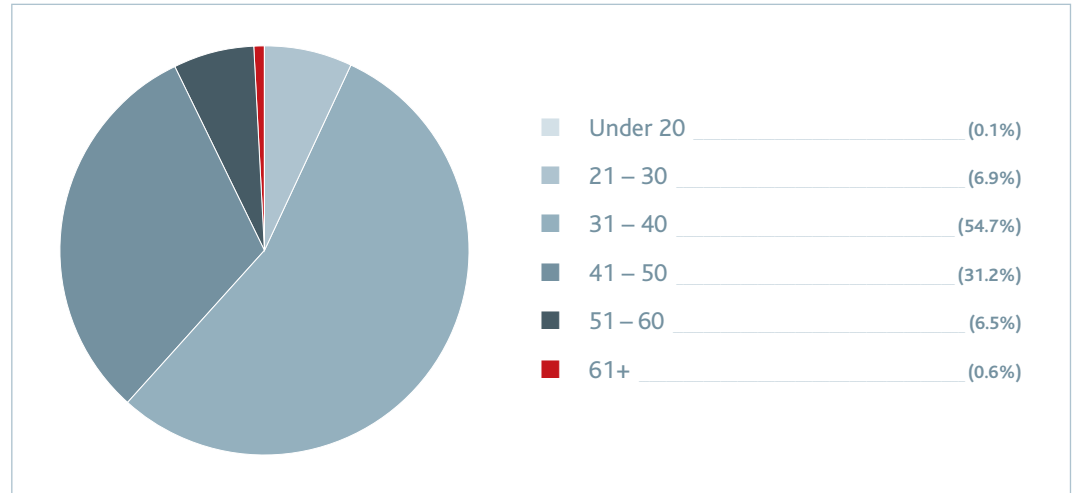
Response by role and position:

Chart 04



Response by age:

Chart 05

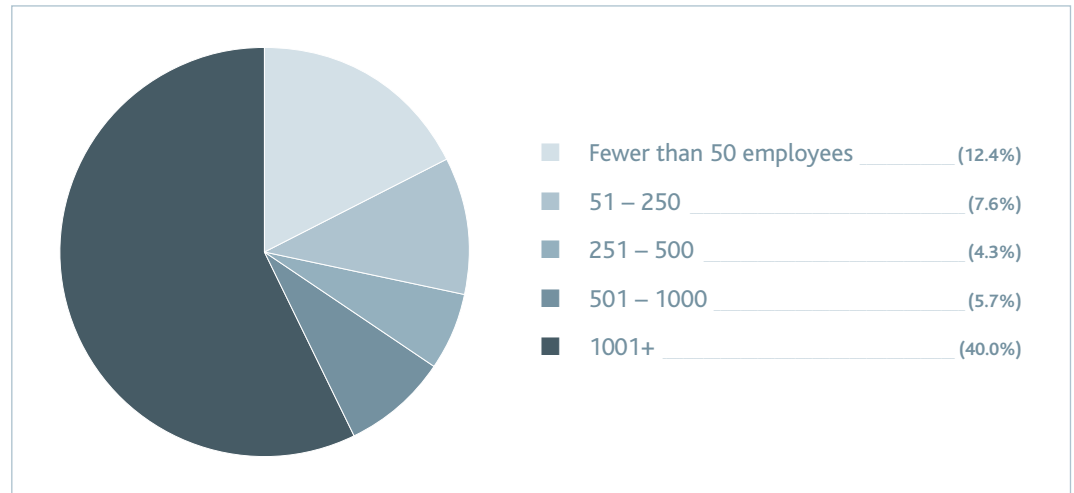


The majority of respondents were aged between 31 and 40. Given the trend in having children later in life, this is the age group who have very young families. The next largest group are the 41-50 year olds who have older children and are starting to have eldercare responsibilities.

70% of respondents work for large (over 1,000 employees) organisations.

Response by size of organisation:

Chart 06

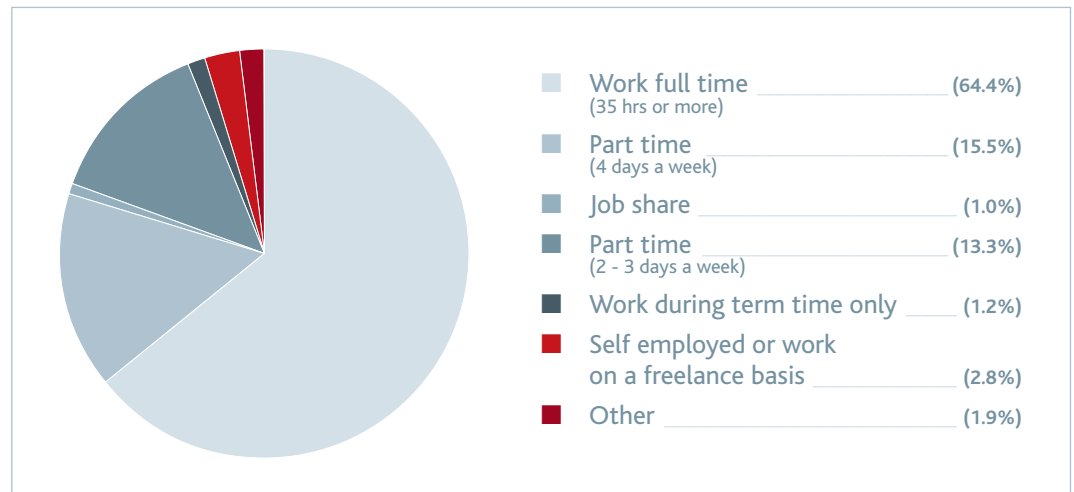


How do they work?

65% of respondents work full time. The other most common way of working is part time, working fewer days per week, this accounts for 29% of respondents.

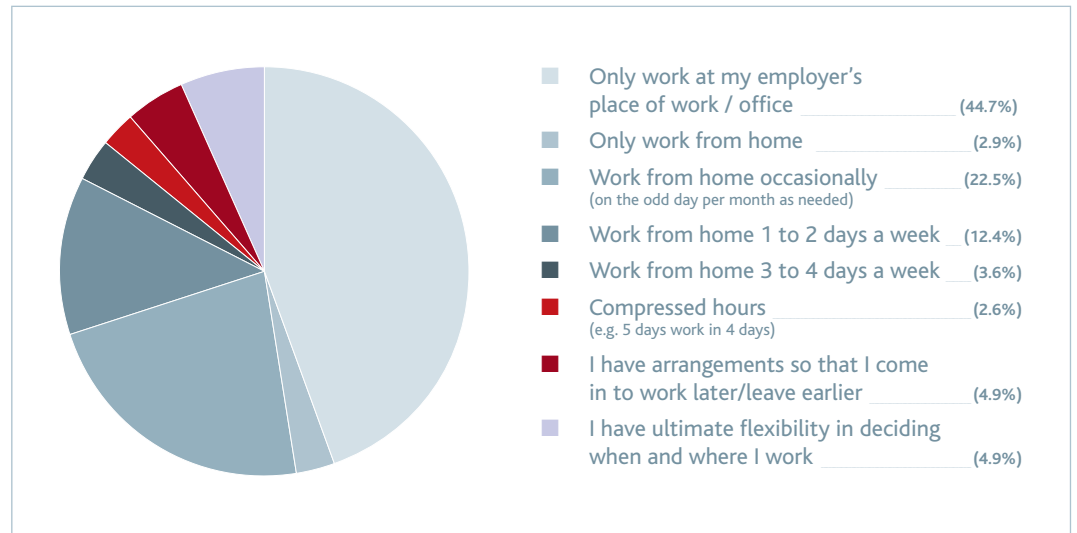
How they work:

Chart 07



Working patterns:

Chart 08



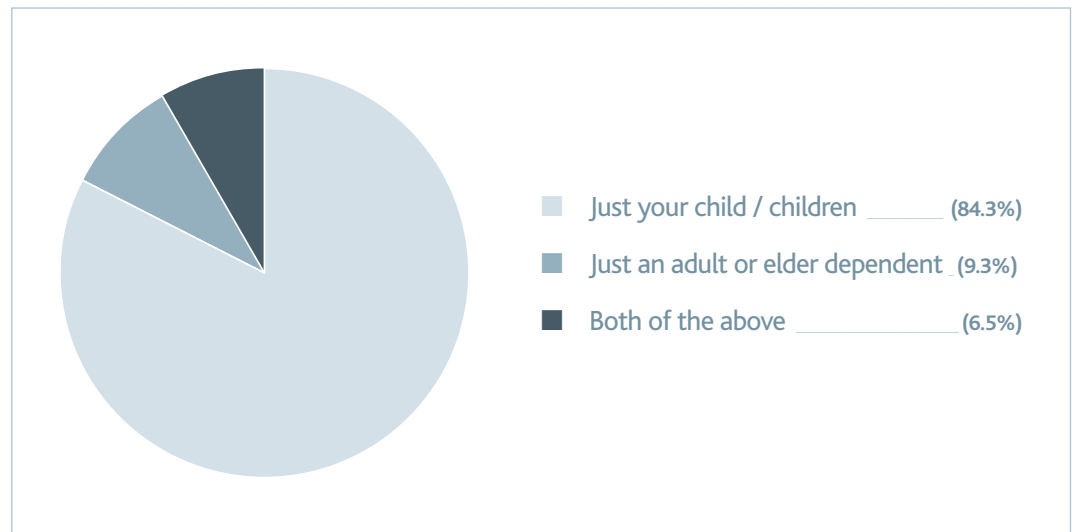
Interestingly working patterns are very varied with less than half only working at their employers place of work. Most common is to work from home on the odd day, but 16% work from home some days on a regular basis.

Working patterns that differ from only working at the employer's place of work do not seem to be the preserve of those working fewer hours. Those working full time have equally varied working patterns.

Who do they care for?

Care responsibilities:

Chart 09



Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of respondents care for their children only (84.3%). Those with both child and adult or eldercare represent 9.3% of the sample and those with eldercare/dependent care at 6.5%.

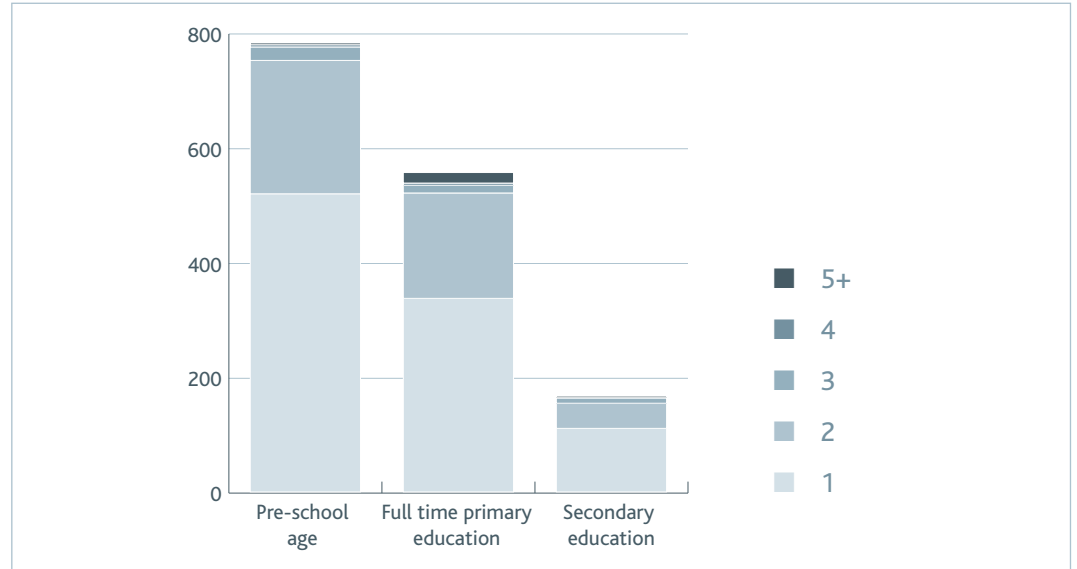
Combined, nearly 16% have dependent or eldercare responsibilities, making it a significant issue for employers. Employers for Carers cites 1 in 7 (14%) of the overall working population as having adult & eldercare responsibilities.

How old are their children and who cares for them?

Most respondents have 2 children, very few having more than this. The distribution of the child age profile is broadly in line with the distribution of the age of the respondents given the average age of first time motherhood (30 years old).

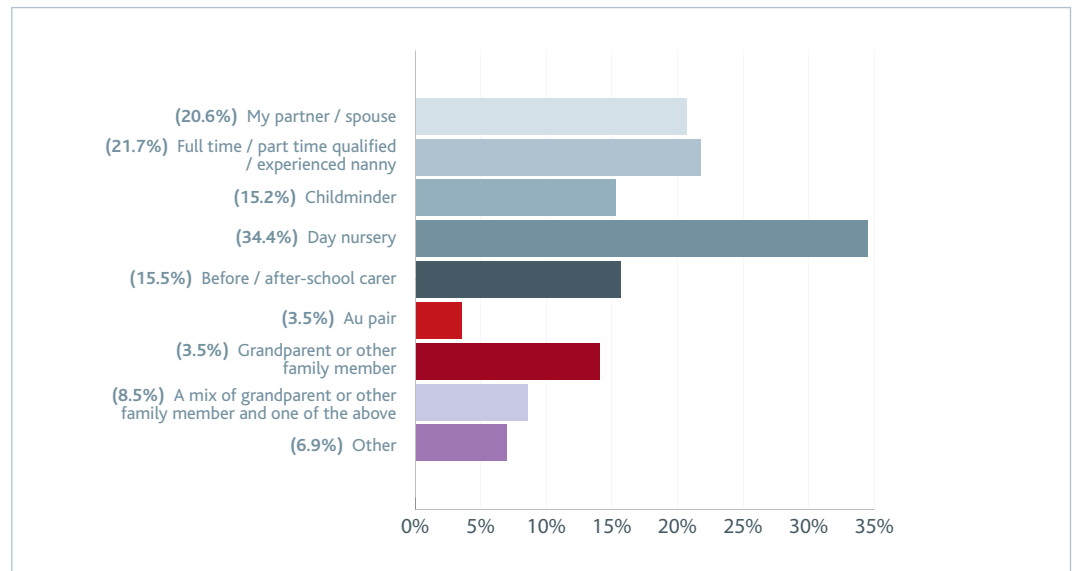
Please tell us how many children you have and how old they are:

Chart 10



Please describe your usual (not in an emergency) childcare arrangements:

Chart 11



Day nurseries are the most common form of childcare, and interestingly, over 25% are reliant on grandparents for all or some of their childcare.

Further reading / related research

We offer here pointers to related research which reveals similar themes to the current survey:

Flexible Working and Performance

Cranfield University & Working Families (2008)

[Links between flexible working, wellbeing and performance]

Survey of Workplace Practice on Maternity and Retention

AXA ICAS in partnership with Managing Maternity benchmarking survey. (2009)

[Flexibility and practical childcare support are valued as HR tools to re-engage returning mothers]

Out of Office: Building Teams for an Agile Future

Opportunity Now. (2010) [The importance of trust in making flexibility work

(and flexibility in promoting trust)]

PwC's Managing Tomorrow's People (The future of work to 2020)

[The changing nature of work, global trends and the need to shape work to these and the future workforce]

Attitudes of women solicitors to their careers and work-life balance and their utilisation of flexible work arrangements

Association of Women Solicitors & Kings College: Walsh, J. (2010).

[Flexibility enhances wellbeing though still leaves concerns about career progression]

Daddy Diapering Trends Survey

Procter & Gamble: Pampers with Dry Max Daddy Diapering Survey; Ipsos Public Affairs. (2010).

[Dads report they are taking on an equal share of diapering changing thought mums disagree]

Work Life Balance: Working for Fathers?

Lancaster University Management School and Working Families (2011).

[The value and positive engagement impact of flexible working for fathers]

Please contact us for a copy of the complete research results or if you'd like to know more about what we can do for employers and their employees.

Call 0845 676 7680



Click myfamilycare.co.uk

