

Work-life balance/ family-friendly policies

Family-friendly or work-life balance issues continue to be debated by governments, employers and employees. Employers are looking for flexibility to meet the demands of the global, '24/7' customer, while remaining competitive.

Governments are looking for way to facilitate the enormous change that has occurred in relation to family and working life norms, such as the increased number of women involved in gainful employment, the diversification of what constitutes a 'family' (e.g. dual earners, single working parents, etc.) and the ageing European workforce. Employees are looking for ways to both balance the different demands on their time and energy, and, at different stages in their lives, to have some choice as to the prioritising of those demands. The combination of all of these factors and perspectives has put pressure on organisations and their human resources strategies. Finding a way to manage the diverse, and sometimes contradictory needs, of the various parties, in addition to planning for future labour and skill requirements, is the source of interest and concern for many HR practitioners.

While helping employees to reconcile work and family responsibilities, the emergence of flexible working as a solution to that dilemma, has also presented employers with opportunities to provide a more flexible service to its customers, in addition to increasing manufacturing processing time through a variety of shift and other flexible working arrangements. To date in Ireland,

and to a similar degree throughout the EU, flexible working arrangements have, in the main, been made available by public sector and large multi-national organisations. Arrangements also exist in many small and medium-sized companies, but tend to be informal and agreed on an individual basis.

This section of the report looks at the availability, eligibility and type of flexible working arrangements.

The objectives and effectiveness of these arrangements are examined as are the demand for, and usage of, flexible working arrangements.

4.1: Flexible working arrangements

Table 4.1 presents information on the overall incidence of flexible working arrangements. More than eight out of ten organisations surveyed (81%) have such

Table 4.1 Incidence of flexible working arrangements - by organisational characteristics

	Percentage of organisations
Sector:	
High-tech mfg.	80
Other mfg.	69
Financial services	96
Other services	90
Distribution	71
Size:	
< 50 employees	80
50 – 249	78
250 employees or more	87
Ownership:	
Irish	80
Foreign	80
Unionisation:	
Unionised	81
Non-unionised	81
Market conditions:	
Declining	74
Mature	79
Emerging/growing	82
All organisations	81

arrangements in place. The highest incidence continues to be found in the *services sector*, in particular, *financial services*, and in large organisations. No difference was found between *Irish and foreign-owned* organisations or between *unionised and non-unionised* organisations. The overall incidence of flexible working arrangements has not changed significantly from previous IBEC HR Surveys, where the incidence was 82% and 78% in 2004 and 2002 respectively.

4.2: Incidence and type of flexible working arrangements

There has been no change in what makes up the top three forms of flexible working arrangements, over the *IBEC HR Surveys 2006, 2004 and 2002*, (i.e. *part-time work, flexi-time and job sharing*). Part-time work continues to account for a substantial part of employer's use of flexible working arrangements in that almost two-thirds (65%) of organisations surveyed have such arrangements. This compares with a finding of 60% of companies using part-time work in the recent ESRI and NCPP¹⁴ survey, and 66% of companies using part-time work in the study¹⁵ undertaken on behalf of the National Framework Committee for Work-Life Balance. The most significant change since the 2002 survey, is the growth in teleworking or working from home for one or two days per week, and a decrease in the incidence of personalised hours.

Table 4.2 Overall incidence of flexible working arrangements – by type of arrangement – 2006/2004/2002

Type of flexible working arrangement	IBEC HR Survey 2006	IBEC HR Survey 2004	IBEC HR Survey 2002
	Percentage of organisations		
Permanent part-time	65	68	62
Flexi-time	33	38	36
Job sharing	30	30	29
Teleworking ¹⁶ 1 or 2 days per week	24	12	12
Career breaks	22	26	23
Personalised hours	14	24	26
Teleworking 5 days per week	7	5	7
Compressed working week	12	8	10
Term-time working	12	8	5

Eligibility for flexible working arrangements

All employees are most likely to be eligible for *career breaks* and *job sharing* where organisations have these arrangements. Other than for these two types of arrangements, specified employee groups are more likely to be eligible for all other types of arrangements, and in particular, for all forms of *teleworking*.

¹⁴ Blackwell, S., Gorby, S., O'Connell, P.J., Russell, H. and Williams, J. (2004) 'The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employers' Views and Experiences', Research Series No. 3 Forum on the Workplace of the Future. Economic and Social Research Institute and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.

¹⁵ Off the Treadmill – Achieving Work-Life Balance' (2003) by Dr. Eileen Drew, Dr Peter Humphreys and Ms Candy Murphy on behalf of the National Framework Committee for Work-Life Balance, Dept. of Enterprise Trade and Employment. Dublin.

¹⁶ Also known as e-working or working from home.

Table 4.3 Availability of flexible working arrangements – by type of arrangement

	Total N =	Available to all employees	Available to specific employees only	Not stated
	Percentage of organisations			
Permanent part-time	212	33	47	20
Flexi-time	106	29	56	15
Job sharing	97	43	40	17
Teleworking 1 or 2 days per week	77	8	74	18
Career breaks/sabbaticals	72	50	28	22
Personalised hours	47	21	49	30
Compressed working week	40	25	63	12
Term-time working	38	26	53	21
Teleworking 5 days per week	23	13	57	30

From table 4.4 we can see that the majority of employees on flexible working arrangements are either availing of *flexi-time* or *part-time work*.

4.3: Demand for/usage of flexible working arrangements

The survey found that over four out of ten companies (46%) had increased their usage of flexible working arrangements over the past 12 months, while more than half (52%) stated that there had been an increase in demand from staff for such arrangements over the same period.

4.4: Key objectives of flexible working arrangements

Figure 4.1 suggests that the primary objectives for organisations of having flexible working arrangements continue to be *staff retention* and *improving staff morale and commitment*. This was also found to be the case in the *IBEC HR Surveys in 2004* and *2002*. Also of importance, are the objectives of *achieving more 'two-way' flexibility* and *reducing absenteeism and lateness*. Organisations would appear to be less concerned with the *cost* element of flexible working arrangements, with the *customer satisfaction* aspect and with *using it as a recruitment tool*.

Table 4.4 Average and median percentage of staff availing of flexible arrangements (in organisations where the arrangement exists) - by type of arrangement

Type of Flexible working arrangement	Total N =	Average %	Median %
Permanent part-time work	160	10.1	5.0
Flexi-time	70	34.5	16.0
Job sharing	64	3.8	2.0
Telecommuting (1 or 2 days from home)	54	3.4	2.0
Career breaks/sabbaticals	42	3.2	1.0
Personalised hours	34	12.1	5.0
Compressed working week	26	14.9	4.3
Term-time working ¹⁷	22	1.6	1.0
Telecommuting (5 days from home)	11	6.7	2.0

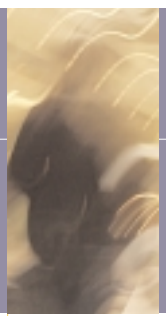
In terms of achieving objectives we can see from figure 4.2 that there is a high level of effectiveness associated with the key objectives of *staff retention* and *improving staff morale/commitment*. Respondents also considered that they are achieving more two-way flexibility and a reduction in absenteeism/lateness with their flexible working arrangements policies.

Conclusion

The number of organisations offering flexible working arrangements to employees is high at 81%. This shows little change from the previous *IBEC HR Surveys in 2004* and *2002*. A high proportion of companies across all sectors and sizes offer some form of flexibility to employees, the

Figure 4.1 Key objectives of flexible working arrangements





most common being part-time working, flexi-time and job sharing. In terms of the numbers of staff on flexible working, flexi-time has the highest average (34.5%) and median (16%) percentage of staff on such arrangements. According to the CSO,¹⁸ 16.5% of all employees nationally, have the ability to vary their start and finish times (having such an ability is one of the main features of flexi-time). The IBEC survey also found that one in 10 employees work part-time. The CSO¹⁹ figure nationally shows that one in six (17%) employees work part-time across all sectors of the economy.

More than four out of ten companies in the survey indicated that they had increased their usage of flexible working arrangements over the past 12 months, in addition to experiencing an increase in demand from staff for such arrangements.

Figure 4.2 Effectiveness of flexible working arrangements in achieving objectives



¹⁸ CSO Quarterly National Household Survey 'Work organisation and Working Time' Q2, 2004

¹⁹ CSO Quarterly National Household Survey, 2nd Quarter, 2006